

Families and Whānau Status Report 2015

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Introduction

This Research Summary presents the key findings from the *Families and Whānau Status Report 2015*. The Report presents, for the first time, New Zealand family and whānau wellbeing indicators using family and whānau frameworks developed for this purpose. These indicators provide a picture of how families and whānau were doing at a particular point in time. The indicators were chosen from the questions asked in national surveys conducted during 2012 and 2013.

KEY RESULTS

- › Overall families were enjoying good levels of wellbeing, although for each indicator there were a portion who were not doing so well.
- › Whānau Māori also had diverse wellbeing outcomes. While many whānau enjoyed high levels of wellbeing across multiple domains, others faced complex challenges that adversely affected their capacity to live well.
- › Single parent families with younger children, single parent whānau, and whānau living in multi-whānau households rated poorly on a range of wellbeing indicators, particularly those related to economic security, housing, mental health, education and employment.

Context

Families and whānau are key building blocks of our society. They give us a sense of identity and belonging, and provide a collective basis for managing resources to generate material wellbeing. Family and whānau members provide care, nurturance, support, socialisation and guidance for one another. Families raise children on whom the future of this country depends. But families do not stand in isolation – they are connected to other families, schools, workplaces and communities.

It is important, therefore, that a country knows how its families and whānau are faring. This is essential information for governments, who need to foster family and whānau wellbeing by developing excellent policies. Those policies must be informed by evidence. This has been recognised by the New Zealand Government, and an amendment was made to the Families Commission Act in 2014 to establish the requirement for Superu to produce an annual 'Families Status Report'. In this context, Superu has been working to measure and monitor the wellbeing of families and whānau. The third annual *Families and Whānau Status Report* presents our progress.

New developments in the report

The Status Report presents three key advances in our work. They are:

- > refined and consolidated conceptual frameworks as the basis for measuring, monitoring and better understanding family and whānau wellbeing
- > a coherent set of family wellbeing indicators, and
- > a coherent set of whānau wellbeing indicators using data from the first national Māori Social Survey, Te Kupenga, which was undertaken for Superu by researchers at the National Institute of Demographic and Economic Analysis and the University of Auckland.

These advances have been made possible in no small part by the support of a large number of people outside of Superu – researchers, statisticians and academics.

We have continued our journey towards a bicultural approach in which both Western and Te Ao Māori concepts and methods are used to analyse family and whānau wellbeing. In future years, these approaches will be ‘braided’ together to create a more nuanced and inclusive portrayal of how well families and whānau are doing.

How we measured family and whānau wellbeing

To measure families and whānau wellbeing, we selected a range of indicators, guided by two separate wellbeing frameworks, and by what data were available. The frameworks, one dealing with families in general, and the other developed for whānau, are described in the table below, and in more detail in the *Families and Whānau Status Report 2015*.

Our approach to the indicator analysis was largely dictated by what data were available and how we could use them to examine how different types of families are faring. As this was the first time we were attempting to map indicators to these frameworks, we also chose to take as straightforward an approach as possible given the complexities of families. This research will provide a solid basis to build on in the future.

| Family wellbeing | Whānau wellbeing |
|---|---|
| <p>This framework identifies four core family functions and six factor areas that help or hinder a family’s capacity to function well.</p> <p>The four core family functions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care, nurture and support • Manage resources • Provide socialisation and guidance • Provide identity and sense of belonging. <p>The six theme areas for factors</p> <p>The factors are grouped according to six theme areas. Indicators have been selected across these six theme areas with a focus on factors that influence or contribute to a family’s ability to function.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health • Relationships and connections • Economic security and housing • Safety and environment • Skills, learning and employment • Identity and sense of belonging. | <p>The Whānau Rangatiratanga Measurement Framework is a matrix of four capability dimensions and five wellbeing principles.</p> <p>The four capability dimensions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability of Te Ao Māori • Social capability • Human resource potential • Economic wellbeing. <p>Within each of these capability dimensions we have identified indicators that most closely align with the five wellbeing principles underpinning the framework.</p> <p>The five wellbeing principles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whakapapa – thriving relationships • Manaakitanga – reciprocity and support • Rangatiratanga – leadership and participation • Kotahitanga – collective unity • Wairuatanga – spiritual and cultural strength. |

Note: ‘family income’ is income after tax and adjusted to take account of family size.

