



families commission
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NEW ZEALANDERS' SATISFACTION WITH FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND PARENTING

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VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
WITH ASSISTANCE FROM RELATIONSHIP SERVICES NEW ZEALAND

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of a national survey of New Zealanders' relationships. The survey was conducted for Relationship Services, in order to provide them with information about how New Zealanders viewed their relationships, the satisfying and challenging aspects of those relationships and how relationship problems are dealt with. It also asked about experiences of parenting and, for those who were not in a current relationship, the positive aspects and the drawbacks of being single.

The results indicate that a number of different relationships, both with immediate family, extended family and friends, were important to most people. These relationships were reported to be very satisfying, particularly those with a partner and with children. There were some interesting differences in rating of relationship importance and satisfaction by gender and ethnicity. Women rated most relationships as more important than men did, and also reported greater satisfaction with many of them. Māori rated relationships with extended family as more important, and in some cases more satisfying, than New Zealand Europeans.

Most reported being very satisfied with their current relationships, and most relationships had improved over time. A number of factors were identified as being important in close relationships, but a number of factors causing relationship tension were also cited. When strains occurred within a relationship a number of common strategies were used, and found helpful, in resolving tensions. Women, in particular, sought help from family and friends to resolve relationship difficulties.

Those who were single felt that there were a number of aspects to being single that were satisfying and helped them enjoy life as a single person. However there were also some negative aspects, although loneliness was cited as a problem by relatively few. This probably reflects the fact that many of the single respondents put work into building and maintaining relationships with family and friends.

Over two-thirds of the respondents were, or had been, parents. The majority were very satisfied with parenting, and men and women reported being similarly satisfied with being a parent. However, women were more likely to get both greater satisfaction from many aspects of parenting and to find many aspects more challenging. In particular, parents found seeing their child unhappy or withdrawn as the most challenging aspect of being a parent. Finding time for the children was also a major concern, and answers to other questions in the survey suggest that balancing work and family time is a major challenge for many families.

Finally, most of those surveyed reported being satisfied with their life overall. These results were in line with other New Zealand and overseas research, which indicates that most people are satisfied with their lives. While income and age were weakly associated with life satisfaction, the factor that was most strongly associated with overall life satisfaction was satisfaction with relationships, particularly that with a partner.

These results support overseas research that shows that having a range of healthy social relationships is important to individual wellbeing. Policies and therapeutic practices that support these relationships are important. Achieving a work-life balance and having time to maintain a healthy relationship with a partner appears to be one of the more common problems for those surveyed. This provides further evidence of the importance of policies to assist families. The research also identifies some of the more common relationship challenges and suggests that therapeutic practices may need to take into account some of the differences in the ways men and women respond to relationship difficulties.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

After reviewing previous psychological theory and research, Baumeister and Leary (1995) proposed that a desire for interpersonal attachments was a 'fundamental human motivation'. Since then research has provided further evidence of the importance of close personal and social relationships to individual wellbeing (eg Diener and Oishi 2005). While some of this research has explored relationship satisfaction (Stack and Eshleman 1998) and individual wellbeing (Diener 2000) at national levels, there has been relatively little equivalent research in New Zealand. While large-scale national surveys, such as the *Quality of Life in New Zealand's Largest Cities* (Gravitas Research and Strategy Limited 2005) and the recent *New Zealand Living Standards 2004* (Jensen et al 2006), have included measures of overall life satisfaction, they have not focused on its relation to individual relationships.

We know relatively little about the importance New Zealanders place on various key relationships in their life, and the level of satisfaction they derive from these relationships. Furthermore, little is known about the positive and negative aspects of these relationships and how they are supported and maintained. For those not currently in a relationship with a partner, while there are positive and negative aspects of being single, there are likely to be other key relationships that contribute to overall life satisfaction. Finally, parenting is an important activity in the lives of many New Zealanders, and satisfaction with parenting is likely to impact on satisfaction with a relationship with a partner and overall life satisfaction. This report will use existing data from a sample of New Zealanders to explore these issues. It will examine the links between aspects of family relationships and parenting, and satisfaction with these relationships and overall life satisfaction. It will also identify successful strategies for maintaining healthy family relationships.

In November 2004 Relationship Services¹ contracted ACNielsen to interview online 1,000 New Zealanders about their relationships with their partners, children, family, friends, their experiences of parenting and their experiences of single life. Although Relationship Services had information from couples experiencing relationship problems, it wanted to find out how a nationally representative sample of New Zealanders saw their relationships. The sample was designed to be as representative of the New Zealand population as possible and quotas were set for gender, age and ethnicity. The sample was drawn from ACNielsen's online panel. This is a panel of over 5,000 New Zealanders who have been recruited offline from telephone and face-to-face research that ACNielsen has conducted. Panellists came from a range of regions and demographic groups. The email broadcast² was split into two, with the minority ethnic groups receiving the first broadcast to help achieve targets set for these groups.

The Relationship Services survey was based, in part, on the Relationships Australia *Relationships Indicators Survey 2003* (Johnston 2003). However the final New Zealand survey differs significantly from the Australian survey. For example, because New Zealand Relationship Services had contact with clients who were single, and who found not being in a relationship difficult, and clients who stayed in relationships because of a fear of being single, the survey included questions on the positive and negative aspects of being single. Also included were questions about strategies to minimise the drawbacks of being single.

The New Zealand survey asked the participants about the following:

- > overall life satisfaction
- > general relationships – importance and satisfaction with various relationships, including time spent with family and friends
- > partner relationships – length of relationship, change in satisfaction with relationship over time, expected relationship change in the future, importance of various aspects of the relationship, satisfaction with aspects of the relationship, causes of tension in the relationship, what helps the relationship
- > parenting – age of children parented, satisfaction with being a parent, positive aspects of being a parent, challenging aspects of parenting

1 Relationship Services Whakawhanaungatanga (formerly Marriage Guidance) is a leading provider of counselling and education services in New Zealand. It works with all kinds of people in – and out of – all kinds of relationships: individuals, couples, families, children, young people and the elderly. Each year it helps thousands of people to build better relationships – at home, at work and in their communities.

2 A broadcast is an email informing potential participants of the survey and the way in which they can participate online.

- > supporting relationships – ways relationships have been supported, and supports for the future
- > being single – reasons for being single, positive aspects of being single, satisfaction with aspects of being single, negative aspects of being single, things that help satisfaction with life as a single person.

The strength of this data is that it is topical, having been collected in late 2004, and from a nearly nationally representative sample of New Zealanders (including the correct population proportions by ethnicity).

Using the data, this report will attempt to answer questions such as the following:

- > Which relationships are most important to New Zealanders and which give the greatest satisfaction?
- > Does the importance and satisfaction differ by gender or with ethnicity?
- > How satisfied are New Zealanders with their relationship with their partner?
- > What are the most important and satisfying aspects of partner relationships? Do these differ for women compared with men?
- > What aspects of a partner relationship are most closely associated with overall satisfaction with that relationship?
- > What are the main causes of tension in partner relationships?
- > What strategies have couples in satisfying relationships used to overcome relationship difficulties and how do these compare with strategies used by those in less satisfying relationships?
- > What are the main reasons people are single?
- > What are the important and satisfying aspects of being single? What are the negative aspects? Do these differ by gender?
- > What helps single people to develop a satisfying life?
- > How satisfying do New Zealanders find parenting?
- > What are the satisfying, and challenging, aspects of parenting? Do these differ by gender?
- > Is satisfaction with being a parent related to relationship satisfaction?
- > How satisfied are New Zealanders with their life overall?
- > How important is parenting to overall life satisfaction? Is this different for mothers compared with fathers?
- > How important are different types of relationship in terms of overall life satisfaction? For example, how do relationships with family members compare with those with friends? Is this different for men and women?

As can be seen from the questions posed above, the analysis will explore gender differences in participants' reports. Although different ethnic groups are represented in the sample, the numbers in most groups (eg Pacific and Asian peoples) preclude detailed analysis by ethnicity. However, where possible, some analysis of the responses of Māori participants compared with New Zealand European participants will be undertaken.

This report presents an analysis of the data from the Relationship Services survey.³ The sample and the analytic methods are described first. Then basic descriptive results are presented that address the above research questions, followed by an analysis using multivariate statistical techniques to explore the association between various aspects of these relationships, parenting, single-hood and overall life satisfaction. Finally the results are summarised and the implications for policy and therapeutic practice are considered.

3 Some of the findings from this survey have been disseminated in a series of media releases from Relationship Services.

2.0 THE SAMPLE

Surveys were completed by 1,006 individuals. Table 1 presents basic demographic data on the sample. The interviewed sample is nationally representative across gender, age, ethnicity and region but under-represents national households with below-average household incomes. The respondents with household incomes of under \$40,000 were half of their true proportion in the New Zealand population and those with household incomes of \$80,000 or more were twice their true proportion. An indication of the adjustment needed to make this sample representative of the national population is provided by the weighted data column in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample proportions and weighted data (n=1,006)

		Sample %	Weighted data %
Gender	Male	47	48
	Female	53	52
Age	Under 30	19	20
	30s	28	23
	40s	22	17
	50s	15	17
	60+	16	24
Ethnicity	Caucasian	75	78
	Māori	14	14
	Asian	7	8
	Pacific peoples	2	2
	Other	2	5
Household income	<\$40,000	24	50
	\$40,000-\$80,000	39	30
	\$80,000+	37	20
Region	Auckland	32	32
	North (ex Auckland)	20	20
	Central	24	24
	South	24	24

It is possible to use the weightings to adjust the sample to make it more representative of the New Zealand population. The data presented in the body of this report are unweighted; however Appendix 1 presents the frequencies for the main descriptive variables once weighting has been taken into account. A comparison of the weighted and unweighted data indicates relatively little impact on these variables from weighting the data.

While it is clear that low-income households are under-represented in the sample compared with the national population, the nature of the survey also has implications for its representativeness. Because the survey was conducted online, those without access to a computer and the internet would be unable to participate. It is not known how these individuals might differ from survey participants on the variables of interest, and therefore how representative the current sample is of the New Zealand population.

Table 2 presents the reported relationship status of those in the sample and compares this with recent census data (where relevant). Almost three-quarters of respondents were currently in a relationship, with almost half of all respondents being married. Approximately one in six were living with a de facto partner and a relatively small group were in a non-cohabiting relationship. Of those not currently in a relationship, over half had never been married, while the remainder were either divorced or separated, or widowed.

Table 2: Relationship status (n=1,006)

	Sample %	Census %
In relationship	76	
Married	54	46
Living with partner/De facto relationship	15	
Relationship but not living together	7	
Single	24	
Never married, not in relationship	14	
Divorced	5	6
Widowed	3	6
Separated	2	4

As can be seen from Table 2, where comparisons are possible, the relationship status of those in the sample provides a reasonable match to national data from the Census. Similar proportions of each ethnic group were in a relationship, but there were slightly more men than women reporting that they were in a relationship. The proportion in a relationship increased with age, up to about age 50, when the proportions in a relationship started to decline.

3.0 ANALYTICAL APPROACH

The choice of the statistical tests used for analysis of this data was dependent on the nature of the variable/s being investigated and the degree to which they meet the assumptions of the particular test (for example, with respect to the distribution of the responses on the variable). Some questions asked for a scaled response on a 1 to 5 rating scale (eg importance and satisfaction). Unfortunately much of this data was highly skewed, with the majority of respondents being very satisfied. This creates some problems for the analysis: firstly it can provide relatively little variance to be predicted, and secondly it can limit the use of 'parametric' statistics, which are based on the assumption of normally distributed interval data.

There are three main ways to handle this problem. Firstly to transform the scores to make them more normally distributed. Secondly, to use a non-parametric statistical test. Finally, to choose some cut-point to create a binary variable from the scale data, and use appropriate statistics on the binary variable (eg Chi-square test for analysing the relationship between two nominal variables, or logistic regression for multiple independent variables). This last option has the disadvantage in that it loses information, ie by collapsing down a five-point scale to a two-point scale, useful information on response variability is lost. There is also difficulty in deciding on a cut-point, as the point chosen may influence the significance of the results, eg should the five-point scale be collapsed to 1-4 versus 5 or 1-3 versus 4-5.

However, despite these difficulties the t-test, a commonly used parametric test, is relatively 'robust' to any violation of test assumptions, especially with the relatively large sample sizes available in this study. In general the approach taken has been to use non-parametric tests, even though they have less 'power' than parametric tests. The main parametric tests used and their non-parametric equivalent (in brackets) are: Pearson correlations (Kendal tau-b); paired and unpaired t-test (Wilcoxon signed rank test and Mann-Whitney U test); analysis of variance (Kruskal-Wallis H); and regression or logistic regression.

