# Families and Whānau Status Report 2016

## Are there ethnic differences in how our families are faring?

**RESEARCH SUMMARY**

superu

Being part of a family, in whatever fashion we define it, is a universal experience that forms the most significant socialising influence in our lives.

In 2015, we presented a national picture of how families and whanāu are faring. To find out how families of different ethnicities are faring, we have produced the Families and Whānau Status Report 2016, our fourth. It provides a snapshot of family wellbeing based on survey data spanning 2008 to 2014.

It is important that decision-makers know where to focus their attention and what works to improve outcomes. This report helps build a solid base of evidence to help decision-makers in the social sector make informed decisions about policies and programmes that affect families.

So, how are European, Māori, Pacific and Asian families faring?

## HOW WE MEASURE FAMILY WELLBEING

We use a framework and approach to measure family wellbeing that was developed for the Families and Whānau Status Report 2015 and is found in appendix A of the Families and Whānau Status Report 2016.

The *Family Wellbeing Framework* is based on assessing the degree to which families:

- care, nurture and support family members

- manage resources

- provide socialisation and guidance

- provide an identity and a sense of belonging.

We assess 'wellbeing' against six broad themes that influence or contribute to a family's ability to function:

- Health

- Relationships and connections

- Economic security and housing

- Safety and environment

- Skills, learning and employment

- Identity and sense of belonging.

We measured wellbeing for six family types in this report:

1. Couples, both under 50 years of age

2. Couples, one or both 50 years of age and over

3. Two parents with at least one child under 18 years of age

4. One parent with at least one child under 18 years of age

5. Two parents with all children 18 years of age and over

6. One parent with all children 18 years of age and over.

## Younger European couples are faring reasonably well but younger Māori, Pacific and Asian couples face some challenges

*Family type: Couples, both under 50 years of age*

Generally, we expect younger families to have fewer financial assets and resources compared to other family types as they have not had the opportunity to build these up over time. This is particularly important for couples who choose to have children as the demand on their resources will increase.

Younger European couples are faring better than similar families overall. They are generally in a good position to build up their financial assets over time and carry out the core functions of being a family.

This is also the case for younger Māori and Pacific couples. These families are more likely to volunteer and provide extended family support. However, they are less likely to have a post-secondary qualification which raises concern about their ability to build and accrue resources and improve their income levels over time.

> Pacific and Māori couples aged under 50 are less likely to have post-secondary qualifications. This raises concern about their ability to build and accrue resources and improve their income levels over time.

Younger Asian couples are less well positioned economically, tending to have high housing costs and to live in less well-off neighbourhoods. These families also feel less able to express their identities which may have implications for their social inclusion in the future.

## Most older couples are at a life stage where they have become financially secure but health issues are a concern

*Family type: Couples, one or both 50 years of age and over*

Older couples may have brought up children who have since left home or never had children. They are at a life stage where, hopefully, they have had an opportunity over time to become financially secure, build their resources, and establish family and community networks. The issues of retirement, health and potentially having aging parents are of increasing concern to this group.

About a third of European families are older couples, reflecting the older age distribution of this group. Despite some health issues, older European couples are faring well.

Older Māori couples are doing fairly well, however they are more likely to live in deprived neighbourhoods and have housing problems than the national average.

Older Pacific couples are also faring reasonably well, although they have low results in the knowledge, skills and employment areas.

Of concern for both older Māori and older Pacific couples are the relatively high health issues for these families. This has implications for family functioning and also in terms of the need for assistance and family support.

Older Asian couples are less financially secure. They are less likely to have adequate incomes or live in affordable housing. They also have lower levels of extended family and community engagement. Together these findings have potential implications for older Asian couples having insufficient or scarce resources in later life.

> About a third of European families are older couples, reflecting the older age distribution of this group.

## Māori, Pacific and Asian families with two parents and younger children face a mixture of challenges

*Family type: Two parents with at least one child under 18 years of age*

European couples with younger children are generally faring well across the indicator areas.