The three main data sources we used were the New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings, the General Social Survey, and Te Kupenga (the Māori Social Survey, which was conducted for the first time in 2013). As we were using data from existing national surveys, the ideal indicator data that measured what we wanted were not always available. Consequently, our indicators include some indirect measures of the factors we are interested in. An example of this is our use of ‘smoking’ as a proxy measure for ‘family attitudes to health’. We also lack specific data about the quality of relationships.

We report on family wellbeing according to the following family or whānau types:

- > couples without children living with them, further classified by whether or not the couple were both under 50 years of age
- > families with at least one child under 18 years of age, further classified by whether one or two parents were living with them, and
- > families where all the children were 18 years of age or older, further classified by whether one or two parents were living with them.

For whānau wellbeing, we used the same categories but with the addition of ‘multi-whānau households’.

A summary of the indicator findings is presented below.

How different types of families are faring

| Couple, both under 50 years of age | Couple, one or both 50 years of age and over |
|--|---|
| <p>Most of these families (91%) had an income at least 60% of the family median, but many (42%) had high housing costs. People in these families were well-positioned with their levels of employment, education, knowledge, skills and health to build up their financial assets over time, and to carry out the core family functions. They were, however, less engaged with the community than other family types.</p> | <p>The people in these families rated highly on most indicators of wellbeing – 88% were satisfied with their standard of living. They were well-connected with their extended families (79% reported that they had the right level of contact), but some had health problems – for example, 39% of these families had someone with a disability.</p> |
| Two parents with at least one child aged under 18 years | One parent with at least one child under 18 years |
| <p>The indicators show that most of these families are doing well, although many of them had financial stresses. Most (87%) were earning at least 60% of the family median, but 43% had high housing costs and 38% had housing problems. On the whole, these family members had good health, education and employment. Overall, apart from the financial stresses, the wellbeing indicators suggest that most of these families were well-placed to provide the core family functions.</p> | <p>Many of the people living in single-parent families with younger children were under financial pressure. For example, 54% had an income below 60% of the family median, and 75% had high housing costs. These people had comparatively low levels of educational attainment and employment, and higher levels of mental-health problems. On the positive side, many enjoyed good family and extended-family interactions, and good physical health. The stressors faced by the people in these families provided challenges to effective family functioning.</p> |
| Two parents with all children aged 18 years and over | One parent with all children aged 18 years and over |
| <p>Most of these families were economically secure – for example, 83% of these families had an income of at least 60% of the family median, and 80% had reasonable housing costs. The people in these families had good levels of education, skills, knowledge and employment. They were well-connected with extended family and the community. They did, however, have higher levels of disability than families in general – 26% of these families included someone with a disability.</p> | <p>The wellbeing indicators present a mixed picture for this family type. The age profile shows that a proportion of family members are elderly. Most of these families (81%) had an income of at least 60% of the family median, and most (78%) had reasonable housing costs. Many of these families (59%) lived in the less well-off neighbourhoods, and a significant minority of the people in these families (28%) were dissatisfied with their standard of living. Their physical and mental health indicators were poor in comparison with other family types. Significant proportions felt that the civil authorities do not always treat all groups in society fairly, felt unsafe in their neighbourhoods after dark, and had neighbourhood problems.</p> |

Note: ‘family income’ is income after tax and adjusted to take account of family size.

The core family functions

Our family wellbeing indicators focus on the factors that help or hinder a family's capacity to function well. Although we cannot gain a comprehensive picture from the current analysis, the findings do give us some insight into the ability of family members living together to provide these core functions. We recognise that families also extend across households and can draw from a wide range of external resources and providers of support. However, although our analysis is constrained, we still consider it useful to relate our indicator findings to these family functions. The family functions are: providing care, nurturance and support; managing resources; providing socialisation and guidance; and providing identity and a sense of belonging.

