families commission
kōmihana ā **whānau**

what makes your family tick?

FAMILIES WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN – SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES PROJECT
REPORT ON PUBLIC CONSULTATION

FAMILIES COMMISSION

The Families Commission was established under the Families Commission Act 2003 and commenced operations on 1 July 2004. Under the Crown Entities Act 2004, the Commission is designated as an autonomous Crown entity.

Our main role is to act as an advocate for the interests of families generally (rather than individual families).

Our specific functions under the Families Commission Act 2003 are to:

> encourage and facilitate informed debate about families

> increase public awareness and promote better understanding of matters affecting families

> encourage and facilitate the development and provision of government policies that promote and serve the interests of families

> consider any matter relating to the interests of families referred to us by any Minister of the Crown

> stimulate and promote research into families, for example by funding and undertaking research

> consult with, or refer matters to, other official bodies or statutory agencies.

what makes your family tick?

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REPORT ON PUBLIC CONSULTATION

ROBYN SETH-PURDIE, ANDREW CAMERON AND FRANCIS LUKETINA

"I want to ensure that my family have what they need, spiritually, emotionally and physically. For them to not starve and be without a meal, to be clothed and not feel the cold so they won't get sick, and to have a roof over their heads so that they have a stable home to go to."

—Auckland, single-parent household, female

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PREFACE

The Commission's primary role, which is to advocate for New Zealand families, requires us to have a good understanding of the views of those families. We use a number of mechanisms to improve our understanding of the experiences of families and those who work with them. This information-gathering is supplemented by research into particular aspects of family life and analysis of the policies that have an impact on families. Over time, this ongoing process will help the Commission to reflect the interests of families in our policy advice, information and public education.

One of the largest projects the Commission has undertaken in its first 18 months has been to examine the interests of families with dependent children. This project, *Families with Dependent Children – Successful Outcomes*, has involved five significant pieces of work. This report, *What Makes Your Family Tick?*, is the final piece of work to emerge from the project. In all, nearly 4,000 people have provided information to the Commission about their family life.

In our report, *Focus on Families: Reinforcing the Importance of Family,*[1] we brought together findings from our literature review and information from 43 focus groups held around the country. *What Makes Your Family Tick?* is not specifically a review of government policies and initiatives. Rather it reports on our analysis of 3,673 submissions about what makes families strong, the challenges they face, the choices they have made to improve family life, and what, in their view, would make things better for their families.

Focus on Families was based on findings from the focus groups and it provided views from different family types and circumstances. *What Makes Your Family Tick?* is based on information from people who chose to respond to our public consultation campaign. The themes that emerged from the two different approaches are remarkably similar and provide an insight into the interests and concerns of a broad spectrum of New Zealand families. The analysis in this last report adds depth to our earlier findings and appreciably extends our understanding of families.

It is clear from this study of families with dependent children that the support they need is a complex business. The support needs to correspond to their changing circumstances and the wide-ranging influences on family life – throughout that family's life span. Families need time and strong relationships to meet the demands of life. They want policies and services that will help improve their work-life balance, for example, appropriate childcare and family-friendly employment policies and practices. Families also need access to information about good parenting and to support during times of trauma and distress.

The interdependence between families and the environments in which they live is reflected in the need families have for supportive networks. Family members speak about the importance of friends and families, their need for provision and good access to services in their community. However, supportive communities and networks do not develop automatically – they require forethought and planning.

Families are regular users of services provided by government and other agencies and these are often governed by policies and procedures determined without the direct

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[1]   *Focus on Families: Reinforcing the Importance of Family,* Stevens, Dickson, Poland with Prasad (2005).

input of families. In their submissions, families highlighted the importance of health, education, housing and childcare policies. While availability and accessibility were considered important for families, there was also a strong message around the need for an adequate income. While the Government's Working for Families Package goes some considerable way to addressing income adequacy, families themselves say there still remains much to discuss and many are struggling to make ends meet.[2]

Our study shows that New Zealand families have a sense of the values and philosophies that they want supported and reflected in their lives. These range from cultural values to those that are faith-based and those which concern social exclusion and acceptance of diversity. The ability of families to provide the best environment for nurturing the citizens and workers of tomorrow is intimately linked to how society develops values and philosophies that support families.