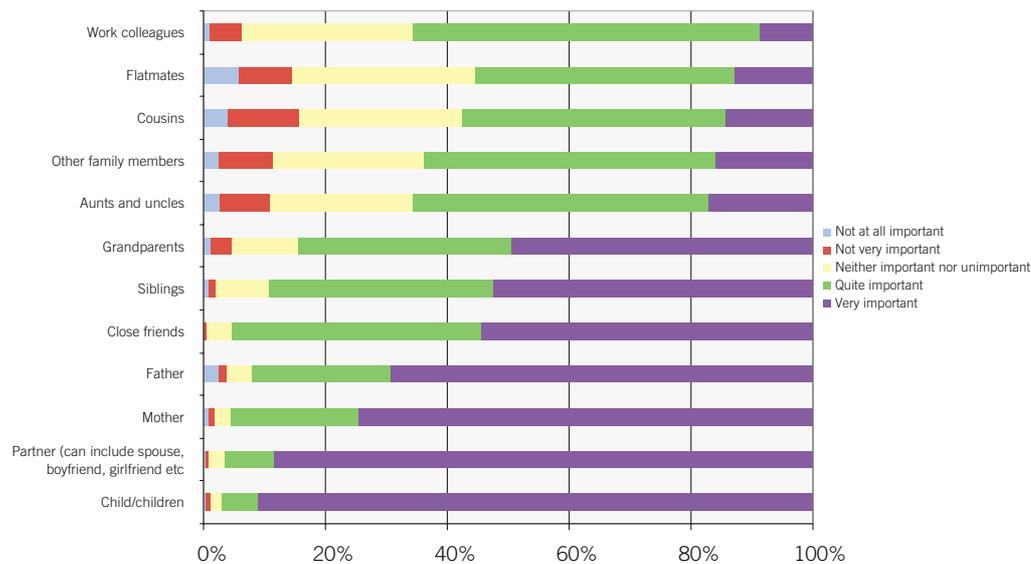
Only statistically significant associations are mentioned in the text. A significance level of .05 was chosen, and all statistical tests are reported with the appropriate test statistic and significance level. Although statistical testing was generally limited to pre-planned comparisons, there is still a relatively large number of such tests and this can result in some results being significant by chance. For example, with a .05 significance level it is likely that five out of 100 comparisons will be tested as significant even though there are no real differences. There is therefore a danger in conducting a large number of statistical tests, and by doing so increasing the chances of finding significant differences due to chance. This needs to be kept in mind when considering these results. Finally, the practical significance of these findings must also be considered along with their statistical significance. The sample examined in this analysis is relatively large, and this can lead to statistically significant findings for differences that are, in practical terms, relatively small. This is particularly the case for the Chi-square test. Where gender differences are examined the actual percents are given to assist with interpreting the practical significance of statistically significant differences.

4.0 GENERAL RELATIONSHIPS

4.1 IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS

All those participating, whether partnered or not, were asked about the importance of their relationships with a range of people and their satisfaction with these relationships. Firstly, respondents were asked to rate the *importance* of the relationship on a 1 to 5 scale, ranging from very important (1) to not at all important (5). The results are shown in Figure 1 and mean scores are presented in Table 3.

Figure 1: Importance of different types of relationship: percents (maximum n=1,006)



For those with children and/or a partner, these relationships were rated as the most important. Relationships with parents (mothers and fathers) were the next most important, followed by close friends, who rate above both siblings and grandparents. Other extended family members have mean levels of importance just above the middle scale point (neither important nor unimportant), indicating that they are less important than more immediate family and friends.

The mean importance score for each relationship is presented in Table 3, along with the results of tests for gender differences. Females rated most relationships as more important than males, except for that with their partner, where males and females gave similar ratings.

Table 3: Importance of various relationships and differences by gender: means (maximum n=1,006)

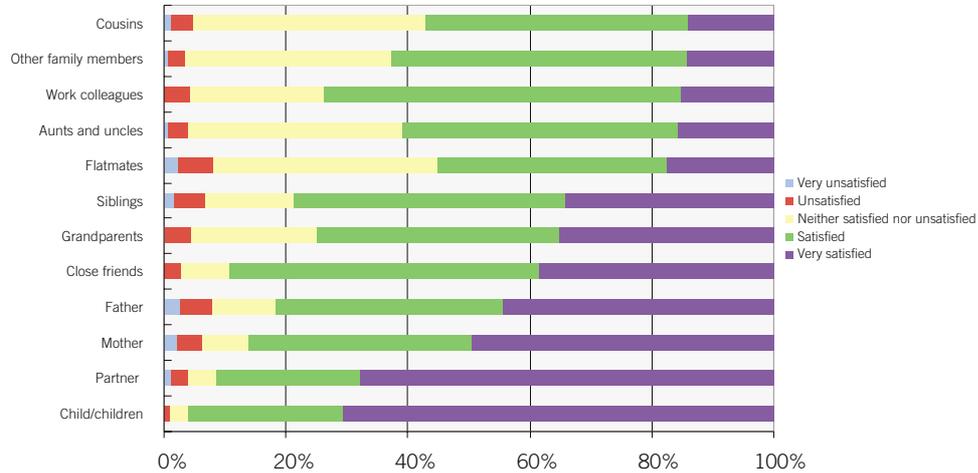
	Mean importance	Gender
Child/children	4.86	f ***
Partner (can include spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend etc)	4.84	
Mother	4.67	f ***
Father	4.55	f ***
Close friends	4.49	f ***
Siblings	4.39	f ***
Grandparents	4.28	f ***
Aunts and uncles	3.69	f ***
Work colleagues	3.67	f **
Cousins	3.52	f ***
Other family members	3.66	f ***
Flatmates	3.48	f **

1=not at all important; 5=very important. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, f: indicates significantly more important for females.

4.2 SATISFACTION WITH RELATIONSHIPS

Respondents were then asked to rate their satisfaction with these same relationships, once again on a five-point scale (1=very unsatisfied to 5=very satisfied) and these results are presented in Figure 2 (mean scores are presented in Table 4).

Figure 2: Satisfaction with various relationships: percents (maximum n=1,006)



For those with a partner and/or children, these relationships were reported to be the most satisfying. Relationships with parents (mothers and fathers) and close friends were the next most satisfying, with satisfaction from close friends rating above both siblings and grandparents. Other extended family members and aunts and uncles have mean levels of satisfaction just above the middle scale point (neither important nor unimportant), indicating that they are less satisfying than relationships with more immediate family and friends. Although satisfaction levels were high for parents and siblings, relationships with these people (along with flatmates) were also most often cited as being unsatisfying, although by very few.

The mean satisfaction score for each relationship is presented in Table 4, along with the results of tests for gender differences. Unlike ratings of importance, males and females rated their satisfaction very similarly. The only differences were that females were more satisfied with their relationships with their children, close friends, siblings, aunts and uncles, and cousins.

Table 4: Satisfaction with various relationships and differences by gender and ethnicity: means (maximum n=1,006)

	Mean satisfaction	Gender
Child/children	4.66	f ***
Partner (can include spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend etc)	4.54	
Mother	4.27	
Close friends	4.25	f ***
Father	4.15	
Grandparents	4.05	
Siblings	4.04	f **
Work colleagues	3.85	
Other family members	3.73	
Aunts and uncles	3.72	f *
Cousins	3.65	f *
Flatmates	3.62	

1=very unsatisfying; 5=very satisfying. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.
f: significantly more satisfying for females.

As can be seen from comparing the results in Tables 3 and 4 the mean importance and mean satisfaction scores for each type of relationship were generally high and very similar. Satisfaction and importance ratings were significantly correlated for each relationship (with correlations between .39 and .61, all $p < .001$).

As noted in the introduction, limited numbers of most ethnic groups in the sample meant comparisons were not possible, except for comparing Māori and New Zealand Europeans. Compared with New Zealand Europeans, Māori appeared to give greater importance to relationships with family and extended family. Māori also appeared to rate their level of satisfaction as being higher for these relationships compared with New Zealand Europeans. However, there is a problem with interpreting these simple associations on the basis of ethnicity since women were over-represented in the Māori sample compared with the New Zealand European sample (67 percent of Māori were women compared with 52 percent of New Zealand Europeans). As has been shown above, gender is also associated with reported ratings of relationship importance and satisfaction.

Further analysis was conducted to examine Māori compared with New Zealand European respondents, controlling for gender differences in sample composition. These results confirmed that Māori men and women regarded the following relationships as more important than New Zealand European respondents: relationships with siblings, aunts and uncles, cousins, and other family members. Māori men also rated relationships with mothers and grandparents as more important than New Zealand European men. New Zealand European women regarded relationships with their partner and with close friends as more important than Māori women. In terms of satisfaction with relationships, the results for the men reflected the ratings of relationship importance, with Māori men rating the above-mentioned relationships as more satisfying. For women, however, the satisfaction levels were similar for Māori and New Zealand Europeans, with the exception that European women reported greater satisfaction from relationships with friends.

Those who were not currently in a relationship reported that relationships with work colleagues, close friends and flatmates were more important than for those currently in a relationship. However, satisfaction with these relationships was rated similarly, irrespective of relationship status.

4.3 TIME SPENT WITH OTHERS

Respondents were also asked how happy they were with the amount of time they spent with each person and these results are presented in Table 5. At least half the respondents wanted to spend more time with their children, with close friends or with their partner. Over two-fifths also said they wanted to spend more time with a range of other family members, and very few said they wanted to spend less time with family or friends. However, at least one in ten wanted to spend less time with flatmates or work colleagues (where relevant).

Table 5: Amount of time spent together: percents (maximum n=1,006)

	Like more	About right	Prefer less
Child/children	58	40	2
Close friends	54	45	1
Partner (can include spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend etc)	50	48	2
Grandparents	48	50	1
Siblings	47	50	3
Father	43	54	4
Mother	41	54	4
Cousins	28	68	4
Aunts and uncles	27	70	3
Other family members	22	74	4
Flatmates	10	75	16
Work colleagues	6	81	13

Note: Percentages will not always total 100 due to rounding.

Men were slightly more likely than women to report that they wanted to spend more time with their child/ren (66 percent of men compared with 52 percent of women reported this) ($\chi^2=13.2$, $p < .001$). Current relationship status (married or cohabiting or non-cohabiting) was unrelated to the desired

amount of time spent together with a partner. With regard to ethnicity, compared with New Zealand European women, Māori women were more likely to report wanting to spend less time with their children (Māori women 8 percent versus New Zealand European women 1 percent, $\chi^2=16.1$, $p<.001$) and work colleagues (Māori women 29 percent versus New Zealand European women 10 percent, $\chi^2=19.6$, $p<.001$). New Zealand European women were more likely to report wanting to spend more time with friends (Māori women 46 percent versus New Zealand European women 61 percent, $\chi^2=13.5$, $p<.001$).

4.4 SUMMARY

These results present a consistent picture in a number of respects. Firstly, the great majority of New Zealanders place a great deal of importance, and derive a great deal of satisfaction from, a range of relationships. Relationships with immediate family tend to come first, followed by those with close friends and extended family. Reflecting this is the fact that most report wanting to spend more time with family and friends, with very few wanting less time in their company.

Secondly, there are gender differences in the reported importance and satisfaction with these relationships. Women place greater importance on most of these relationships, although both men and women report similar levels of importance in their relationship with their partner. With regard to satisfaction derived from these relationships, there are still some differences, but they are far fewer. Women report more satisfaction from relationships with children and close friends, and with some family members. As with rated importance, men and women get similar levels of satisfaction from their relationship with their partner.

Finally, Māori report higher levels of perceived importance with relationships with some extended family compared with New Zealand Europeans. These results are reflected in the finding that Māori are more likely to want to spend more time with some of their extended family, while Europeans want more time with friends.

5.0 PARTNER RELATIONSHIPS

Of those who took part in the survey, over three-quarters (76 percent, n=768) were currently in a relationship. Of the total sample 54 percent were married, 15 percent were cohabiting and 7 percent were in non-cohabiting relationships. These relationships had been in existence for varying lengths of time, ranging from less than a year (5 percent) to over 40 years (8 percent), although most couples had been together for six to 10 years (17 percent) or 11 to 15 years (15 percent). As might be expected, those who were married reported being in longer-term relationships than those who were in cohabiting relationships ($\chi^2=222.3$, $p<.001$). Those respondents who reported being in a relationship were asked a series of questions regarding this relationship.