Care, nurturing and support

Family members need resources, time and good health to provide this function. Stresses in these areas detract from family members' ability to care for, nurture, and support each other. Our indicators show that while many families were well-placed to do this, others appeared to be stretched.

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The majority of families appeared to have adequate income, and affordable housing, and the majority of people were in good health. Most people in families appeared well-supported through being connected with their extended families, and they were

easily able to access services. The majority of working members of families were happy with their hours and pay (suggesting they were happy with their work-life balance). These findings indicate that the majority of families were well-placed to care for, nurture and support each other.

For all family types, there were some people facing challenges to being able to provide care, nurturance and support. This was particularly true for single-parent families. For people in single-parent families with children under 18, financial and other material stresses were evident. In addition, more than a quarter of secondary-school pupils in single-parent families reported that their family 'eat together less than three times a week'. The results indicate that many single parents living with all adult children also faced some of these challenges.

Poor health and disabilities can both hinder people's abilities to care for, nurture and support their family members, and increase the need for care, nurturance and support from other family members. People in single-parent families with all adult children had a relatively high rate of disability (35 percent), and many had physical or mental-health problems. Some of these families will have included adult children caring for an elderly parent. Older-couple families without children also had high rates of disability (39 percent), and many had physical health problems.

Managing resources

To solve problems and overcome setbacks, families draw on shared resources, including time, money and skills. As discussed above, many families appear to have had adequate resources, but a proportion of families for all family types did not, and this was particularly true for single-parent families. One illustration of this is the extent to which people in these families had unresolved housing problems – this was the case for almost half of the people in single-parent families with children under the age of 18. Although many of the other younger families (younger couples only, and two-parent families with children under 18) were doing well on most indicators, they also appeared to have been struggling financially – for example, they were paying at least 25 percent of their income on housing. Many people in these families also reported that they had significant housing problems.

If people in families have education, knowledge, skills and employment, they have the ability to build on their assets. Overall, people in families scored well on these indicators, except for those in single-parent families with children under 18, many of whom did not have post-secondary school qualifications, or were unemployed.

Socialisation and guidance

Socialisation is enhanced by connections with extended family and the community. Families should foster healthy living among their members, along with positive attitudes towards education and employment. We have limited data in this area.

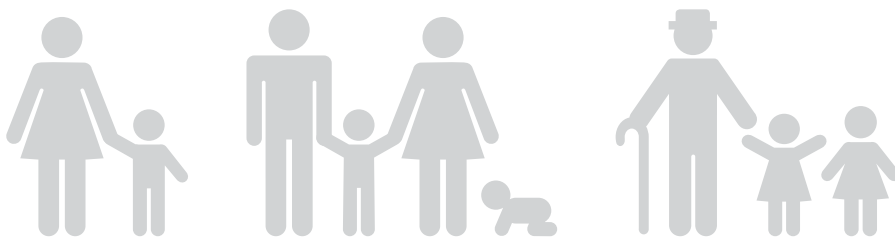
One measure of connection to the community is the extent to which people in families did voluntary work of some sort. A substantial minority (46 percent) had done so in the past four weeks. Close to three-quarters of the people in families thought they had the right level of contact with extended families, although this dropped to two-thirds for people from single-parent families with children under 18. More than half of the people in families (57 percent) had given some support to their extended families during the previous 12 months.

We have two indicators about family guidance. The first is whether there was a family member who smoked, as an indirect measure of attitudes to health. Smoking has decreased across all family types. It was most prevalent for single-parent families with children under the age of 18 – over a third of these families (37 percent) had a member who smoked. The second is the attitude of people in families towards education – almost all thought that education was important.