The Commission is currently examining the key issues raised by families in this project. Some of these, such as parenting and the issues of reconciling work and family life, will be priorities in our future research, public education and policy advice. Our goal is to see changes implemented that reflect the needs of families with dependent children.

The Commission also has a role in assisting with the development of a tool that can be used to analyse policies and programmes from a family perspective and thus ensure there are no unexpected negative impacts once they are implemented.

Finally, we at the Commission greatly appreciate the effort of the many individuals, families and institutions who have participated in this project. You have been very generous with your time and given us valuable insights into family circumstances and experiences. We will now use those insights to advocate for changes that will improve family life.

Rajen Prasad
Chief Commissioner

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[2]   Families made their submissions to the Families Commission prior to the 2005 Budget announcements of enhancements to the Working for Families package.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To enhance its understanding of families, in its first year of operation the Families Commission initiated the *Families with Dependent Children – Successful Outcomes* project. The key objective of this project was to improve the understanding of successful outcomes for families with dependent children by exploring the characteristics of family wellbeing as defined by families themselves. The project also examined the factors which contributed to or acted as barriers to family wellbeing and the trade-offs that families had to make to achieve wellbeing. The project comprised research (a literature review and focus groups) as well as a nationwide consultation.

The main content of this report presents feedback from the *What Makes Your Family Tick?* consultation[3], but it also comments on these findings in relation to the research findings from the first part of the study as reported on in *Focus on Families: Reinforcing the Importance of Family* (Stevens et al 2005).[4]

CONSULTATION RESPONDENTS

In total, the Families Commission received 3,673 submissions in response to the *What Makes Your Family Tick?* consultation. Respondents came from a wide range of family types, ethnicities, socio-economic circumstances, religions, political perspectives and world views. Females were more likely than males to respond, and respondents were most likely to fall into the 35-49-year age bracket. Ethnically, the distribution of respondents was similar to the distribution of the New Zealand population, and the largest ethnic group to respond was Pākehā. Two-parent families made the largest number of submissions, followed by single-parent families.

WHAT MAKES FAMILIES TICK?

Consultation respondents considered the key factors which enhanced family life to be: having time with the family, having good relationships with family members, having access to family and community support, and being able to live according to one's values.

A lack of money was the most significant challenge to family life for many families, and manifested itself in many ways. The costs of housing, healthcare, education and childcare were problematic for many. As the literature tells us (Families Commission 2005), poverty is associated with low living standards and poor family outcomes in general.

Other key challenges for families included the struggle to balance work and family life, family health problems, educational needs (including adult education about life-skills and parenting), access to childcare, problems with family functioning (relationship problems/traumatic events) and a lack of available support.

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[3]   A full summary of consultation submissions (prepared by UMR Research) is available on the Families Commission website www.nzfamilies.org.nz

[4]   The research comprised a literature review and 43 focus groups with family members with dependent children. This report is available on the Families Commission website www.nzfamilies.org.nz

The key themes identified by families – as factors which enhance family life, challenge family wellbeing, or suggestions for improving wellbeing – are summarised below.

TIME

The project findings strongly support the notion that time is one of the family's most significant resources, enabling families to care for individual and family wellbeing, and to nurture relationships. Our findings identify that lack of time is one of the most significant challenges to family life, particularly for single-parent families and those on low incomes, and the demands of modern life appear to be placing increasing time pressures on families.

Within the family, preferences and beliefs about family priorities affect time use decisions. Care commitments (often related to the age and health of dependent family members) and how family members share family responsibilities, also play a big part in how individual family members experience work-life balance. Challenges from outside the family include long working hours/high work expectations, inflexible working conditions and low wages.

Many consultation respondents made trade-offs between family time and work time. Their options were influenced by financial and childcare considerations, and the extent of support they received from other family members and extended family. A large number said that they would like to have more options available to them, particularly being assisted financially or otherwise by government policies to enable them to stay home with children rather than placing children in childcare.

Other respondents either wanted to enter the workforce, or obtain more family-friendly working environments. They suggested that their family wellbeing could be improved through more flexible working conditions (enhanced annual and sick leave, and leave for employees to attend family events), and more flexible childcare arrangements (including funding for at-home carers/family members, enhanced availability and quality, and access to after-school and holiday programmes for dependent children of all ages).