5.1 SATISFACTION WITH THE RELATIONSHIP WITH A PARTNER

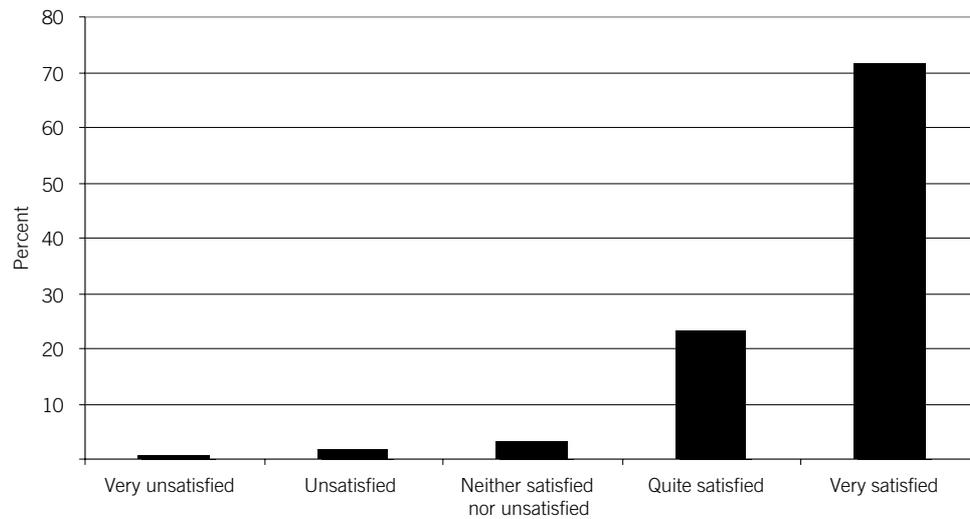
Figure 3 presents respondents' reported satisfaction with their relationship with their current partner (including a spouse boyfriend or girlfriend). The majority of respondents (72 percent) reported being very satisfied with their relationship and very few reported being dissatisfied (2 percent). Most (73 percent) also reported that their relationship had become more satisfying over time, while similar numbers felt their relationships had not changed (14 percent) or had become less satisfying (13 percent) with time. In keeping with these reports almost three-quarters (72 percent) felt their relationship would continue to improve, while a quarter (26 percent) felt it would stay the same and very few (2 percent) felt it would get worse. Those whose relationships had improved over time were more likely to see the relationship as continuing to improve ($\chi^2=189.5$, $p<.001$). However, even amongst those who reported their relationship as becoming less satisfying over time, half were optimistic and felt that the relationship would improve in the future.

In terms of their relationship with their partner, satisfaction levels were similar for men compared with women, and Māori compared with New Zealand European. There is a statistically significant tendency for relationship satisfaction to increase with the length of the relationship ($r=.14$, $p<.001$). It appears that relationship satisfaction increases with time, but it is also possible that this finding in part represents a selection effect. Those with initially low relationship satisfaction may be more likely to separate, so mean satisfaction level increases with the length of the relationship as those with low satisfaction end their relationships at an early stage.

Those cohabiting were more satisfied with their relationship than those in a relationship but not cohabiting ($U=23,949$, $p<.001$). Of those currently cohabiting, those who were married were significantly more satisfied than unmarried cohabiting respondents (ie those in a de facto relationship) ($U=36,943$, $p=.009$). However, part of the difference may be due to the longer duration of most married couples' relationships. Controlling for time together indicated that although those who were married tended to report higher relationship satisfaction, this was no longer a statistically significant difference.

A recent Australian national survey Johnston (2003) found that relationship satisfaction levels were also generally high in Australia. Three-quarters of their national sample rated their relationship satisfaction as eight or higher on a 10-point scale (where 10 was 'completely satisfied'). Those who were married were also found to be significantly more satisfied than those in de facto relationships, with little difference in ratings for men compared with women. For example, 76 percent of married men rated their relationship satisfaction as 8+, compared with 71 percent of women.

Figure 3: Satisfaction with relationship with partner: percents (n=757)



5.2 IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARTNERS

Respondents were asked to rate the importance (where 1=not at all important and 5=very important) with various aspects of their relationship with their partner. Table 6 presents the means for the various aspects of the relationship and indicates where there were significant differences in response by gender. All aspects of the relationship asked about were rated as of high importance by respondents, with relatively little difference between them. Interestingly, having children was not rated as important as other aspects of the relationship, a finding similar to that in the Relationships Australia survey (Johnston 2003). Females rated most of the aspects of the relationship as more important than did males, apart from financial security, having children and being in love, where men and women were similar, and having an active sex life, which was more important for men.

Table 6: Importance with various aspects of relationship with partners: means and differences by gender (maximum n=768)

	Mean importance	Gender
Loyalty to each other	4.81	f ***
Being able to relax and be myself around someone	4.79	f ***
Fun and laughter	4.78	f ***
Supporting and listening to each other	4.75	f ***
Being valued just as I am	4.71	f ***
Companionship, sharing experiences, interests and ideas	4.66	f ***
Sexual fidelity	4.65	f ***
Being in love and having someone in love with me	4.62	
Getting to know each other really well	4.60	f *
Confidence in a shared future	4.58	f **
Having our own ideas and interests	4.52	f***
Financial security	4.33	
Having an active sex life	4.06	m **
Having children	4.01	

1=not at all important; 5=very important. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.
 f: significantly more important for females. m: significantly more important for males.

5.3 SATISFACTION WITH ASPECTS OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARTNERS

Respondents were also asked to rate their satisfaction (1=very unsatisfied and 5=very satisfied) with these various aspects of their relationship with their partner. Table 7 presents the mean satisfaction levels for the various aspects of these relationships and indicates where there were significant differences in response by gender. The order of items is similar to that of the rating of importance, as are the importance and satisfaction scores for each item. In fact the importance and satisfaction ratings were significantly associated for each item (with correlations between .16 and .53, $p < .000$). In terms of gender differences, it is interesting to note that women reported greater *satisfaction* with their sex life than men, whereas men rated this of greater *importance*. Women also reported greater satisfaction with having children, having their own ideas and interests, sexual fidelity, being valued as they are, fun and laughter, being able to relax and loyalty to each other. It needs to be noted that although these differences are statistically significant they are not large, with most means being greater than four for both men and women.

Table 7: Satisfaction with various aspects of relationship with partners: means and differences by gender (maximum $n=768$)

	Mean satisfaction	Gender
Loyalty to each other	4.62	f *
Sexual fidelity	4.56	f ***
Being able to relax and be myself around someone	4.49	f ***
Getting to know each other really well	4.39	
Being valued just as I am	4.36	f **
Being in love and having someone in love with me	4.35	
Having our own ideas and interests	4.34	f***
Having children	4.31	f**
Fun and laughter	4.29	f *
Supporting and listening to each other	4.29	
Companionship, sharing experiences, interests and ideas	4.29	
Confidence in a shared future	4.22	
Financial security	3.93	
Having an active sex life	3.89	f**

1=very unsatisfying; 5=very satisfying. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.
f: significantly more important for females.

As might be expected, satisfaction with each aspect of the relationship, mentioned in Tables 6 and 7, is significantly related to overall relationship satisfaction with their partner. Most strongly associated were items concerning love, support and companionship, while financial security and having children were least strongly correlated with overall relationship satisfaction. Factor analysis indicated the items listed in Table 6 could be divided into three factors, although the first factor included most of the items listed, with the other two factors loading mainly on single items – one representing having children and the other financial security. A new variable was created that represented the mean satisfaction across all items (mean satisfaction with aspects of partner relationship). This variable was highly correlated with overall satisfaction with the partner relationship ($r=.69$, $p < .000$).

5.4 TENSIONS IN PARTNER RELATIONSHIPS

Respondents were asked about a range of factors that might have caused tension in their relationship with their partner. Table 8 presents the frequency with which causes of tension were selected by those in the sample. Almost a third indicated that not having time for one another was a cause of tension, as was the related concern of work taking up too much time or attention. Not listening to or understanding one another was also cited by almost a third, while disagreements about money, values and frequency of sex were cited by over a fifth. Disagreements about housework and parenting were also relatively common causes of tension, while factors more removed from the immediate dyadic relationship also caused tension in some cases (eg grief, losing touch with friends). The Relationships Australia survey (Johnston 2003) reports similar frequencies for comparable items, with 'not enough time spent together' being cited most often and the items concerning alcohol and drug use, having an affair and violence, being cited by relatively few respondents.

Table 8: Causes of most tension in the relationship: percent of those currently in a relationship (maximum n=768)

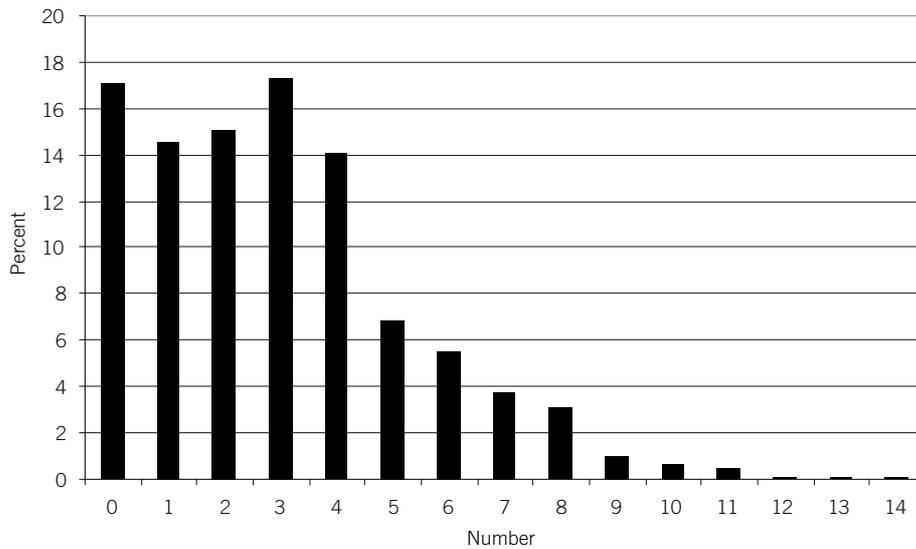
	Number	Percent
Not enough time spent together	232	30
Not listening to or understanding each other	230	30
Work takes up too much time or attention	227	30
Disagreements or arguments about money	192	25
A clash in values or ideas	176	23
When one partner wants to have sex more than other	172	22
Critical or negative attitudes	149	19
Housework	144	19
Grief or distress from things outside the relationship	140	18
Pressures of parenting	128	17
Disagreements about having or raising children	97	13
Losing touch with friends	73	10
Family or friends taking up too much time or attention	66	9
Having nothing to say to each other	60	8
Constant arguing or sniping	58	8
Assuming the worst about each other	54	7
Alcohol or drug use	36	5
When one partner has an affair	28	4
Hitting or yelling	19	3
Health/medical problems	11	1

Women cited some issues significantly more often than men, although the differences were not large. Women were more likely to report tension due to disagreements about having or raising children (women 16 percent versus men 9 percent), grief or distress from things outside the relationship (women 22 percent versus men 14 percent) and housework issues (women 22 percent versus men 15 percent).

Most causes of tension were significantly related to lower current satisfaction with the partner relationship (except work takes up too much time, family and friends taking up time, disagreements about money, losing touch with friends, pressures with parenting or health/medical problems). Those who cited tension arising from a clash of values, having nothing to say to one another, assuming the worst about each other, constant arguing or sniping, not listening to or understanding one another, disagreeing about raising the children, housework, the frequency of sex, and money, one partner having affairs, hitting and yelling, and alcohol and drug use, were also more likely to report that their relationship had become less satisfying over time.

An index of overall tension was created by summing up the number of items causing tension and these data are presented in Figure 4. While 17 percent indicated that there were no sources of tension with their partner, most others selected a limited number of sources of tension. The number of items mentioned as sources of tension was significantly negatively related to both the reported relationship satisfaction with the partner ($r = -.36, p < .000$) and the mean of the satisfaction items ($r = -.42, p < .000$). That is, the more sources of tension, the poorer the relationship. Those reporting that their relationship had got worse over time were also more likely to report more sources of tension ($F = 42.6, p < .001$).

Figure 4: Number of sources of relationship tension (n=768)



5.5 STRATEGIES USED TO MAKE RELATIONSHIPS WORK

While the above data concern sources of tension in the relationship, Table 9 presents responses to a series of questions asking respondents about a range of strategies that they may have used to make their current relationship work. As can be seen from the table, which presents the percentage using a strategy and the percent of these who found it helpful, there were a number of strategies that had been used by over 90 percent of respondents. In addition, the vast majority who used these strategies reported finding that they had helped. The exceptions are yelling and shouting, and ignoring things they are unhappy with, which were not found to be helpful when they were used.