Identity and a sense of belonging

Well-functioning families generate a sense of identity, trust, belonging and security, including through expressions of love, affection, happiness and respect, and through building social cohesion. This is fostered through good internal family relationships, spending time together, family traditions (for which we have no indicator at present), community engagement, and perceptions that groups in society are treated fairly. Overall, many families appeared to engage in activities that foster a good sense of family belonging. Most people in families (85 percent) found it easy to express their identity, and few (9 percent) felt that they were discriminated against. Secondary-school pupils from two-parent families recorded that 71 percent of their families often had fun together, but the percentage dropped to 62 percent for single-parent families. Almost all secondary-school pupils (94 percent) felt safe at home most of the time.

Results relating to a sense of social cohesion were less positive when it came to fears over personal safety and a belief that the civil authorities do not treat all families fairly. Fear over personal safety and mistrust of civil authorities and other organisations can stand in the way of engagement with society. Almost all people in families felt safe at work, but a third did not feel safe walking in their neighbourhoods after dark. While most people in families (80 percent or more for all family groups) believed that education and health providers were always fair to all groups in society, a significant proportion thought this was not always true for civil authorities, ranging from 30 to 40 percent depending on the family type.



Whānau wellbeing

The *Families and Whānau Status Report 2015* assesses the state of whānau wellbeing using Superu's Whānau Rangatiratanga Measurement Framework, which reports outcomes based on four capability dimensions. Most of the indicators are drawn from the 2013 Te Kupenga survey, with some added from the 2013 Census to create an in-depth and culturally informed depiction of whānau wellbeing. We note that most of the indicators are not whānau-level measures as such, but are for individuals living in different types of whānau arrangements. This is not unusual: very few surveys collect information on all whānau members. Nevertheless, care needs to be taken when interpreting the findings.

The four capability dimensions are: Sustainability of Te Ao Māori; Social capability; Human resource potential; and Economic wellbeing.

Sustainability of Te Ao Māori

Māori living in all types of whānau have a strong sense of identity and belonging as Māori. At least 80 percent live with a family member who knows their iwi, and more than 60 percent know their ancestral marae. This ongoing connection to identity is very favourable given that Māori are among the most urbanised indigenous peoples in the world, with at least 85 percent living in urban areas. Across all whānau types at least half of all adults feel that they have a tūrangawaewae, or special place where they belong. The exception to this is young couples without children, which may partly reflect their younger age structure. Across most whānau types, fewer than 50 percent of adults are registered with their iwi; for those who are not registered, this limits their capacity to access and benefit from iwi membership.

The level of engagement with Māori institutions, including marae and kaupapa Māori education, varies significantly across whānau. Māori single parents and those living in multi-whānau households tend to be more involved with Māori institutions than other whānau. Both children and adults living in single-parent whānau have greater access to te reo Māori in the home. The cultural resources that exist within single-parent whānau and multi-whānau households are an important feature that, until now, have been largely overlooked.

Social capability

Although the vast majority of whānau are not victims of crime, some whānau are far more exposed to the risk than others. Single parents with young children are especially vulnerable, with one in four having experienced some form of crime in the past 12 months.

Being able to trust in institutions and in others is vital for co-operation and community cohesion. Māori living in all whānau types generally do not feel a high level of trust in key institutions such as the police, the courts, and the health and education systems. Fewer than half report feeling a very high level of trust in any one of these institutions (8–10 on a scale of 0–10), and the proportion is particularly low in educational institutions. The proportion of whānau that feel a very high level of trust in other people in general is even lower, ranging between 14 and 26 percent, depending on the whānau type.

Engagement with whānau members outside the household is common for Māori living in all kinds of whānau arrangements. At least 80 percent have had some form of recent in-person contact with whānau members from outside their household, and around 60 percent feel that the level of contact is about right for them. Loneliness is less of an issue for older couples, with more than two-thirds saying they had never felt lonely in the last four weeks. Older couples are also much more likely to be engaged in mainstream political processes, with nearly 90 percent voting in the last general election. This contrasts sharply with the low level of voting among eligible single parents of young children (52 percent).

Manaakitanga can be expressed in many ways, including looking after adults or children in other households, and providing unpaid help in schools, churches and sports clubs. More than a third of Māori in whānau with younger children looked after other people's children in the past four weeks. Those who place a higher degree of importance on wairuatanga, or spirituality, include older couples, whānau consisting of a single parent with adult children, and those in multi-whānau households.