MONEY AND LIVING STANDARDS

Consultation respondents did not consider money to be one of the most important factors in making good families: they saw love/aroha and good relationships as stronger contributors. A lack of money was, however, by far the most common challenge for family life. Many of the respondents – including low-, middle- and higher-income earners – found it very hard to achieve a 'decent' standard of living, and some suggested that a universal form of financial assistance should be provided for families with dependent children.

The introduction of the Working for Families package in the 2004 Budget, and the more recent extension of it, will increase incomes for many low- and middle-income families. It will also raise subsidies and thresholds for childcare, and the *Pathways to the Future* strategy will provide up to 20 hours of free childcare per week for three- and four-year-olds who attend recognised childhood education services. These policies will reduce poverty rates among families with dependent children. Their full impact on living standards, however, will not be known until at least 2007 when they will be fully implemented.

Suggestions by respondents for ways in which families themselves can improve their income and living standards included choosing to move to lower-cost areas, taking up higher-paid employment (often resulting in spending less time with families), re-training, and improving budgeting and life-skills through adult education.

Many financial challenges, however, arise from factors outside the family's direct control. Respondents suggested that family life could be enhanced through increases in rates of pay, decreases in living costs (in particular the costs of healthcare, housing, education and childcare), lowering of tax rates for families, increased assistance for families in the form of government payments, and more flexible working conditions.

RELATIONSHIPS AND PARENTING

Respondents identified supportive, loving family relationships with both immediate and extended family as important to family life. Respondents generally thought good communication and parenting skills were effective contributors to family relationships.

Conversely, family relationships were the source of many challenges for families. Respondents mentioned various events or issues that potentially created physical, emotional and financial problems for the family unit. They referred to disagreements between family members, separation/divorce, family violence/abuse, addictions and traumatic events such as the death of a family member. Underlying some of these issues may be a lack of knowledge or skills in managing family relationships (including a lack of parenting skills) and isolation from family support networks (discussed more below).

Overcoming relationship challenges may be something families themselves can achieve, although in many instances external support, and willingness to access it, is required. Respondents suggested that in general the availability, quality and extent to which families accessed education for parenting, relationships and life-skills (budgeting, cooking, childcare), could be enhanced. This finding has been reinforced by the Families Commission's recent *Review of Parenting Programmes* which concluded that "an overall strategy for supporting all parents in their parenting role needs to be developed" (Kerslake-Hendricks & Balakrishnan 2005:iv).

FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORKS

As suggested above, the support of family, friends, communities and community groups is of great importance to family life, and consultation submissions clearly reinforced this notion. Many groups of respondents felt that turning to their friends and community support networks helped them to overcome challenges to family life. Some felt more support for community groups was required.

While only a minority of respondents viewed a lack of support as a challenge to their family, this group included many single-parent families and migrants to New Zealand, suggesting isolation for these groups is a concern. While in some cases families themselves can make a difference (for example moving closer to family or other support networks), in other cases this is not feasible. In such instances the role of communities and community groups in engaging with isolated families is likely to be important.

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

Respondents believed that having access to local, low-cost, healthy activities, that can be easily reached, enhanced family health and relationships. They considered good quality neighbourhood playgrounds and unspoilt nature reserves and beaches to be very much part of the Kiwi lifestyle, and that they should be available to everyone. Having a safe environment in which to raise children was also important for families, although few mentioned that this was of particular concern where they lived.

Families placed high importance on being able to access the full range of health services for all family members. Respondents described the importance of both preventive healthcare and treatment services. Many families had experienced challenges in accessing both healthy living (good food, water and housing) and health services, predominantly because the costs of both placed a significant burden on families. This was particularly true for families where one or more members had significant health problems, and where these health problems affected the extent to which supporting family members could work and earn income. Many respondents (both low and medium income) described not accessing services (medical, dental) until absolutely necessary, sometimes resulting in health problems becoming more serious. While in recent years some policy changes have been made to decrease the costs for particular groups (older people, high users and children), it is likely that many who do not fall into these groups will still struggle to afford essential healthcare.

A number of respondents commented on the need for improved services and additional support for families with a member who has special learning, physical or mental health needs (including addiction problems).

EDUCATION

Education was highly valued by many participants, both in the consultation and the earlier focus groups, and some families reported making considerable short-term sacrifices in order to improve their educational qualifications. As was reported in *Focus on Families*, some groups – in particular Māori, Pacific and migrant groups – saw education as the key to overcoming problems associated with discrimination and social inequity.