On the whole, Māori families are also faring relatively well, but they are more likely to live in more deprived areas and have associated housing problems than the national average. The health indicators for these families are slightly lower than average and they are less likely to believe that civil authorities, such as the Police and government departments, are fair. These indicators suggest that there are some challenges to functioning well as a family, particularly in relation to housing. However, Māori families have strong family connections and community engagement.

Pacific couples with younger children have strong relationships and community connections but fare less well generally across the family wellbeing theme areas. This finding is important considering that a third of children are of Māori and Pacific ethnicity. These results suggest that a key area for policy focus is addressing issues of economic security and skills.

Asian couples with younger children appear to be more vulnerable in relation to economic security, housing, and hours of work and pay. These families are more likely to experience discrimination and to feel uneasy about expressing their identities. They are also much less likely to engage with the community through volunteering. These results indicate potential risks in terms of alienation, isolation and exploitation in the workforce. It also highlights challenges for these families in fostering a sense of belonging for their children.

## Single parents with younger children face financial and psychological stresses and some struggle with employment and skills

*Family type: One parent with at least one child under 18 years of age*

Across all four ethnic groups, single-parent families with younger children are facing difficulties and financial stresses. These families also have low mental health outcomes, which further affects their ability to function well as a family.

Financial stresses affected Māori single parents with young children in particular. These families have lower outcomes for skills and employment but higher family and community engagement than sole parents with young children generally.

Both Māori and Pacific single parents with younger children are also less likely to include a family member with post-secondary qualifications or with a job. These findings suggest that Māori and Pacific single-parent families are less well-placed to find employment.

> Single parent families are facing financial and psychological stresses across all four ethnic groups. This will impact their ability to function well as a family.

Although Asian single-parent families with younger children face similar financial stresses, their overall profile of wellbeing results is slightly different. They are less likely to have family and community connections but they have better results for health and education indicators. This may place them in a slightly better position for finding employment and for effective family functioning.

## Couples with adult children have fair to strong results overall, however Pacific families appear to be facing difficulties

*Family type: Two parents with all children 18 years of age and over*

Two parent families with adult children reflect a diverse set of characteristics and contexts. These include parents who are caring for adult children with severe disabilities, adult children staying home while studying, or adult children who have returned home to save money between completing study and beginning full-time work. While some adult children may be living with their parents by choice, for others it may reflect more difficult family circumstances.

While couples with adult children have strong wellbeing results nationally, there are differences across ethnic groups. European and Māori families in this group have similar results to the national average but Pacific families face greater health and economic challenges and have poorer results for their knowledge and skills. In contrast, Asian families are above the national average in health.

The high wellbeing results for couples with adult children are encouraging but there are certain families which face difficulties in contrast to the national picture. Pacific couples with adult children in particular have lower outcomes across several themes which may affect family functioning and reduce their standard of living.

## Single-parent families with adult children are doing relatively well economically but many have poorer health outcomes

*Family type: One parent with all children 18 years of age and over*

Single-parent families with adult children are diverse and include sole parents caring for adult children with severe disabilities, adult children caring for an elderly parent and adult children living at home while studying or so that they can save money.

European, Māori and Asian single-parent families with adult children are doing relatively well economically, but have poorer health outcomes and weaker connections with extended family compared to similar families.

Pacific families with older children are also doing well economically and are more likely to rate themselves healthy, despite being more likely to have a smoker in the family.

For more information about how families are faring by ethnicity, see chapter 2 of the Families and Whānau Status Report 2016: The wellbeing of European, Māori, Pacific and Asian families.
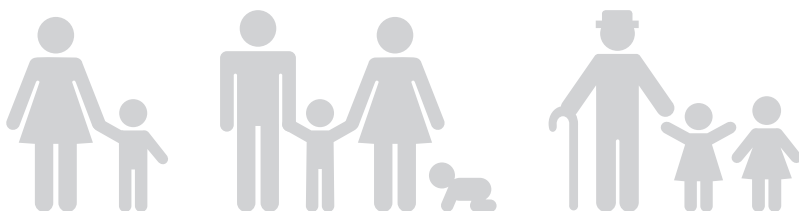
## ISSUES FOR POLICY MAKERS

Improve the wellbeing of families with children aged under 18 with a focus on:

### Single-parent families

- economic security and housing

- safety and environment

- psychological health

- education, knowledge and skills for Māori and Pacific families.