Table 9: Strategies used to help make current relationship work: percents of those currently in a relationship who used strategy and, of those who used strategy, percent who found it helpful (maximum n=768)

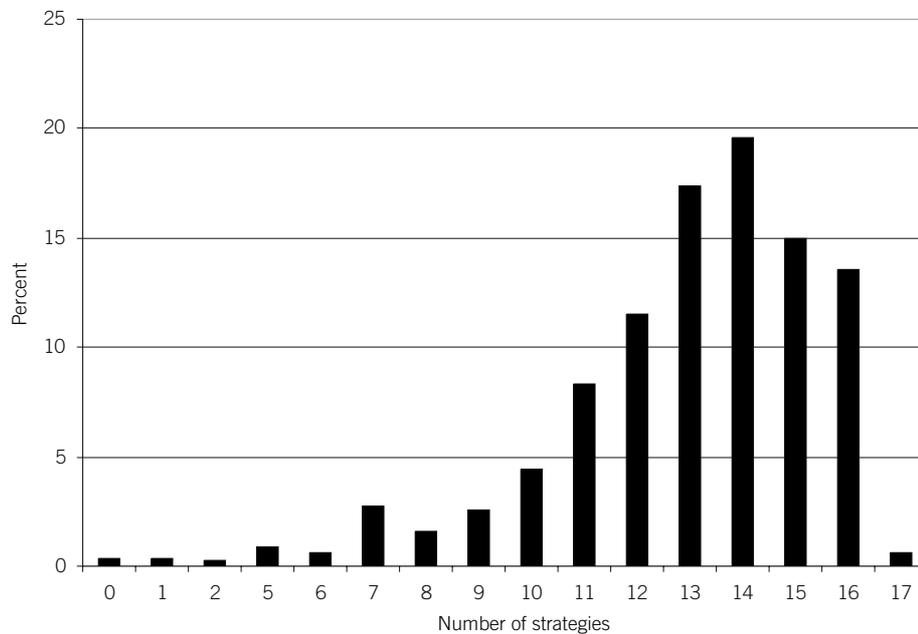
	Percent used	Percent helpful
Taking time to listen to my partner	97	94
Accepting responsibility for my part in the situation	95	97
Apologising for any hurt or distress I've caused	95	95
Accepting our differences	95	94
Focusing on the good things in our relationship	94	96
Making time for our relationship	92	93
Demonstrating I can be trusted (eg keeping my promises)	89	92
Talking seriously about things I'm unhappy about	88	81
Changing my own behaviour	85	88
Giving my partner the benefit of the doubt	83	87
Having sex	81	85
Having a life outside the relationship	79	90
Imagining myself in my partner's shoes	78	88
Ignoring things I'm unhappy about	72	24
Buying gifts for my partner (eg flowers or chocolates)	71	79
Shouting or yelling at my partner	56	11

There were relatively few differences in the reported use of strategies by men compared with women, and where there were differences they were small. Women were more likely to report talking seriously about things they were unhappy with (women 95 percent versus men 92 percent, $\chi^2=8.3$, $p=.004$), and shouting and yelling (women 63 percent versus men 50 percent, $\chi^2=12.5$, $p<.001$). Males were more likely to report apologising (men 97 percent versus women 93 percent, $\chi^2=6.8$, $p=.009$) and buying gifts for their partner (men 81 percent versus women 61 percent, $\chi^2=33.1$, $p<.001$).

Those with a better relationship with their partner were more likely to have used the strategies and found them helpful, rather than trying them and finding them unhelpful.⁴ Exceptions were ignoring things they were unhappy about, having a life outside the relationship and shouting and yelling, items that indicate a troubled relationship. Some of these strategies were more likely to be reported by those whose relationship had improved over time. Apologising for any hurt or distress, imagining themselves in their partner's shoes, making time for the relationship, having sex, and buying gifts for their partner were all reported more frequently by those noting increases in relationship satisfaction over time. Ignoring things that they were not happy about was associated with relationships becoming less satisfying over time.

Figure 5 presents the total number of strategies used by the respondents. Only three respondents reported never having used any of the listed strategies to help make their relationship work. It appears that most respondents had used a wide range of strategies, with over half reporting having used between 13 and 15 different strategies. Those who reported using more strategies reported greater satisfaction with their relationship, although the correlation was relatively weak ($r=.10$, $p=.005$). The number of sources of tension was weakly correlated with the number of strategies used ($r=.10$, $p=.006$), suggesting that more sources of tension may lead to the need for more strategies to help make the relationship work.

Figure 5: Number of relationship strategies used: percent (n=766)



5.6 SUPPORTING RELATIONSHIPS

Respondents were also asked about the approaches they might have used to support their relationships more generally (Table 10). Most reported having talked to the person concerned, or to family or friends, to work out relationship issues or problems. Almost half had sought out ideas or information to help support the relationship, mainly from books or the internet. A third had sought help from a trusted person (eg friend, family member) to help them work out issues in the relationship. Almost a quarter had been to counselling on their own, and slightly fewer had been to counselling with the person involved. Altogether, a third had been to counselling either on their own or with the person involved. When asked if they would use the strategy in the future, the percent responding 'yes' was very similar to the proportion who had used it in the past.

⁴ Numbers for those using a strategy and finding it unhelpful were relatively small and these results need to be interpreted with caution.

Table 10: Ways used to support relationships (this could include family, friends and colleagues): percent used in the past and percent likely to use in the future (n=1,006)

	Used in the past	Likely to use in the future*
Talked with the person concerned to work it out	89	91
Talked with family or friends about it	81	80
Looked for ideas or information in books or on the internet	48	57
Had a trusted friend/family member/other person help us to work it out	30	37
Gone to counselling on my own	24	21
Gone to counselling with the person involved	19	20
Prayer/church/bible principles	1	

* Score of 4=quite likely to use in future or 5=very likely to use in future on five-point scale.

Women were more likely to report having used the following supports: talking to family and friends (women 85 percent versus men 75 percent); looking for ideas or information (women 54 percent versus men 41 percent); going to counselling on their own (women 31 percent versus men 17 percent).

5.7 SUMMARY

In summary, respondents gained a great deal of satisfaction from their relationship with their partner. They were able to identify a number of aspects of this relationship that were important to them, and from which they derived satisfaction. However they also noted a number of causes of tension in their relationship, and these were related to decreased relationship satisfaction. In part in response to these factors, many of the respondents had used a range of strategies to make their relationship work. Most of these strategies were seen as helping the relationship. In particular, apologising for any hurt or distress, imagining themselves in their partner's shoes, making time for the relationship, having sex, and buying gifts for their partner were all reported more frequently by those noting increases in relationship satisfaction over time. Other strategies did not help improve the relationship – ignoring things they were unhappy about, having a life outside the relationship and shouting and yelling. In addition to these strategies, more general relationship supports were frequently used, often involving getting support and assistance from family and friends.

6.0 SINGLES – THOSE NOT CURRENTLY IN A PARTNER RELATIONSHIP

Two hundred and thirty eight respondents indicated that they were not currently in a ‘partner’ relationship. Of those not in a relationship, 65 percent reported that it was their choice to be single at this time, while 27 percent said it was not their choice to be so, and 8 percent were unsure.

6.1 REASONS FOR BEING SINGLE

The main reasons given for being single are presented in Table 11. The reason most often cited was that they had not met anyone they wanted to get involved with, cited by two-thirds of the single respondents. Two-fifths reported that the main reason for being single was that they enjoyed being single. Around a quarter felt that one of the reasons they were single was the difficulty in meeting someone who shared their interests or who was not already involved in a relationship and was interested in them. Almost a third mentioned only one main reason for being single, but equal numbers mentioned two (19 percent) or three reasons (23 percent).

Table 11: Main reasons for being single: percents of all those not currently in a partner relationship (n=238)

	Percent
Haven’t met anyone I want to get involved with	66
I enjoy being single	42
Find it hard to meet someone who shares my values or interests	39
The people I’m interested in are already involved or not interested in me	27
Past relationship experience has put me off the idea	25
A relationship doesn’t fit with my age or stage of life	13
I don’t feel I’m ready to be in a relationship	13
My focus right now is on being a parent	12
I’m grieving for a former partner and a new partner doesn’t appeal	9
My job makes having a relationship difficult	8
I’m busy with studying and feel a relationship would be too distracting	8
I’m uncertain about my sexuality and am unsure who I’d want to get involved with	2

It is likely that reasons for being single are related to the age of the respondent, and this was found to be the case. Under-50-year-olds were more likely to say that they hadn’t met anyone they wanted to get involved with, they didn’t feel they were ready to be in a relationship and their focus right now was on being a parent. Those over 50 years old were more likely to say they were single because a relationship didn’t fit with their age or stage of life, or that they were grieving for a former partner and a new partner didn’t appeal. Gender also distinguished some responses. Males were more likely than females to say that the people they were interested in were already involved or not interested in them (men 35 percent versus women 22 percent), and to report that they didn’t feel they were ready to be in a relationship (men 19 percent versus women 10 percent).

6.2 IMPORTANCE AND SATISFACTION WITH ASPECTS OF BEING SINGLE

Those who were single were also asked to rate the importance of, and their satisfaction with, a number of aspects of being single (Table 12). A number of items related to having choice and independence were rated most important by those who were single, and as providing high levels of satisfaction. On the other hand, issues concerning safety and career development were rated as relatively low in importance.

Table 12: Rated importance and satisfaction with aspects of being single: means for all those not currently in a partner relationship and differences by gender (maximum n=238)

	Mean importance	Mean satisfaction
Able to choose the life that suits me (eg work, social life)	4.29	4.16
Having time and space for myself	4.21 f *	4.20
Able to manage and control my own finances	4.20 f **	4.09 f *
Able to do things on the spur of the moment	4.14 f *	4.19
More time to develop rich, satisfying friendships	3.97 f **	3.85 f *
Able to have a lifestyle that reflects my values	3.97 f **	4.01 f **
Able to provide more consistent parenting	3.87 f *	3.89 f ***
Gaining confidence from taking care of myself	3.82 f ***	3.84 f ***
Less need to compromise	3.66 f **	3.97 f *
Feeling safer and more secure	3.51 f ***	3.67
Able to concentrate on my career	3.38	3.75

1=not at all important;5=very important; 1=very unsatisfying; 5=very satisfying.

*** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05.

f: significantly more important for females.

Females find almost all the aspects of being single more important than males (apart from being able to concentrate on a career and choosing a life that suits them). Most of these differences also exist for satisfaction with aspects of being single, where females are more satisfied with managing their own finances, developing friendships, a lifestyle that reflects their values, more consistent parenting, taking care of themselves and less need to compromise. Once again the rating of item importance was significantly correlated with the rating of satisfaction with each aspect of being single (with correlations between r=.39 and .58, p<.000).

6.3 DRAWBACKS TO BEING SINGLE

Respondents were also asked about negative aspects of being single (Table 13). Almost half mentioned that a negative aspect of being single was not being as sexually active as they would like. Lack of a partner's income was mentioned by over a third, as were issues concerning other people's reactions to not having a partner. Very few cited loneliness as a negative aspect of being single, or lack of help with parenting.

Table 13: Negative aspects of being single: percents of all those not currently in a partner relationship (maximum n=238)

	Percent
I'm not as sexually active as I would like	48
There is no one I come first with	40
No partner income	36
I get left out of couple-oriented events	35
People make assumptions about me because I'm single	35
I have to do all my own planning and motivating	32
No one to take care of me	30
There is no one to share the work with	29
I don't feel as attractive or worthwhile as I would with a partner	24
I may miss out on having children	19
Having to find suitable people to live with (eg flatmates)	14
Feeling afraid or vulnerable on my own	15
No negative aspects to being single	12
Loneliness/no one to share things with/lack of companionship	8
My family don't see me as 'grown up'	8
No one to help raise my children	7

There were some gender differences in the negative aspects of being single. Women were significantly more likely to report that they had no one to share the work with (women 36 percent versus men 18 percent), had to do all their own planning and motivating (women 38 percent versus men 22 percent) and had no one to help raise their children (women 10 percent versus men 2 percent). Men were

more likely to mention that negative aspects involved not being as sexually active as they would like (men 59 percent versus women 42 percent), and feelings of loneliness/no one to share things with/lack of companionship (men 14 percent versus women 5 percent).

6.4 DEVELOPING A SATISFYING LIFE AS A SINGLE PERSON

Despite these negative aspects of being single, most respondents had used a range of ways to help develop a satisfying life as a single person. The percentage of singles who used various methods, and whether or not they had found them useful, is presented in Table 14. All these strategies had been used by the majority of single respondents and all had been found to be helpful by over three-quarters of those who had used them. Developing and maintaining relationships with family and friends was one of the main ways in which single respondents developed a satisfying life as a single person. The importance of these relationships perhaps explains the relatively low rates of loneliness reported earlier. Other strategies focused on taking care of themselves and creating a personal space. Women were more likely to mention using taking care of family relationships (women 95 percent versus men 79 percent), finding ways to enjoy their own time (women 99 percent versus men 93 percent) and asking others for support (women 80 percent versus men 63 percent).