Many families felt particularly challenged by the high costs of education and thought the Government could do more to help them meet such costs. 'Voluntary' fees at primary and secondary schools, uniforms, school trips and resources at primary and secondary schools were burdensome for many. The high costs of early childhood and tertiary education meant families frequently chose not to access these. Student loans were cited as affecting people's decisions about staying in New Zealand, starting a family or purchasing a home.

Quality of education was an issue for some, resulting in children being home-schooled or moved to a different school. Some respondents felt schools could do more to be inclusive of their family's particular values or morals (often cultural or religious).

Adult education, particularly about family life, such as parenting, budgeting, family health and relationship management, were discussed. Some suggested that courses in a range of life-skills could help them to improve life for their families, although they identified problems in accessing good quality courses. These submissions are consistent with the findings of the *Focus on Families* research.

VALUES, MORALS AND BELIEFS

Many people who took part in the project (particularly those who responded to the consultation) talked about the importance of values (including cultural and religious values) for families. These values were perceived as making family life good by guiding members about what behaviours were acceptable, and by giving them principles to live by. Many considered that values enriched not only their own families but society more broadly.

There was, however, an enormous range in what respondents perceived as the 'right values'. Honesty, trust and respect were values which many respondents mentioned as important to family life. Some respondents emphasised a 'traditional' set of beliefs, with strong views about same-sex relationships, marriage, parental roles and discipline of children. Some expressed concerns about today's materialism, expectations of young people, and conflicts between cultural and religious values. Some people felt that the values supported by the government and media were sometimes out of step with their own values. Respondents to the consultation expressed these 'traditional' beliefs more commonly than focus group participants, perhaps reflecting the fact that the people who made submissions were self-selected. The range of values advocated by focus group participants was broader in comparison, with acceptance of diversity an important issue for many who reported experiences of social discrimination on the grounds of their particular family structure, sexual orientation or ethnicity.

CONCLUSION – ENHANCING FAMILY OUTCOMES

This report is the culmination of a substantial work programme commenced by the Families Commission in its first year of operation. This project has already resulted in four earlier reports and, together with this report, they have provided the Families Commission with a wealth of information which can be called upon to develop better policies and services for families. In particular, this information suggests that:

> A range of policies should be explored that would allow families to improve their work-life balance, such as reducing excessive hours in paid employment, creating more family-friendly work environments, and providing greater access to quality and affordable childcare.

> Notwithstanding the Working for Families Package and other recent government initiatives, consideration should be given to further policies for financial assistance to families as some are likely to continue experiencing financial hardship, particularly those headed by a sole parent not in paid employment.

> Further work should be done on identifying gaps in the support available to families from community groups and other agencies.

> The health of the agencies and groups which support families should be investigated to determine whether further government or local body assistance is needed.

> The reasons why some families appear unable to afford essential healthcare should be identified, and policies should be developed to rectify this.

> The cost of educating children, particularly through the state school system, should be investigated with a view to developing policies that will reduce the financial burden on families.

> The extent to which families have access to affordable budget and life-skills courses should be explored, and corrective action taken, if necessary.

> More needs to be done to promote tolerance of diversity in society.

Two of the key issues identified in this report will be particular priorities for the Families Commission's work programme. These are issues about how to improve families' work-life balance, and policies and services to support parenting education. This report and the *Focus on Families* report provide valuable information which will be utilised as we proceed with these projects.

1. introduction

While a wealth of information is available about the factors which improve family outcomes, the Commission felt that it needed to find out directly from families what was important to them. It consequently embarked on a project to identify the most important issues impacting on families and lay the foundations for an analysis of family life. This project is known as *Families with Dependent Children – Successful Outcomes*. The *What Makes Your Family Tick?* consultation, which is addressed in this report, is the culmination of the overall project.

The key objective of the *Families with Dependent Children – Successful Outcomes* project was to improve our understanding of successful outcomes for families with dependent children, in particular the factors which enhanced or acted as barriers to family life.

Families are complex entities and many, if not all, of the issues identified in this report will require further exploration in relation to existing policies and services. The *Families with Dependent Children – Successful Outcomes* project will provide one of the foundation blocks for the future development of the Families Commission's work programme. As the Commission's first large-scale project, it demonstrates our commitment to consultation and dialogue with New Zealand families, to the thoughtful use of existing evidence, and to testing that evidence through research.