### Two-parent families

- economic security and housing for Māori, Pacific and Asian families

- education, knowledge and skills for Māori and Pacific families

- fostering a sense of social inclusion for Asian families.

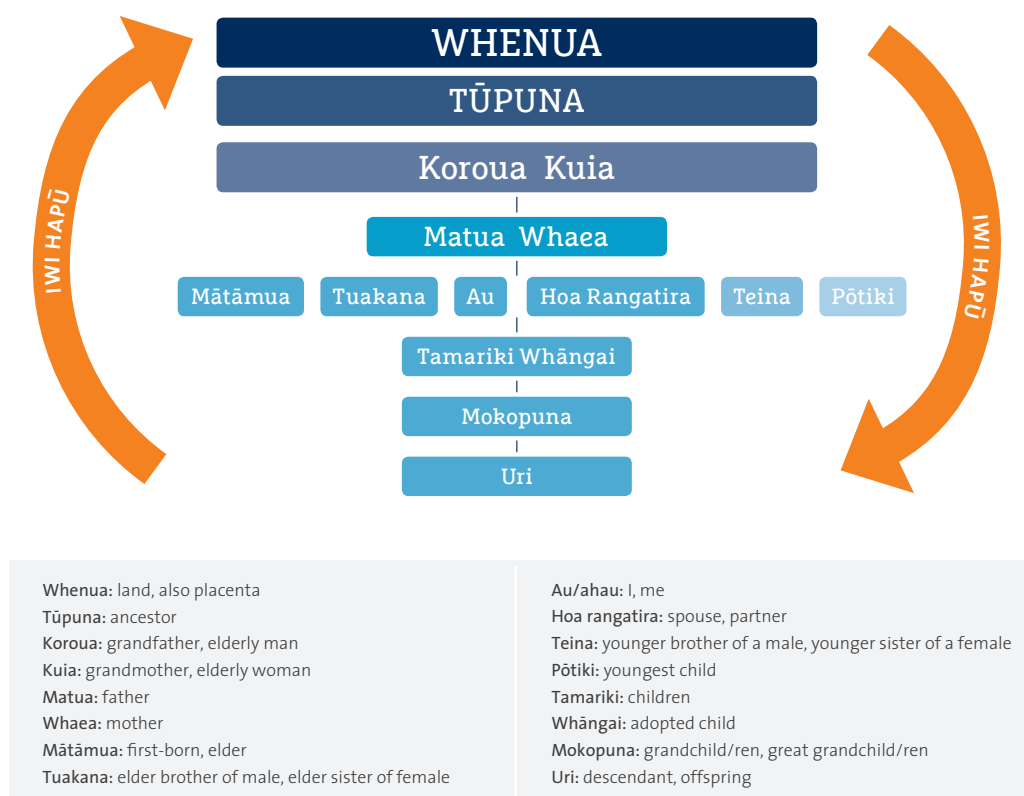When making policy and service delivery decisions, note that:

- family and community connections is a common strength for both Māori and Pacific families that can be drawn on for the benefit of these families

- policies to support and strengthen whānau need to be based on evidence that accurately reflects Māori values and realities

- by looking at what impacts family and whānau wellbeing over time from a 'life course' perspective, decision-makers can develop appropriate policies and deliver the right social services and programmes to the right people, at the right time

- there are four core family functions that are universal across cultures (to care, nurture and support; manage resources; provide socialisation and guidance; and provide an identity and a sense of belonging), however there are differences in how these functions are undertaken. These differences need to be explored further when developing policies and programmes for families from diverse cultural backgrounds.

# Māori think of whānau in terms of genealogical relationships

Whānau are the cornerstone of Māori society. While the literature shows there is no universal or generic way of defining whānau[1] there is a broad consensus that genealogical relationships form the basis of whānau, and that these relationships are intergenerational, shaped by context, and given meaning through roles and responsibilities.