Table 14: Strategies used to help develop a satisfying life as a single person: percents of those not currently in a partner relationship (maximum n=238)

	Used	Helpful
Finding ways to enjoy time on my own	97	90
Focusing on maintaining current friendships	96	92
Establishing a home where I feel comfortable and relaxed	92	92
Focusing on taking good care of myself	91	89
Maintaining (or working towards) financial independence	91	83
Taking care of relationships with my family	89	89
Appreciating and valuing myself	88	88
Getting involved in activities or interests I enjoy	86	88
Talking with friends and family about important things in my life	83	85
Actively developing new friendships and acquaintances	83	84
Planning trips, holidays, celebrations or special occasions	82	86
Actively planning my future	79	80
Asking others for help or support when I need it	73	77
Organising events and inviting others to come	62	85

6.5 SUMMARY

Although not all chose to be single, being single was seen as having many positive aspects, particularly for women. It gives independence and time to further develop relationships with family and friends. Very few respondents noted loneliness as a major drawback from being single, with far more citing the lack of sex and income as the main negative aspects of being single. Most had developed a range of strategies to help develop a satisfying life as a single person, often involving developing and maintaining relationships with family and friends.

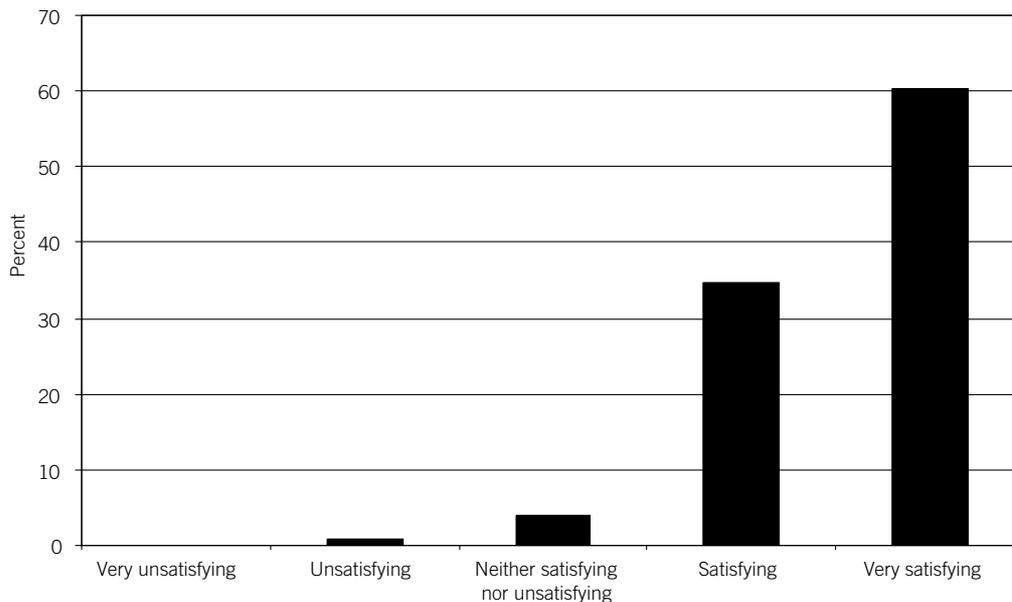
7.0 PARENTING

Of the 1,006 respondents, 694 (69 percent) had at some stage in their life been involved in parenting. As might be expected, parenting experience was more common amongst those currently in a relationship (75 percent), compared with those not currently in a relationship (51 percent). Of those with parenting experience, 154 were not currently parenting at the time of participating in the survey, leaving 540 currently parenting, and of these, 425 were currently parenting at least one child under 20 years old. When asked if they had consciously decided to have children, 74 percent said yes, 23 percent said having children was not a conscious decision and 3 percent were unsure. Those who were married were more likely to say their children were planned (88 percent) compared with those in a de facto relationship (55 percent) ($\chi^2=50.0, p<.001$). The Relationships Australia survey (Johnston 2003) indicated that 67 percent of the first-born children of those in their sample were planned, and that those in a de facto relationship were less likely to report their first child was planned.

7.1 SATISFACTION WITH PARENTING

Those who were, or had been parents, were asked how satisfying they found being a parent (where 1=very unsatisfying and 5=very satisfying). The responses for those with a child under 20 years old are presented in Figure 6. The majority of parents found parenting to be satisfying (35 percent), or very satisfying (60 percent). Parenting satisfaction levels were similar for men compared with women, for sole compared with partnered parents, for those married and those cohabiting, and Māori compared with New Zealand European. The age of the youngest child being parented was also unrelated to satisfaction with parenting.

Figure 6: Satisfaction with parenting: percent parents of children under 20 years old (n=425)



Those who were more satisfied with parenting also reported greater satisfaction with their relationship with their partner ($r=.16, p<.001$). However, contrary to previous research (Twenge, Campbell and Foster 2003), being a parent was not associated with lower satisfaction with the partner relationship. It is possible that this difference in findings is due to the broad age range of the children in this sample. Previous research finds the drop in relationship satisfaction to be most pronounced for younger children.⁵ For those who were currently single, being more satisfied with aspects of being single was associated with being more satisfied with parenting ($r=.16, p=.033$).

⁵ Due to the lack of ability to control for the age of children it was not possible to test the impact of young children on relationship satisfaction in this sample.

7.2 SATISFACTION WITH ASPECTS OF PARENTING

Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with a number of aspects of parenting. As can be seen from Table 15, those who were parenting a child under 20 years old were very satisfied with a number of aspects of parenting. Watching their child develop over time, and the changes this entailed, were highly satisfying, as was loving and feeling loved by the children.

Table 15: Rated satisfaction with aspects of parenting: means for all those currently parenting a child under 20 years old and differences by gender (maximum n=425)

	Mean Satisfaction	Gender
Watching my kids grow and develop	4.87	f **
Getting to know my kids as their personality emerges	4.83	
Feeling proud of my kids	4.83	f ***
Being loving and feeling loved by my kids	4.83	f **
Watching the delight my kids get out of simple things	4.78	f ***
Celebrating my kids' milestones	4.76	f ***
Spending quality time with my kids	4.74	f **
Helping my kids learn about themselves and the world	4.73	f ***
Talking with my kids and listening to what they say	4.67	f ***
Seeing things through the eyes of my kids	4.53	f ***
Surprising myself by discovering things I can do as a parent	4.41	f ***
Having time without the kids	4.38	f ***
Seeing my kids' relationship with their other parent	4.25	
Seeing myself or my partner in how my kids look or behave	4.18	
Being reminded of how I used to be	3.95	

1=very unsatisfying; 5=very satisfying. *** $p<.001$, ** $p<.01$,
f: significantly more important for females.

Women reported greater satisfaction with the majority of items in Table 15, apart from getting to know their children, the children's relationship with the other parent, seeing themselves or their partner in how the children look and being reminded of how they used to be. All the aspects of parenting listed in the table were positively related to the measure of parenting satisfaction (with correlations between .22 and .38; $p<.001$), apart from having time without the children.

7.3 PARENTING CHALLENGES

Parents were also asked to rate challenging aspects of parenting (1=not at all to 5=very challenging), and these data are presented in Table 16. The most challenging aspects of parenting involved seeing the children upset, and trying to find time for the children. The teenage years were also rated as relatively challenging, as were aspects of parenting concerned with the control and disciplining of the children, and managing conflict.

Table 16: Degree of challenge of aspects of parenting: means for all those currently parenting a child under 20 years old and differences by gender (maximum n=425)

	Mean challenge	Gender
Seeing my kids unhappy or withdrawn	4.13	f ***
Balancing time for the kids with time for other commitments	4.08	
Difficulties during the teenage years	3.95	f **
Being firm with my kids – not backing down on decisions	3.82	f **
Managing conflict between my kids and me or between my kids	3.80	f ***
Modelling good behaviour all the time	3.78	
Worries about how other influences are affecting my kids	3.76	f ***
Consistent parenting with my partner	3.67	f *
Parenting effectively when I don't live with my kids	3.66	
Keeping my kids safe without limiting them unnecessarily	3.65	
Disciplining appropriately	3.65	
Allowing my kids to make and learn from their own mistakes	3.63	f **
Getting my kids to co-operate with me	3.53	
Issues with their health or development	3.50	
Being able to get enough sleep myself	3.44	f ***

1=not at all challenging; 5=very challenging. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.
f: significantly more important for females.

Women, compared with men, also reported that many of these aspects of parenting were more challenging. Women report as more challenging: seeing their children unhappy or withdrawn; difficulties during the teenage years; being firm with the children; managing conflict; worries over other influences on the children; consistent parenting with their partner; allowing the children to make their own mistakes; and being able to get enough sleep.

Some of the challenging aspects of parenting were associated with the overall parenting satisfaction measure, but these associations were not large (correlations less than .17 and mostly under .10). Finding the following more challenging was associated with less parenting satisfaction: balancing time for the children with time for other commitments; consistent parenting with their partner; disciplining appropriately; difficulties during the teenage years; managing conflict between their children and themselves or between their children; getting their children to co-operate with them; and parenting effectively when they don't live with their children.

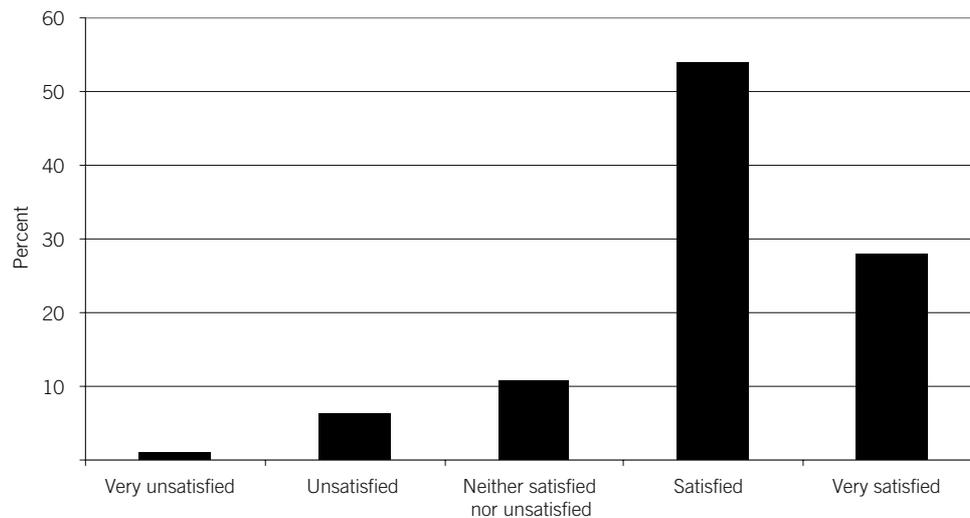
7.4 SUMMARY

Most of the respondents who were parents reported being very satisfied with their parenting experience. In line with recent Australian data (Headey, Warren and Harding 2006), being less satisfied with being a parent was associated with lower relationship satisfaction with a partner. Whether dissatisfaction with parenting leads to strains on the relationship, or vice versa, is open to debate. Parents identified a number of aspects of parenting from which they derived great satisfaction, especially when seeing their children grow and develop over time. They were able to acknowledge a number of challenging aspects of the parenting experience, but these did not seem to provide a major detraction from their overall satisfaction with parenting. While women reported greater satisfaction with most aspects of parenting, they also found many aspects more challenging than men did.

8.0 OVERALL LIFE SATISFACTION

All those participating in the survey were asked 'At this time, how satisfied are you with your life overall?' with a five-point response option ranging from very unsatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5). Figure 7 shows the distribution of responses, with most indicating that they were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their life overall (mean satisfaction of 4.02 on the five-point scale). The distribution of responses to this question is very close to that reported from a large sample of respondents (n=7,800) from 12 large New Zealand cities (Gravitas Research and Strategy Limited 2005).⁶ Similarly high levels of overall life satisfaction were also reported in a recent Australian national survey (Headey et al 2006), with mean overall life satisfaction of 8.0 on a 10-point satisfaction scale. In the current study the level of satisfaction with life overall was lower than satisfaction with the partner relationship (paired t=14.79, p<.001) and satisfaction with parenting (paired t=11.4, p<.001).