1.1   OVERALL PROJECT DESIGN[5]

The *Families with Dependent Children – Successful Outcomes* project took place in three stages. The first was a literature review (Families Commission 2005) of the factors of success and wellbeing for families with dependent children. In the second stage, 43 focus groups were conducted by UMR Research using a discussion guide developed from the literature review. The resulting report – *Focus on Families: Reinforcing the Importance of Family* (Stevens et al 2005) – reviewed the research findings from the focus groups and literature review. The final stage of the project comprised a public consultation referred to as *What Makes Your Family Tick?*, which is the focus of this report.[6]

The diagram below shows an overview of this project.[7]

Literature Review
To inform the development of discussion guides to be used to gather insight from families across New Zealand

Focus Groups
43 focus groups conducted with families across New Zealand

What Makes Your Family Tick? Consultation
Nationwide public consultation with families

Focus Group Report
2005

Consultation Report
2005

Focus on Families **Literature Review and Focus Groups Report**
2005

What Makes Your Family Tick? **Report**
2006

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[5]   The study design and methodology are described fully in Appendix One.

[6]   Note that the full range of reports associated with this study (the literature review, *Focus on Families* and UMR Research reports) can be found on the Families Commission's website, www.nzfamilies.org.nz

[7]   The reports in this diagram are described in Appendix One.

1.2   CONSULTATION DESIGN

This third stage of the project – the *What Makes Your Family Tick?* consultation
– complements the earlier two stages of the *Families with Dependent Children
– Successful Outcomes* project (the literature review and focus groups research) by
providing an opportunity for any New Zealand family to be heard through participation
in a nationwide public consultation.[8] The nature of the consultation, through provision
of anonymous answers to open-ended questions[9], provides an environment in which
individual respondents may provide fuller, franker details of their experience and views
than would be expected from the focus groups research. The consultation differs from
formal research, however, in that because respondents were self-selected (that is, they
could choose to respond or not) their responses may not necessarily be representative
of the views of New Zealand families.[10]

In order to counterbalance the effects of this self-selection bias, the consultation findings
need to be considered alongside the findings from earlier stages of the overall project,
which followed a more rigorous research methodology. Such comparisons are made in
the discussions, conclusions and executive summary of this report.

1.3   REPORT STRUCTURE

The report is structured thematically, according to the key issues raised by participants
in the consultation and in the overall *Families with Dependent Children – Successful
Outcomes* project. Each theme is analysed according to the overall project objectives.

The summaries at the end of each chapter – and the conclusions chapter – also
make use of an ecological framework.[11] This framework is a useful way to organise
and understand the consultation's key findings, interpreting these according to the
relationship between families and their wider environments. The ecological framework
suggests that an individual's development is influenced by interaction with the
environment in which they live, and conceptualises this environment as a series of four
concentric systems surrounding the individual. These four systems range from the most
personal (household/family/whānau) to the widest social context (global trends and
economy, social and cultural values and beliefs). By discussing the consultation's key
findings in the context of the ecological framework, we are able to better understand
how factors both within and outside the family's immediate control can influence their
lives, which in turn provides guidance about the areas that may require change in order
to enhance family life.

Chapter 2 analyses respondents' demographic information and where possible
compares this self-selected group with the New Zealand population as a whole.[12]

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8   For details on who was invited to participate and how, refer to Appendix One.

9   The questions asked in the consultation are included in Appendix One.

10   This is called sampling bias. Refer to Appendix One for a discussion of the difference between research and
     consultation methods, and consultation limitations.

11   A full description of the ecological framework is available in Appendix Two.

12   Note that the sample that participated in the consultation was not a representative sample of New Zealand,
     because it was self-selected rather than randomly selected.

Chapters 3 to 9 present a summary of the key issues. These are categorised according to the themes and concerns most commonly raised by consultation respondents:

> Chapter 3: Time

> Chapter 4: Money and living standards

> Chapter 5: Relationships and parenting

> Chapter 6: Family and community support

> Chapter 7: Health and environment

> Chapter 8: Education

> Chapter 9: Values, morals and beliefs

Each chapter is structured according to the overall project objectives, and summarises what it was about that theme that respondents said contributed to a good family life, the difficulties or challenges they faced, and what changes would make family life better. The material presented is qualitative[13] in nature, and is illustrated with quotations from the submissions.