**Figure 1_A relational model of whakapapa whānau**



Whenua: land, also placenta
Tūpuna: ancestor
Koroua: grandfather, elderly man
Kuia: grandmother, elderly woman
Matua: father
Whaea: mother
Mātāmua: first-born, elder
Tuakana: elder brother of male, elder sister of female

Au/ahau: I, me
Hoa rangatira: spouse, partner
Teina: younger brother of a male, younger sister of a female
Pōtiki: youngest child
Tamariki: children
Whāngai: adopted child
Mokopuna: grandchild/ren, great grandchild/ren
Uri: descendant, offspring

Drawing on past literature, Figure 1 illustrates the different aspects of whānau, along with relationships to whenua and tūpuna. Whakapapa provides the links between the vertical and horizontal aspects of whānau through hapū and iwi relationships.

Whakapapa relationships are not just ways of situating individuals within a kin group but are connected to roles, responsibilities and obligations, including mutual acts of giving and receiving.

The notion of reciprocal and mutual obligation means that whakapapa "makes you accountable"[2] whether individually or as a group. Whakapapa is invoked in a range of settings to guide decision-making on matters relating to land succession, governance and tikanga.

---

1  Lawson-Te Aho, K. (2010). *Definitions of whānau: A review of selected literature*. The Families Commission. Wellington and Smith, G. (1995). Whakaoho whānau: New formations of whānau and an innovative intervention into Māori cultural and economic crises. He Pukenga Kōrero, 1, 18-36.

2. Kruger, T., Pitman, M., Grennell, D., McDonald, T., Mariu, D., Pomare, A., Mita, T., Maihi, M., & Lawson-Te Aho, K. (2004). *Transforming whānau violence – A conceptual framework*. An updated report from the former Second Māori Taskforce on Whānau Violence. Te Puni Kōkiri. Wellington.

## Te Kupenga – An opportunity to better understand whānau in a way that reflects Māori values

This year we have used Te Kupenga, the first Māori Social Survey carried out in 2013, to explore modern expressions of whānau. The purpose of Te Kupenga is to address a substantial gap in the evidence base relating to whānau as official statistics and/or administration data has been dominated by household-based studies of families. Te Kupenga offers an opportunity to go beyond these narrow definitions to better understand whānau in a way that reflects Māori values.

This is important because policies to support and strengthen whānau need to be informed by evidence that accurately reflects Māori values and realities. Until now, official statistics and data have been unable to provide a meaningful level of analysis to inform policy about whānau because of a lack of culturally-informed representative data.

Our analysis of Te Kupenga re-affirms the pre-eminence of whakapapa relationships as the foundation of whānau. The vast majority of Māori (99%) think of their whānau in terms of genealogical relationships, however the breadth of those relationships varies greatly, for example from referring solely to the immediate family to the inclusion of extended family.

The importance of cultural factors suggests that policy responses aimed at strengthening whānau connections are likely to be most effective when linked to measures to strengthen cultural connections more generally.

> The vast majority of Māori (99%) think of their whānau in terms of genealogical relationships, however the breadth of those relationships varies greatly.

Our analysis also suggests that a number of factors are related to whether or not individuals see their whānau as encompassing extended whānau, such as:

- demographic factors, specifically older age and place of residence

- a basic connection to one's ancestral marae

- a high regard for being involved with Māori culture.

Māori with ready access to cultural support are also much more likely to see their whakapapa whānau in a broad sense such as those who engage in kaupapa Māori education and/or use te reo at home are more likely to broadly define their whānau as inclusive of non-relatives.

It should be emphasised that Māori who count non-relatives among their whānau do not see these relationships as substitutes for whakapapa relationships, nor are they disconnected from Māori identity and culture. Rather, the broadening of whanaungatanga to include non-whakapapa relationships would appear to be evidence of the endurance and vitality of whānau values, rather than a diminution of it.

Our research shows significant geographical variation in perceptions of whānau structure that could be explored in more detail in future Te Kupenga surveys. A larger sample would enable more detailed regional analyses that are more closely aligned with the regional service delivery and policy focus.