Figure 7: Overall life satisfaction: percents (n=1,002)



Which of the factors explored in the previous chapters were associated with this overall life satisfaction? Gender was not associated with overall life satisfaction, with both males (3.98) and females (4.05) reporting similar levels of satisfaction. The *Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey* (Headey et al 2006) also found no gender differences in overall life satisfaction. There was also no evidence that ethnicity was associated with overall life satisfaction in this sample. However, both age and household income were associated with levels of overall life satisfaction. There was a significant trend for life satisfaction to be higher in the older age groups ($r=.10$, $p<.001$). The data survey of 12 New Zealand cities also found that overall life satisfaction increased with age, but, as found here, there was no difference for men compared with women (Gravitas Research and Strategy Limited 2005).

The current data also indicated that satisfaction was higher for those with higher household income⁷, although the correlation was relatively weak ($r=.16$, $p<.001$). The New Zealand 12-cities survey also found a tendency for satisfaction to be higher for those on higher incomes, although once above the lower income levels, satisfaction levels were similar (Gravitas Research and Strategy Limited 2005). The HILDA survey also found a relatively weak association between income and life satisfaction, although stronger associations were found when using a measure of wealth rather than income.

Those currently in a relationship were significantly more satisfied with life overall ($t=-5.76$, $p<.001$) compared with those not in a relationship⁸, which is in line with previous research (Stack and Eshleman 1998). Although having ever parented was associated with greater overall life satisfaction ($t=2.83$, $p<.005$), this association is confounded by age, as it includes older people who have parented in the past but are not doing so now. After controlling for age, overall life satisfaction for those currently parenting a child under 20 years old was no different from those not currently parenting. This

6 Satisfaction levels were (relate sample in brackets) – 3 percent dissatisfied (6 percent), 12 percent neutral (11 percent), 53 percent satisfied (54 percent) and 32 percent very satisfied (28 percent).

7 As this sample under-represents low-income households, the sample is therefore likely to over-represent those with higher overall life satisfaction.

8 Glenn and Weaver (1981), however, make the point that a poor marriage is not better than being single and happy.

held for both mothers and fathers. However, the level of satisfaction derived from parenting children was significantly associated with overall satisfaction ($r=.22$, $p<.001$), with life satisfaction higher for those more satisfied with parenting. This association between satisfaction with life overall and satisfaction with parenting held for both men ($r=.24$, $p<.001$) and women ($r=.21$, $p<.001$).

Greater overall life satisfaction was also associated with greater satisfaction with all the relationships mentioned earlier, particularly with the relationship with a partner ($r=.38$, $p<.001$). Those reporting higher mean satisfaction with aspects of their relationship with their partner ($r=.37$, $p<.001$) and fewer sources of relationship tension ($r=-.28$, $p<.001$) also reported higher overall life satisfaction. Although the number of relationship strategies used in the relationship was also significantly related to overall life satisfaction, the size of the association was relatively weak ($r=.08$, $p<.01$).

For currently single people, overall life satisfaction was higher when reporting greater satisfaction with aspects of being single (apart from 'providing more consistent parenting') and to the overall mean of these items ($r=.34$, $p<.001$).

The interpretation of these simple bivariate relationships is complicated by the fact that they are potentially confounded by other variables. For example, household income is associated with age (rising with age initially before falling after retirement) and parenting satisfaction is associated with satisfaction with the relationship with a partner. To select out the most important factors impacting on overall life satisfaction, while controlling for confounding, a regression analysis was conducted.⁹

Firstly, for the total sample, overall life satisfaction was predicted from the following variables – age, gender, income, average satisfaction with all relationships and whether currently in a partner relationship. All these factors, apart from gender, were found to independently contribute to overall life satisfaction, with average satisfaction with all relationships being most important. Examining only Māori and New Zealand Europeans and including the ethnicity variable produced similar results, with gender and ethnicity not helping to predict overall life satisfaction, once the other factors were taken into account.

Next, overall life satisfaction for those in a relationship was examined as a function of age, gender, income, average satisfaction with all relationships, satisfaction with a partner, number of sources of tension in the relationship and number of strategies used to make the relationship work. The main variables that independently predicted overall life satisfaction were average satisfaction in all relationships, household income, mean satisfaction with aspects of the relationship with their partner and the number of sources of tension in the relationship. The most important were average satisfaction with all relationships and mean satisfaction with aspects of the partner relationship. When this analysis was run including Māori versus New Zealand European ethnicity, the results were largely unchanged, with ethnicity not contributing anything extra to the prediction of overall life satisfaction.

The above analysis, for those in a relationship, was also run with the addition of the variable measuring satisfaction with parenting. Once again the results did not change, indicating that the relationship factors were more important in predicting overall life satisfaction, rather than parenting satisfaction. That is, overall life satisfaction seems to be more a function of satisfaction with a number of different relationships and aspects of the relationship with a partner, rather than aspects of parenting. However, a difficulty with this analysis may be the relatively high levels of satisfaction with parenting in this sample, leaving little variation in parenting satisfaction to contribute to the multivariate analysis.

This multivariate analysis suggests that higher overall life satisfaction is most strongly associated with the quality of a range of relationships and, in particular, with a strong and healthy relationship with a partner. For those who were not in a relationship, life was more satisfying if they were able to enjoy the positive aspects of being single. While age and income were associated with overall life satisfaction, they do not appear to have a major impact.

9 The skewed nature of the life satisfaction variable means that this analysis should be regarded as tentative. However, the analysis was repeated with a binary satisfaction measure and the results were substantively the same.

9.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Two leading researchers into subjective wellbeing believe that research supports the view that “supportive, positive social relationships are necessary [although not sufficient] for well-being” (Diener and Seligman 2004). International research also indicates that the majority of people rate being happy as important and that most report being satisfied with their life (Diener 2000). The results reported here would support this view and the previous research. This chapter first considers the possible limitations of this study, before summarising the findings in relation to the research questions proposed. It closes by considering the policy and practice implications of this research.

When considering these results it needs to be kept in mind that the data are cross-sectional and it is not possible to determine the direction of cause and effect. While in many cases it seems plausible to assume that the direction of action is in a certain direction, it is possible that the relationship operates in the reverse direction. For example, while it might seem that greater satisfaction with relationships leads to greater overall life satisfaction, some research indicates that being more satisfied with life overall also contributes to greater relationship satisfaction (Lyubomirsky, King and Diener 2005). That is, it is possible that there is a reciprocal relationship between satisfaction measures. More sophisticated research designs are needed in order to understand the direction of influence and how many of these factors interact.

A further potential limitation of this study concerns the measures used. Satisfaction with relationships, parenting and life overall were measured by single-item five-point scales. Single-item measures of relationships and wellbeing are relatively weak measures (Twenge et al 2003) and more comprehensive multi-item measures are considered preferable. However, while these multi-item measures are preferable, space and time limitations in conducting surveys mean they are less suitable for survey work.

It is difficult to judge the national representativeness of the sample in this study. Although there is clearly a shortage of lower-income households in the sample it is not clear whether, or in what ways, these families would change the findings. There is certainly evidence in this research that these families have lower overall life satisfaction, but the association is relatively weak. The survey was conducted online and therefore those without access to the internet would not be able to participate. Again it is not clear how these individuals might differ from those who participated.

9.1 SATISFACTION WITH RELATIONSHIPS GENERALLY

New Zealanders regard relationships with a range of people as important in their lives. Particularly important are relationships with children and partners, followed by more immediate and extended family. Close friends are also very important to most New Zealanders, rating higher than some extended family members. Levels of satisfaction with these relationships were also high, and the relative satisfaction derived from each relationship was similar to their order of importance. That is, most satisfaction came from relationships with children and a partner, followed by close friends and immediate family (eg mother and father). A recent national Australian study also found that “the large majority of both married and de facto men and women are well satisfied with their relationships” (Headey et al 2006:2). Average satisfaction with the relationship with a partner was over 8 on a 10-point scale, comparable to the 4.5 on the five-point scale used in the present survey. Satisfaction with the relationship with children was also relatively high in the Australian study, again with an average in excess of 8 on the 10-point scale.

There were some interesting differences in the level of importance attached to different relationships by both gender and ethnicity (Māori compared with New Zealand European). Women regard most relationships as being more important than men do, and report higher satisfaction with many of them. Māori regard some relationships with extended family as more important than New Zealand Europeans, while New Zealand Europeans tend to attach more importance to their relationship with their friends.

9.2 SATISFACTION WITH THE RELATIONSHIP WITH A PARTNER

The majority of respondents reported being very satisfied with their current relationship with a partner, with very few being dissatisfied. Relationship satisfaction levels were similar for men and women, and for Māori compared with New Zealand European. Most of these relationships had also become more satisfying over time, and respondents felt they would continue to improve. Interestingly, those who were married were most satisfied with their relationship with their partner, followed by those cohabiting and then by those in a relationship where they did not live together. However, once the length of the relationship was taken into account, the difference between those married and those cohabiting was no longer statistically significant.

A range of factors was regarded as important to the relationship with the partner. Being valued by another person and being able to be themselves were particularly valued. Most of the respondents derived high levels of satisfaction from these aspects of the relationship. Women regarded most aspects as more important than men, apart from having an active sex life, which was more important to men. Women also found most aspects of their relationship more satisfying, including having an active sex life.

Tension in the relationship was commonly a result of not spending enough time together, often due to the demands of work, and a lack of listening and understanding (for almost a third). Disagreements about money, housework, values and sex also often contributed to tension. While parenting was mentioned as a source of tension it was not common, being mentioned by one in seven. Although a number of sources of tension were identified, most respondents selected less than four sources. The greater the number of sources of tension, the lower was the rating of relationship quality. This is consistent with prior research that has shown that stress, especially chronic stress, leads to declining marital quality (Bradbury and Karney 2004).

Around half of all the respondents would like to spend more time with immediate and extended family and with close friends. Men, in particular, report wanting to spend more time with their children. This perhaps reflects the above finding that the demands of work are a prime source of relationship tension, and further indicates the importance of work-life balance issues for New Zealand families (eg see Families Commission 2006).

Although a number of sources of tension contributed to relationship stress, respondents were also able to identify a number of strategies that helped make the current relationship work. Many of these strategies had been used by over nine out of 10 respondents, with taking time to listen, accepting responsibility, apologising, accepting differences, focusing on positive things in the relationship and making time for the relationship, being commonly used. When used, these strategies had been found to be particularly helpful. On the other hand, ignoring things and shouting and yelling, although used by over half of the respondents, had not been found to be particularly helpful. There were relatively few differences in use of strategies by men compared with women.

The main ways people reported supporting relationships were talking directly to their partner, or talking with family or friends. Almost half had also used books or the internet to get information on relationships. Consistent with previous research (Helms, Crouter and McHale 2003), women were more likely to talk to family and friends, to look for sources of information and to go to counselling on their own. These differences in ways of supporting relationships have implications for programmes to support those with relationship difficulties. In particular, men's lower use of counselling may suggest alternative approaches are needed to engage them in resolving relationship issues.

9.3 BEING SINGLE

A third of those surveyed were not currently in a partner relationship, although they may have been in one in the past. Two-thirds of those who were single said it was their choice to be so, mainly because they had not met anyone they wanted to be involved with or because they enjoyed being single. Those over 50 years old were more likely to say they were single because a relationship didn't fit with their age or stage of life, or that they were grieving for a former partner. Males were more likely to report that they were not ready for a relationship or that they were interested in someone but that person was already involved in a relationship or did not reciprocate the interest.

There were many aspects of being single that were seen as important and as providing satisfaction. The independence of single life enabled respondents to choose a life that suited them, to have time and space for themselves, to control their own finances, to develop friendships and to have a lifestyle that suited their values. Interestingly, being able to concentrate on a career was not rated as highly as the other aspects of being single. Most aspects of being single were seen as more important by women compared with men, and most of these were also seen as providing more satisfaction.

A number of negative aspects of being single were also noted by single respondents. Almost half noted not being as sexually active as they would like (cited more often by men than by women). Being treated or perceived differently by others because they were not in a relationship was noted by a third, as was having no partner income. Also relatively common was missing someone to share things with, including day-to-day activities such as housework. It is interesting to note that feelings of loneliness, having no one to share things with and a lack of companionship were noted by relatively few; less than one in 10 noted this as a negative aspect of being single. Perhaps the strategies identified below provide alternative relationships that fulfil the need for social connectedness.

In part in response to these negative aspects of being single, respondents were able to identify a number of strategies that they had used to develop a satisfying life as a single person. Focusing on having enjoyable experiences and relationships, particularly with friends and family, was used by almost all those who were currently single. Having a home where they could relax and feel comfortable was important, as was maintaining financial independence. All these strategies had proved helpful, further indicating that even though they were not in a relationship with a partner, other relationships were important in the lives of these people.