Chapter 10 analyses the issues discussed in Chapters 3 to 9, draws some conclusions and identifies the implications.

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[13] Apart from the demographic information, respondents' submissions were qualitative in nature. That is, their responses to the open-ended questions were descriptive in nature rather than numerical and discrete. Accordingly, the information reported in Chapters 3 to 9 is qualitative and descriptive rather than numerical. For a fuller exploration of these concepts refer to Appendix One.

2.   responses and respondents[14]

In total, 3,673 submissions were received by the Families Commission in response to the *What Makes Your Family Tick?* consultation. The submissions came from family members across a wide range of family types, ethnicities, socio-economic circumstances, religions, political perspectives and world views.

As noted in the Methodology (Appendix One), the consultation was designed to provide the opportunity for individuals from across New Zealand to express their views. Like all such consultation processes the results cannot be seen as statistically representative.

Demographic data were collected from those people who took part in the consultation. This allows readers to identify in what ways the sample over- or under-represents New Zealand families in terms of certain demographic characteristics.

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[14]   These results replicate or are based on those produced by UMR Research in *What Makes Your Family Tick? – Summary Report of Community Consultation Submissions* (2005b). Further results regarding the consultation are also available in the UMR report, which is available at www.nzfamilies.org.nz

2.1 SEX

Females (69 percent) were considerably more likely than males (27 percent) to respond to the consultation. This probably reflects that women were more interested in expressing their views on family matters but it could possibly have been accentuated by information packs being unintentionally distributed through sources and organisations more commonly used by women than men.

FIGURE 1: SEX
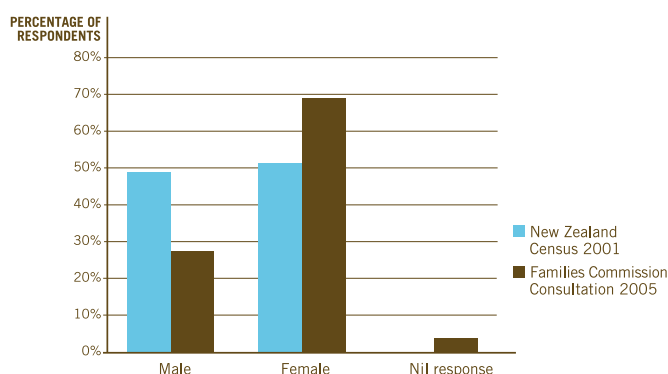
2.2 AGE

As depicted below, 35 to 49-year-olds were most likely to make a submission, followed by 24 to 34-year-olds.[15]

FIGURE 2: AGE GROUP OF RESPONDENTS IN COMPARISON TO THE CENSUS 2001 DATA
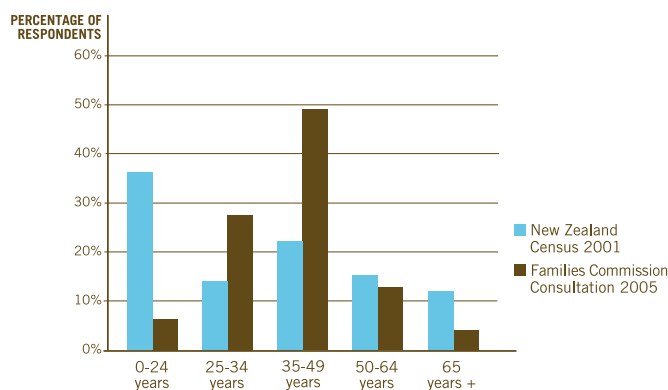
The predominance of responses from people aged 25 to 49 ties in with what we know about family formation and childrearing age groups in New Zealand. The average age for New Zealand women to give birth is currently 30 years[16], with a median age of giving birth to a first child at 28 years (Ministry of Women's Affairs 2005).

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15   Using valid data (excluding nil response).

16   *The Social Report 2005* (Ministry of Social Development 2005). This report notes that the average age for a woman to give birth is younger amongst some ethnic groups including Māori and Pacific women.