This analysis should be seen as merely a starting point for a broader platform of work on whānau that is relevant and useful for Māori, and that has the potential to inform policy responses to achieve the aspirations embodied in the Superu Whānau Rangatiratanga Wellbeing framework.

For more information about whānau, see chapter 3 of the Families and Whānau Status Report 2016: Expressions of whānau.

## Family emphasis on individual and collective outcomes vary between cultures

New Zealand is an increasingly diverse country and families operate in different ways based on a diverse platform of cultural influences.

Across all cultures, families provide the four core wellbeing functions to:

- support, nurture and care for each other

- manage resources

- socialise and guide

- provide a sense of identity and belonging for family members.

Although these functions are universal, there are differences between cultures as to who's considered 'family' and how these family functions are interpreted.

For example, western cultures tend to place greater emphasis on the wants and needs of the individual (individualistic cultural values) and on the independence of individual family members (Independent orientation). The 'family' is often seen as the nuclear family.

Non-western cultures tend to focus more on the wants and needs of the group (collectivistic cultural values) and relationships and obligations between family members (interdependent orientation). These cultures are more likely to include extended family and even the wider community.

We have developed the table below with examples that demonstrate these differences. Different cultures may operate on any part of the spectrum between individualistic and collectivistic cultural values and independent and interdependent family orientations.

### Table 1_Examples of family functioning

| | Individualist culture<br>The wants and needs of the individual | EMPHASIS | Collectivistic culture<br>The wants and needs of the group |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Independent orientation<br>Autonomy and personal accountability | | Interdependent orientation<br>Material, and emotional, interdependencies between family members<br>Reciprocal relationships |
| **Care, nurture and support** | Parents support children until they are adults | | Parents support children throughout their lives |
| | Support is expected from children, but there is little obligation for reciprocity | | There is an expectation and obligation of reciprocity of support amongst family members |
| | Support is both emotional and instrumental and is often expected to diminish after children have reached maturity | | A greater value is placed on instrumental support in comparison to emotional support, and this support is often expected to extend into adulthood |
| | Extended families are often not included in support network | | Extended families are integral to the support network |
| | Support networks tend to be small and localised | | Support networks tend to be large and span across geographic and kinship borders |

| | Individualist culture | EMPHASIS | Collectivistic culture |
|---|---|---|---|
| | The wants and needs of the individual | | The wants and needs of the group |
| | **Independent orientation** | | **Interdependent orientation** |
| | Autonomy and personal accountability | | Material, and emotional, interdependencies between family members |
| | | | Reciprocal relationships |

| | **Individualist culture** | **Collectivistic culture** |
|---|---|---|
| **Manage resources** | Economic resources are provided by the proximal family network | Economic resources are provided by the larger family network |
| | Over the life course individuals become self-sufficient | Over the life course reciprocal economic ties remain between family members |
| | Economic ties tend to be distinct from community and social relationships | Economic ties are strong to the community and to the diaspora |
| | Economic resources and security are seen as a component of personal pride | Economic resources and security are a component of collective pride where resources are used for the wellbeing of the family and wider community |
| **Socialisation and guidance** | Values are communicated through socialisation by parents and the wider society (e.g., school, media) | Values are communicated by extended family and community network, and these may be compromised by values from the wider society |
| | The concept of family or collective identity is constrained to a small group, and tends to be de-emphasised in comparison to personal identity | The concept of a collective identity (family, ethnic, religious) is broad and collective identity tends to be prioritised in comparison to personal identity |
| | The individual is ultimately responsible for their life decisions | The collective family unit is responsible for important life decisions |
| **Identity and sense of belonging** | Self is defined as distinct, but embedded within the family | Self is defined as embedded within the collective family and wider community. |
| | Focus on the individual and their unique characteristics | Focus on the collective and wellbeing for all members, not solely for individual family members |
| | Promotion of independent thought and action, as well as accountability and responsibility | Promotion of obligations, respect, face saving, and accountability to the collective |
| | The degree to which an individual prioritises their relationships is flexible and fluid | Relationships are prioritised over the wants and needs of the individual |

For more information about cultural definitions of family, see chapter 4 of the Families and Whānau Status Report 2016: Cross-cultural dimensions relating to concepts of 'family' wellbeing.