9.4 PARENTING POSITIVES AND CHALLENGES

Almost 70 percent of those surveyed had, at some stage in their life, been involved in parenting children. However, this reduced to 43 percent when considering only those currently parenting at least one child under 20 years old. The majority of those who had parented were very satisfied with parenting, while most of the remainder were satisfied and very few expressed dissatisfaction. Parenting satisfaction did not vary for men compared with women, contrary to some previous research that suggested men had significantly lower parental satisfaction (Rogers and White 1998). Māori and New Zealand Europeans reported similar levels of parenting satisfaction.

With regard to specific aspects of parenting, greatest satisfaction was derived from watching the children grow and the development of their personalities. Feelings of pride in the children and being loved by and loving the children also gave great satisfaction to parents. On most items women reported getting greater satisfaction from aspects of parenting than did men. Women also reported that many aspects of parenting were more challenging. The most challenging aspects concerned seeing the children unhappy or withdrawn, finding time for the children, dealing with the teenage years, conflict between children or with children and being firm with the children.

In line with overseas research, greater parenting satisfaction was associated with greater satisfaction with the relationship with a partner (Rogers and White 1998) and with greater overall life satisfaction. While satisfaction with parenting might be seen to contribute to relationship satisfaction, Rogers and White's research suggests that a better relationship also contributes to more satisfying parenting.

9.5 SATISFACTION WITH LIFE OVERALL

Most respondents reported being either very satisfied (a quarter) or satisfied (over half) with life overall. These relatively high levels of life satisfaction are consistent with overseas research (Diener 2000) and other New Zealand studies (Gravitas Research and Strategy Limited 2005). Overall life satisfaction did not differ for men compared with women or for Māori compared with New Zealand Europeans. However, those who were older and those with greater household income tended to report greater overall life satisfaction, although the associations were relatively weak.

Those in a relationship were more satisfied with life overall, consistent with previous research (Kohler, Behrman and Skythe 2005). However, unlike previous research (Stack and Eshleman 1998), those who were married and those in a cohabiting relationship had similar levels of life satisfaction. This may reflect the lesser distinction between marriage and cohabitation for New Zealanders compared with

those living in the United States. Being more satisfied with the partner relationship was also associated with being more satisfied with life overall, as has been found in previous studies (Glenn and Weaver 1981). For single respondents, as might be expected, overall life satisfaction was associated with reported satisfaction with positive aspects of being single.

9.6 WHAT IS ASSOCIATED WITH OVERALL LIFE SATISFACTION?

Since many of the above factors were correlated, multivariate analysis was used to examine which factors contributed the most to overall life satisfaction. For the total sample, overall life satisfaction was greater for older respondents, those with higher household incomes, those more satisfied on average with all their relationships and those currently in a partner relationship. The most important of these was average satisfaction with all relationships.

For those in a partner relationship overall life satisfaction was greater, with higher average satisfaction in all relationships, higher household income, greater average satisfaction with aspects of the relationship with their partner and fewer sources of tension in the relationship. The most important of these were the average relationship satisfaction and satisfaction with aspects of the relationship with a partner. Parenting satisfaction did not appear to contribute over and above these measures, but this may be due to the relatively limited variation in parenting satisfaction expressed by this sample.

9.7 PRACTICE AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

These results indicate that a wide range of relationships is of importance to New Zealanders and that these relationships contribute to individuals' overall wellbeing. Strengthening and supporting these relationships is likely to be beneficial to New Zealanders' sense of satisfaction with life. Policies that support individuals and families to address the main causes of relationship tension are important. This report identified a number of common sources of relationship tension, in particular the time pressures families experience in balancing work and parenting responsibilities, while leaving time for building and strengthening relationships with a partner. Policies that help achieve a better work and family life balance are likely to lead to better individual wellbeing, which in turn is likely to have an impact on other 'life domains', such as health and work performance (Lyubomirsky et al 2005).

Practitioners also need to be aware of the relationship issues facing New Zealanders. For couples in distress, providing relationship information and counselling is likely to help. However, men appear to be less likely to use certain supports, such as counselling, and consideration may need to be given to other ways to disseminate information to them. Differences in the ways men and women respond to relationship stress also have implications for the design and content of educational and therapeutic programmes. As these results indicate, women are more likely to call on family and friends to help resolve relationship difficulties.

As with most studies the results presented here raise a number of interesting questions, which call for further research. For example, why are there gender differences in the perceived importance of relationships? Why do men use different relationship strategies, and why do they feel the need to spend more time with their children? What underlies the differences in women's compared with men's experience of being single? These are all questions worthy of further research.

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APPENDIX 1

Weighted frequencies for main variables

Table A1 Satisfaction with relationship with partner: percents

	Weighted	Unweighted
Very unsatisfied	2.1	1.1
Unsatisfied	3.1	2.8
Neither unsatisfied or satisfied	7.8	4.7
Satisfied	22.5	23.5
Very satisfied	64.6	67.9

Table A2 Satisfaction with being a parent: percents

	Weighted	Unweighted
Very unsatisfied	2.1	1.3
Unsatisfied	0.6	0.9
Neither unsatisfied or satisfied	4.5	3.9
Satisfied	32.5	34.3
Very satisfied	60.3	59.7

Table A3 Satisfaction with your life overall: percents

	Weighted	Unweighted
Very unsatisfied	2.2	1.0
Unsatisfied	6.6	6.3
Neither unsatisfied or satisfied	11.4	10.8
Satisfied	53.3	53.9
Very satisfied	26.5	28.0

Table A4 Relationship change over time: percents

	Weighted	Unweighted
Become more satisfying	70.6	72.5
Not changed	17.2	17.2
Become less satisfying	12.2	13.1

APPENDIX 2

The Questionnaire



Section A – Demographics

All respondents complete this section.

Firstly, please confirm a few details about yourself.

Q1	Please select your gender.	Code
	Male	1
	Female	2
Q2	Which of the following age groups are you in?	Code
	Under 18	01
	18-19	02
	20-24	03
	25-29	04
	30-34	05
	35-39	06
	40-44	07
	45-49	08
	50-54	09
	55-59	10
	60-64	11
	65 +	12
Q3	This question to be a drop down box rather than having the full list displayed	
	Which region do you live in?	Code
	Northland	01
	Auckland region	02
	Waikato	03
	Bay of Plenty	04
	Gisborne	05
	Taranaki	06
	Manawatu-Wanganui	07
	Hawkes Bay	08
	Wellington region	09
	Nelson	10
	Marlborough	11
	Tasman	12
	West Coast region	13
	Canterbury region	14
	Otago	15
	Southland region	16
Q4	Which of these best describes your ethnicity?	
	<i>Select more than one if applicable.</i>	Code
	New Zealand Māori	01
	New Zealand European	02
	Other European	03
	Cook Island Māori	04
	Samoan	05
	Fijian	06
	Niuean	07
	Tongan	08
	Other Pacific Islands	09
	Chinese	10
	Indian	11
	Other Asian	12
	Other (specify)	17

Q5	What is your total gross household income from all income earners and all other sources before tax? This includes benefits.	Code
	Less than \$20,000	01
	\$20,001 - \$30,000	02
	\$30,001 - \$40,000	03
	\$40,001 - \$50,000	04
	\$50,001 - \$60,000	05
	\$60,001 - \$70,000	06
	\$70,001 - \$80,000	07
	\$80,001 - \$90,000	08
	\$90,001 - \$100,000	09
	\$100,001 - \$150,000	10
	\$150,001 or more	11

Q6	Which of the following best describes you at the moment?	Code
	Married	1
	Living with partner/in a de facto relationship (with someone of the opposite sex)	2
	Living with partner/in a de facto relationship (with someone of the same sex)	3
	In a relationship (with someone of the opposite sex) but not living together	4
	In a relationship (with someone of the same sex) but not living together	5
	Never married and not currently in a relationship	6
	Separated	7
	Divorced	8
	Widowed	9

Check quota's demographic section answered and if necessary screen respondent out with suitable message.

Section B – Overall Relationships

All respondents complete this section.

Q7 How important are each of the following relationships to you?

If any of these relationships are not applicable to you please indicate this in the far column.

		Very important	Quite important	Neither important nor unimportant	Not very important	Not at all important	Unsure	Not applicable to me
(R1)	Partner (can include spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend etc...)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R2)	Child/children	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R3)	Mother	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R4)	Father	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R5)	Siblings	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R6)	Grandparents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R7)	Aunts & uncles	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R8)	Cousins	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R9)	Other family members	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R10)	Work colleagues	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R11)	Close friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R12)	Flatmates	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Q8 Remove any coded as “not applicable to me” in Q7.
And how satisfied are you with each of these relationships?**

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	Unsure
(R1) Partner (can include spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend etc...)	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R2) Child/children	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R3) Mother	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R4) Father	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R5) Siblings	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R6) Grandparents	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R7) Aunts & uncles	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R8) Cousins	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R9) Other family members	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R10) Work colleagues	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R11) Close friends	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R12) Flatmates	1	2	3	4	5	6

**Q9 Remove any coded as “not applicable to me” in Q7.
Thinking about the amount of time you spend with each of these people, please select the option that best applies to you.**

	Would like to spend more time with	Feel I spend the right amount of time with	Would prefer to spend less time with	Unsure
(R1) Partner	1	2	3	4
(R2) Child/children	1	2	3	4
(R3) Mother	1	2	3	4
(R4) Father	1	2	3	4
(R5) Siblings	1	2	3	4
(R6) Grandparents	1	2	3	4
(R7) Aunts & uncles	1	2	3	4
(R8) Cousins	1	2	3	4
(R9) Other family members	1	2	3	4
(R10) Work colleagues	1	2	3	4
(R11) Close friends	1	2	3	4
(R12) Flatmates	1	2	3	4

Q10 At this time, how satisfied are you with your life overall? Code

Very satisfied	1
Satisfied	2
Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	3
Unsatisfied	4
Very unsatisfied	5
Unsure	6

Section C – Partner Relationships

All those who selected codes 2-6 in **Q6** answer this section (e.g. all those in a relationship). Everyone else skips to the Singles section.

Q11 How long have you been with your current partner?	Code
Less than one year	01
1 - 3 years	02
4 - 5 years	03
6 - 10 years	04
11 - 15 years	05
16 - 20 years	06
21 - 30 years	07
31 - 40 years	08
More than 40 years (please specify)	09
Unsure	10
40 - 45 years	11
46 - 50 years	12
50 - 55 years	13

Q12 Thinking about your relationship over time, has it become more satisfying, less satisfying or not changed over time?	Code
It has become <i>more</i> satisfying over time	1
It has not changed over time	2
It has become <i>less</i> satisfying over time	3
Unsure	4

Q13 And how do you see your relationship changing in the future? Do you expect it to...	Code
Become <i>much more</i> satisfying	1
Become a <i>bit more</i> satisfying	2
Stay the same	3
Become a <i>bit less</i> satisfying	4
Become <i>much less</i> satisfying	5
Unsure	6

Q14 Many good things can come out of relationships. Please indicate how important each of the following things are to you.

If you feel there is something else you get out of your relationship not mentioned here, please type in the box below and ENSURE you indicate how important this is to you.

	Very important	Quite important	Neither important nor unimportant	Not very important	Not at all important	Unsure	Not applicable to me
(R1) Being valued just as I am	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R2) Companionship, sharing experiences, interests and ideas	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R3) Being in love and having someone in love with me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R4) Having an active sex life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R5) Confidence in a shared future	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R6) Getting to know each other really well	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

		Very important	Quite important	Neither important nor unimportant	Not very important	Not at all important	Unsure	Not applicable to me
(R7)	Fun and laughter	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R8)	Being able to relax and be myself around someone	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R9)	Having our own ideas and interests	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R10)	Having children	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R11)	Loyalty to each other	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R12)	Sexual fidelity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R13)	Supporting and listening to each other	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R14)	Financial security	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R15)	Other (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R16)	Spiritual/religious beliefs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Q15 If they mention anything in “other specify” in Q14 this will be included at the bottom of this list. Anything coded “not applicable” in Q14 will be excluded from this question. And how satisfied are you with each of these aspects in your current relationship with your partner?

		Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	Unsure
(R1)	Being valued just as I am	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R2)	Companionship, sharing experiences, interests and ideas	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R3)	Being in love and having someone in love with me	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R4)	Having an active sex life	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R5)	Confidence in a shared future	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R6)	Getting to know each other really well	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R7)	Fun and laughter	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R8)	Being able to relax and be myself around someone	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R9)	Having our own ideas and interests	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R10)	Having children	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R11)	Loyalty to each other	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R12)	Sexual fidelity	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R13)	Supporting and listening to each other	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R14)	Financial security	1	2	3	4	5	6

Q16 There can also be causes of tension in relationships. Please select the ones that cause the MOST tension in your current relationship with your partner.