Human resource potential

Individuals' perceptions about how their whānau are doing provide an insight into the state of whānau wellbeing. Māori who are part of an older couple, or a couple with children, are the most likely to rate their whānau wellbeing as very high (55–56 percent). Older couples also have the highest percentage who say that their whānau gets along very well (51 percent). Single parents of young children, younger couples and those in multi-whānau households are the least likely to rate their whānau wellbeing very highly, although more than one-third think that the situation for their whānau is improving.

While helping others is an integral part of what many whānau Māori do, whānau also need to be able to count on support from others. Imbalances can occur between support given, support received, and support needed. Single parents of young children have the most challenging socio-economic circumstances, yet are the highest contributors to the childcare of other people's children. However, they are the least likely to have easy access to general or crisis support when they need it.

Just as whānau wellbeing is important, so too is the wellbeing of the individuals that make up whānau. Individual self-ratings of health vary substantially across whānau. Those who are part of a younger couple, or a couple with young children, are more likely to rate their health as very good or excellent (60–61 percent). Self-rated health is lowest in whānau comprising single parents and adult children (47 percent). Individuals in these whānau are also less likely to feel that they have a high degree of control over their life (57 percent). We do not know whether this reflects the perceptions of the parent, the adult child, or both.

By contrast, both younger and older couples without children feel a strong sense of personal autonomy, with more than two-thirds seeing themselves as being in control of their situation. Single parents with young children and single parents with adult children had lower rates of life satisfaction than those in other whānau, with 51 percent or fewer having a high level of life satisfaction.

Self-reported discrimination is associated with a number of negative health and social outcomes. With the exception of older couples, at least one-fifth of Māori across all whānau types feel that they have experienced some form of discrimination in the past 12 months. In all whānau types, at least 30 percent of adults feel they have experienced discrimination in a school setting at some time in their lives, with the percentage especially high for younger couples, single parents with young children, and whānau made up of couples with adult children.

Economic wellbeing

Single-parent whānau and those living in multi-whānau households face multiple, interlocking sources of economic insecurity that make daily life challenging. Fewer than four out of every 10 single-parent whānau say they have enough, or more than enough, income to meet their daily needs. Māori who are part of a younger or older couple without children fare much better, with at least two-thirds reporting an adequate income.

Owning a home is a key indicator of economic stability and it remains beyond the reach of many whānau. Home-ownership rates are lowest for single parents with young children (22 percent), which contrasts starkly with the rate for older couples and for whānau consisting of a couple with adult children (both 63 percent). Not owning a home also increases the risk of exposure to housing problems such as dampness. Single parents with young children and those living in multi-whānau households are the least likely to be free of a major housing problem.

Employment and education are key enablers of wellbeing, and they vary substantially across whānau. More than a third of single parent whānau and multi-whānau households had no-one in the whānau with a formal educational qualification. The proportion without a qualification is highest for older Māori couples (37 percent), but this largely reflects cohort differences in access to education. Finally, more than 90 percent of younger couple without children whānau and couple with younger children whānau had someone in paid employment. For single parents with young children, whānau who must also juggle caregiving responsibilities with work demands, the proportion is much lower, at 45 percent.

NEXT STEPS

The results we present in the *Families and Whānau Status Report 2015* provide an initial benchmark and we will update our indicators as new data become available. The General Social Survey and Te Kupenga surveys conducted in the future will be an essential part of being able to update our indicators so that we can start to properly monitor for changes over time.

The development of the wellbeing frameworks and indicators to measure family and whānau wellbeing has been and continues to be an iterative process. Following the publication of these indicators, we will consult and gather feedback to refine and build our approach over time.



Download the full report: superu.govt.nz/statusreport

For more information contact enquiries@superu.govt.nz

Follow us:  

Superu Level 7, 110 Featherston Street P: 04 917 7040
PO Box 2839, Wellington 6140 W: superu.govt.nz

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