# Using a life course model will help us better understand family wellbeing

How well families and whānau are able to function is influenced by other factors besides culture: the community, public policies, what's happening locally and internationally, and historic events all have an impact. To help us understand some of the things that may affect family and whānau wellbeing over time, we propose using a 'life course' approach.

This approach can provide useful information to help develop appropriate policies and deliver the right social services and programmes to the right people, at the right time.

> How well families and whānau are able to function is influenced by other factors besides culture.

## A life course perspective helps us better understand family wellbeing by:

### Highlighting the wide range of factors that influence family wellbeing

What's happening in the community? Nationally? Internationally? What are the possible impacts of public policy on family wellbeing, intended or otherwise?

### Showing us how families and whānau are changing

What factors have an impact on each person's ability to fulfill their role in a family? How are families carrying out their core functions? What's changed and why? How have government and the social sector responded in terms of public policy and family support?

### Looking at long-term trends

What factors contribute to good outcomes later in life? What factors contribute to poor outcomes? How can we increase the likelihood of positive outcomes later in life? What is the potential impact of national and international events such as an earthquake, war or financial crisis? What impact do these trends have for the different life stages reflected by the different family types?
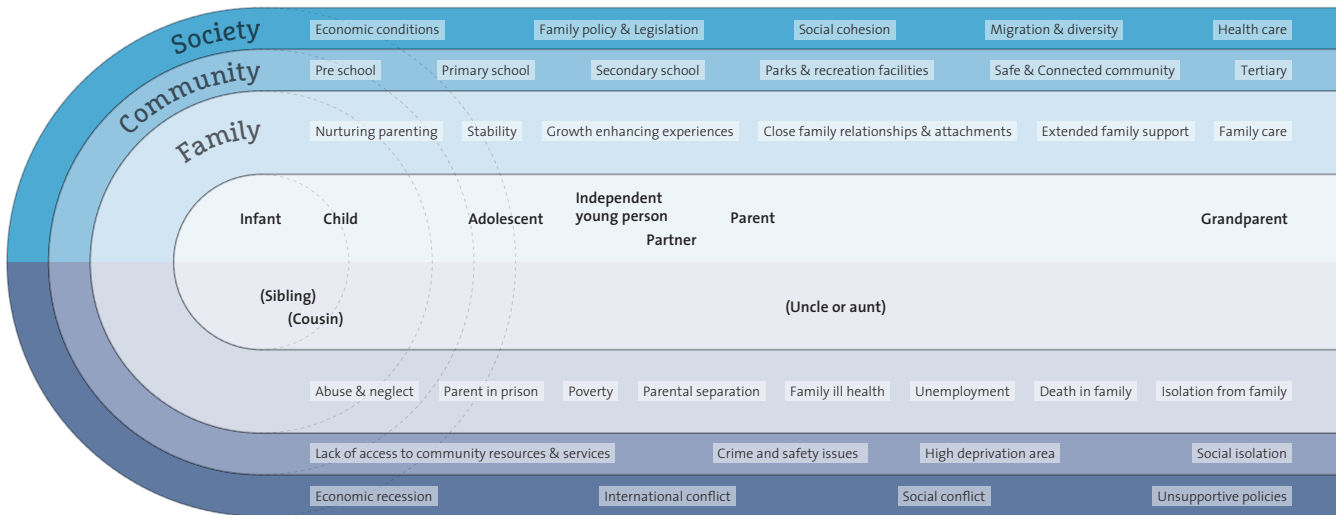
Such models usually focus on individuals so we have developed an exploratory family life course model. From the model, you can see some of the events and factors in the community, society, and the wider world that may impact a family's wellbeing.
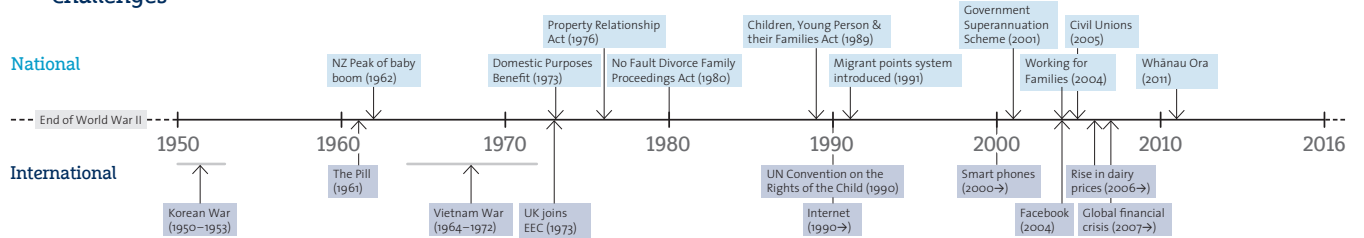
## Figure 2_A life course model of family wellbeing