Please type in the box provided if there is a cause of tension relevant for you not mentioned here. If there are no causes of tension in your current relationship with your partner please select “no causes of tension”.

	Code
A clash in values or ideas	01
Not enough time spent together	02
Having nothing to say to each other	03
Assuming the worst about each other	04
Constant arguing or sniping	05
Not listening to or understanding each other	06
Disagreements about having or raising children	07
When one partner wants to have sex more than other	08
When one partner has an affair	09
Work takes up too much time or attention	10
Family or friends taking up too much time or attention	11
Hitting or yelling	12
Critical or negative attitudes	13
Disagreements or arguments about money	14
Grief or distress from things outside the relationship	15
Housework	16
Losing touch with friends	17
Pressures of parenting	18
Alcohol or drug use	19
Other (please specify)	20
No causes of tension	21
Health/medical problems	22

Q17 Once people have completed this section they skip to the parenting section. Thinking about ways to help make your relationship work during tough times, which of the following have you used in your current relationship and have you found them helpful?

If you can think of something you have done that is not listed here please type in the box below and ENSURE you indicate if you have found it helpful or not.

	Have used and found helpful	Have used and found NOT helpful	Have not used	Unsure
(R1) Accepting responsibility for my part in the situation	1	2	3	4
(R2) Apologising for any hurt or distress I've caused	1	2	3	4
(R3) Imagining myself in my partner's shoes	1	2	3	4
(R4) Talking seriously about things I'm unhappy about	1	2	3	4
(R5) Ignoring things I'm unhappy about	1	2	3	4
(R6) Giving my partner the benefit of the doubt	1	2	3	4
(R7) Demonstrating I can be trusted (e.g. keeping my promises)	1	2	3	4
(R8) Changing my own behaviour	1	2	3	4
(R9) Focusing on the good things in our relationship	1	2	3	4
(R10) Accepting our differences	1	2	3	4
(R11) Having a life outside the relationship	1	2	3	4
(R12) Taking time to listen to my partner	1	2	3	4
(R13) Shouting or yelling at my partner	1	2	3	4
(R14) Buying gifts for my partner (e.g. flowers or chocolates)	1	2	3	4
(R15) Making time for our relationship	1	2	3	4
(R16) Having sex	1	2	3	4
(R17) Other (specify)	1	2	3	4

Section D – Singles

This question asked of those who coded 8-11 in **Q6** (e.g. singles).

Q18 At this time, is it your choice to be single?	Code
Yes	1
No	2
Unsure	3

Q19 What are your main reason/s for being single?

Please select as many reasons as are applicable for you. If you have a reason not listed here please type in the box provided.

	Code
I enjoy being single	01
Haven't met anyone I want to get involved with	02
The people I'm interested in are already involved or not interested in me	03
I don't feel I'm ready to be in a relationship	04
My focus right now is on being a parent	05
My job makes having a relationship difficult	06
I'm busy with studying and feel a relationship would be too distracting	07
A relationship doesn't fit with my age or stage of life	08
I'm grieving for a former partner and a new partner doesn't appeal	09
I'm uncertain about my sexuality and am unsure who I'd want to get involved with	10
Past relationship experience has put me off the idea	11
Find it hard to meet someone who shares my values or interests	12
Other (specify)	13

Q20 There can be positive aspects to being single. Please indicate how important each of the following things are to you.

If there is an aspect you would like to add please type in the box below and ENSURE you indicate how important is it to you.

	Very important	Quite important	Neither important nor unimportant	Not very important	Not at all important	Unsure	Not applicable to me
(R1) More time to develop rich satisfying friendships	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R2) Able to do things on the spur of the moment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R3) Able to choose the life that suits me (e.g. work, friends, social life)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R4) Gaining confidence from taking care of myself	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R5) Able to manage and control my own finances	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R6) Less need to compromise	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R7) Able to provide more consistent parenting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R8) Having time and space for myself	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R9) Feeling safer and more secure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Very important	Quite important	Neither important nor unimportant	Not very important	Not at all important	Unsure	Not applicable to me
(R10) Able to have a lifestyle that reflects my values	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R11) Able to concentrate on my career	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R12) Other (specify)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Q21 If they mention anything in other specify in Q20 this will be included at the bottom of this list. And how satisfied are you personally with each of these aspects of being single?

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	Unsure
(R1) More time to develop rich, satisfying friendships	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R2) Able to do things on the spur of the moment	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R3) Able to choose the life that suits me (e.g. work, friends, social life)	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R4) Gaining confidence from taking care of myself	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R5) Able to manage and control my own finances	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R6) Less need to compromise	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R7) Able to provide more consistent parenting	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R8) Having time and space for myself	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R9) Feeling safer and more secure	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R10) Able to have a lifestyle that reflects my values	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R11) Able to concentrate on my career	1	2	3	4	5	6

Q22 There can also be negative aspects to being single. Please select the ones that are the MOST relevant for you.

If there is a negative aspect you would like to add please type in the box below. If you find there are no negative aspects to being single, please select this option below.

	Code
There is no one I come first with	01
I get left out of couple oriented events	02
People make assumptions about me because I'm single	03
There is no one to share the work with	04
No partner income	05
I may miss out on having children	06
No one to take care of me	07
My family don't see me as "grown up"	08
I have to do all my own planning and motivating	09
I'm not as sexually active as I would like	10
I don't feel as attractive or worthwhile as I would with a partner	11
Having to find suitable people to live with (e.g. flatmates)	12
No one to help raise my children	13
Feeling afraid or vulnerable on my own	14
Other (please specify)	15
No negative aspects to being single	16
Loneliness/no one to share things with/lack of companionship	17

Q23 Thinking about ways to develop a satisfying life as a single person, which of the following have you ever tried and have found helpful?

If you can think of something you have tried that is not listed here please type in the box below and ENSURE you indicate whether you have found it helpful or not.

	Have used and found helpful	Have used and found NOT helpful	Have not used	Unsure
(R1) Organising events and inviting others to come	1	2	3	4
(R2) Actively developing new friendships and acquaintances	1	2	3	4
(R3) Focusing on maintaining current friendships	1	2	3	4
(R4) Getting involved in activities or interests I enjoy	1	2	3	4
(R5) Establishing a home where I feel comfortable and relaxed	1	2	3	4
(R6) Actively planning my future	1	2	3	4
(R7) Taking care of relationships with my family	1	2	3	4
(R8) Planning trips, holidays, celebrations or special occasions	1	2	3	4
(R9) Finding ways to enjoy time on my own	1	2	3	4
(R10) Talking with friends and family about important things in my life	1	2	3	4
(R11) Focusing on taking good care of myself	1	2	3	4
(R12) Appreciating and valuing myself	1	2	3	4
(R13) Maintaining (or working towards) financial independence	1	2	3	4
(R14) Asking others for help or support when I need it	1	2	3	4
(R15) Other (specify)	1	2	3	4

Section E – Parenting

All respondents start this section. If they code 2 or 3 in **Q24** (e.g. no past parenting involvement) then they are skipped through to Section F – Supporting Relationships.

Q24 Have you personally ever been involved in the parenting of children?	Code
Yes	1
No	2
Unsure	3

Q25 Which of the following age groups of children are you currently involved in parenting?	Code
Please select all that apply	
Under 1 year	1
1 - 4 years	2
5 - 9 years	3
10 - 14 years	4
15 - 19 years	5
20 - 29 years	6
30 years and over	7

Q26 Overall, how satisfying do you find being a parent?	Code
Very satisfying	1
Satisfying	2
Neither satisfying nor unsatisfying	3
Unsatisfying	4
Very unsatisfying	5
Unsure	6

Q27	Did you and your partner make a conscious choice to have children?	Code
	Yes	1
	No	2
	Unsure	3

Q28 There are many positive aspects to being a parent. Thinking about your personal experience, how satisfying have you found the following?

If there is a positive aspect of parenting not mentioned here you wish to add in please type in the box below and ENSURE you indicate how satisfying you found it.

		Very satisfying	Quite satisfying	Neither satisfying nor unsatisfying	Unsatisfying	Very unsatisfying	Unsure	No experience
(R1)	Getting to know my kids as their personality emerges	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R2)	Watching my kids grow and develop	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R3)	Seeing things through the eyes of my kids	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R4)	Helping my kids learn about themselves and the world	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R5)	Seeing myself or my partner in how my kids look or behave	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R6)	Spending quality time with my kids	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R7)	Watching the delight my kids get out of simple things	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R8)	Being loving and feeling loved by my kids	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R9)	Being reminded of how I used to be	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R10)	Feeling proud of my kids	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R11)	Celebrating my kids milestones	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R12)	Surprising myself by discovering things I can do as a parent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R13)	Seeing my kids relationship with their other parent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R14)	Talking with my kids and listening to what they say	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R15)	Having time without the kids	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R16)	Other (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Q29 There are also challenging aspects to being a parent. Thinking about your personal experience, how challenging have you found the following?

If there is a challenging aspect of parenting not mentioned here please type in the box below and ENSURE you indicate how challenging you found it.

	Very challenging	Quite challenging	Neither challenging nor unchallenging	Not very very challenging	Not at all unchallenging	Unsure	No experience
(R1) Balancing time for the kids with time for other commitments	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R2) Issues with their health or development	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R3) Keeping my kids safe without limiting them unnecessarily	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R4) Being firm with my kids – not backing down on decisions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R5) Consistent parenting with my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R6) Disciplining appropriately	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R7) Modelling good behaviour all the time	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R8) Seeing my kids unhappy or withdrawn	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R9) Being able to get enough sleep myself	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R10) Difficulties during the teenage years	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R11) Allowing my kids to make and learn from their own mistakes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R12) Managing conflict between my kids and me or between my kids	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R13) Getting my kids to co-operate with me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Very challenging	Quite challenging	Neither challenging nor unchallenging	Not very very challenging	Not at all unchallenging	Unsure	No experience
(R14) Parenting effectively when I don't live with my kids	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R15) Worries about how other influences are affecting my kids	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(R16) Other (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Section F – Supporting Relationships

All respondents answer this section.

Q30 There are a range of ways to support relationships. Thinking about ALL your relationships (this could include family, friends and colleagues) which of the following have you used in the past?

Please select all that apply to you. If there is something you would like to add to the list please type in the box below.

	Code
Talked with the person concerned to work it out	1
Talked with family or friends about it	2
Looked for ideas or information in books or on the internet	3
Gone to counselling on my own	4
Gone to counselling with the person involved	5
Had a trusted friend/family member/other person help us to work it out	6
Other (please specify)	7
None of the above	8
Prayer/church/bible principles	9

Q31 If anything typed in "other" box in Q30 this will come up at the bottom of the list in this question. And how likely are you to use any of these in the future?

	Very likely	Quite likely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Not very likely	Not at all likely	Unsure
(R1) Talk to the person concerned to work it out	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R2) Talk to family or friends about it	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R3) Look for ideas or information in books or on the internet	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R4) Go to counselling on my own	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R5) Go to counselling with the person involved	1	2	3	4	5	6
(R6) Have a trusted friend/family member/other person help us to work it out	1	2	3	4	5	6

Q32 Finally, have you heard of an organisation called Relationship Services?

	Code
Yes	<u>1</u>
No	<u>2</u>
Don't know	<u>9</u>

Thank you for your time taken to complete this survey.

Completing this survey may have raised some issues for you about your relationships. Relationship Services is an organisation with counsellors trained and experienced in helping people with all sorts of issues in this area. You can find out more about them by visiting their website www.relate.org.nz

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 Calister and Stuart Birks, March 2006.
- 3/06 *Grandfathers – Their Changing Family Roles and Contributions*, Dr Virginia Wilton and Dr Judith A. Davey, March 2006.
- 4/06 *Neighbourhood Environments that Support Families*, Dr Karen Witten, Liane Penney, Fuafiva Faalau and Victoria Jensen, May 2006.
- 5/06 *New Communication Technologies and Family Life*, Dr Ann Weatherall and Annabel Ramsay, May 2006.
- 6/06 *Families and Heavy Drinking: Impacts on Children's Wellbeing, Systematic Review*, Melissa Girling, John Huakau, Sally Casswell and Kim Conway, June 2005.
- 7/06 *Beyond Demography: History, Ritual and Families in the Twenty-first Century*, Jan Pryor, June 2005.
- 8/06 *Whānau is Whānau*, Tai Walker, Ngāti Porou, July 2006.
- 9/06 *Supervised Contact: The Views of Parents and Staff at Three Barnardos Contact Centres in the Southern Region of New Zealand*, Anita Gibbs and Margaret McKenzie, August 2006.
- 10/06 *New Zealanders' Satisfaction with Family Relationships and Parenting*, Jeremy Robertson, August 2006.

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