**Promoters**
**Protective factors**

Society
Community
Family

| Society | Economic conditions | Family policy & Legislation | Social cohesion | Migration & diversity | Health care |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Community | Pre school | Primary school | Secondary school | Parks & recreation facilities | Safe & Connected community | Tertiary |
| Family | Nurturing parenting | Stability | Growth enhancing experiences | Close family relationships & attachments | Extended family support | Family care |

Infant   Child   Adolescent   Independent young person   Parent   Grandparent

Partner

(Sibling)
(Cousin)   (Uncle or aunt)

| Abuse & neglect | Parent in prison | Poverty | Parental separation | Family ill health | Unemployment | Death in family | Isolation from family |

| Lack of access to community resources & services | Crime and safety issues | High deprivation area | Social isolation |

| Economic recession | International conflict | Social conflict | Unsupportive policies |

**Risks**
**Challenges**

**National**

- Property Relationship Act (1976)
- Children, Young Person & their Families Act (1989)
- Government Superannuation Scheme (2001)
- Civil Unions (2005)
- NZ Peak of baby boom (1962)
- Domestic Purposes Benefit (1973)
- No Fault Divorce Family Proceedings Act (1980)
- Migrant points system introduced (1991)
- Working for Families (2004)
- Whānau Ora (2011)

End of World War II

1950   1960   1970   1980   1990   2000   2010   2016

**International**

- The Pill (1961)
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990)
- Smart phones (2000→)
- Rise in dairy prices (2006→)
- Korean War (1950–1953)
- Vietnam War (1964–1972)
- UK joins EEC (1973)
- Internet (1990→)
- Facebook (2004)
- Global financial crisis (2007→)

This has been adapted from Zubrick, S. R., Taylor, C. L., Lawrence, D., Mitrou, F., Christensen, D., & Dalby, R. (2009). The development of human capability across the lifecourse: Perspectives from childhood. Australasian Epidemiologist, 16(3), 6.

For more information about life courses, see chapter 5 of the Families and Whānau Status Report 2016: Families and life course.

**superu**

## Our purpose

To increase the use of evidence by people across the social sector so that they can make better decisions – about funding, policies or services – to improve the lives of New Zealanders, New Zealand's communities, families and whānau.

## What we do

We work across the wider social sector to:

- **promote** informed debate on the key social issues for New Zealand, its families and whānau, and increase awareness about what works

- **grow** the quality, relevance and quantity of the evidence base in priority areas

- **facilitate** the use of evidence by sharing it and supporting its use in decision-making.

### About the Families and Whānau Status Reports

Each year since 2013, we have produced an annual families status report that measures and monitors the wellbeing of New Zealand families and whānau. This requirement was introduced by the Families Commission Amendment Act 2014, and we are proud to undertake this work.

The general aim of the Families and Whānau Wellbeing Research Programme is to increase the evidence and the use of evidence about family and whānau wellbeing. Our research aims to better understand how families and whānau are faring, and the key role they play in society. This is so that decision-makers in the social sector make informed decisions about social policies and programmes and better understand what works, when and for whom.

A copy of the full report can be found at superu.govt.nz

**Download the full report: superu.govt.nz**

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 |

The Families Commission operates under the name Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit (Superu)