2.3 ETHNICITY

Respondents came from a range of ethnic backgrounds. They were asked to report both their individual ethnicities and those of their families.[17] Figure 3 depicts individual responses, the largest group of which was NZ European/Pākehā, followed by Māori. While not directly comparable to Census data (because of different counting and prioritisation schemes) it appears that these results are reasonably similar to the overall population.

FIGURE 3: INDIVIDUAL ETHNICITY
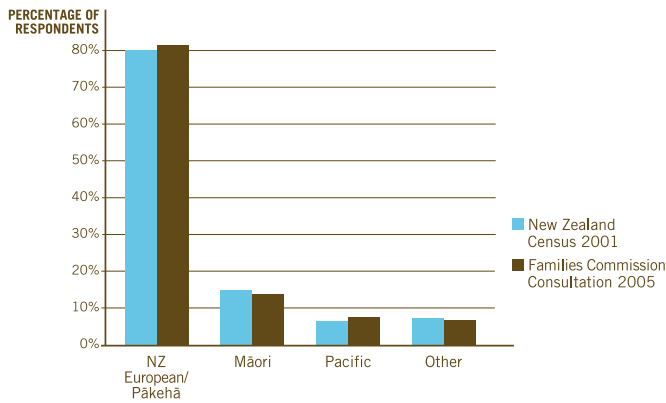
Similarly, the majority of respondents (84.8 percent) included NZ European/Pākehā in their family ethnicity, followed by Māori, then Pacific as shown in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4: FAMILY ETHNICITY

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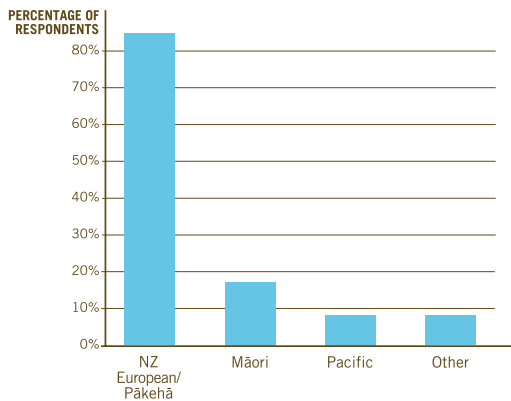
17   Ethnic counts may add to more than 100 percent because respondents who reported more than one ethnicity were counted in all applicable groups.

2.4 GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION[18]

Submissions were received from areas across New Zealand approximately proportional to the population in each area. This is depicted in Figure 5 below.

FIGURE 5: RESPONDENTS BY REGION

Northland Region
Pop. 3.6%
Con. 6.0%

Auckland Region
Pop. 32.4%
Con. 25.2%

Bay of Plenty Region
Pop. 6.3%
Con. 4.5%

Waikato Region
Pop. 9.4%
Con. 9.3%

Gisborne Region
Pop. 1.1%
Con. 1.2%

Taranaki Region
Pop. 2.6%
Con. 3.3%

Hawke's Bay Region
Pop. 3.7%
Con. 2.6%

Manawatu/ Wanganui Region
Pop. 5.6%
Con. 5.3%

Nelson-Tasman Region
Pop. 2.2%
Con. 3.7%

Wellington Region
Pop. 11.3%
Con. 13.4%

Marlborough Region
Pop. 1.0%
Con. 0.7%

West Coast Region
Pop. 0.8%
Con. 0.7%

Canterbury Region
Pop. 12.8%
Con. 13.0%

Otago Region
Pop. 4.8%
Con. 3.7%

Southland Region
Pop. 2.6%
Con. 2.4%

LEGEND

Pop. – Percentage of population

Con. – Percentage of consultation submissions received

As shown, the Auckland region accounted for over one-quarter of all submissions.

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18   Statistics New Zealand estimates
      www.stats.govt.nz/popn-monitor/where-people-live/where-do-people-live-graph-detail.htm

2.5   HOUSEHOLD TYPE

Respondents came from a range of household types, as depicted below.

FIGURE 6: HOUSEHOLD TYPE

There was a 72.7 percent response rate from two-parent households, 13.2 percent from single-parent households, 5.8 percent step/blended households and 0.7 percent from couples without dependent children. There were small numbers of responses (1.7 percent) from a range of other household types including same-sex parents (0.2 percent), respondents who live alone (0.7 percent), grandparents raising grandchildren (0.1 percent) and foster families (0.1 percent). Given the nature of this consultation, couples without children were less inclined to take part, as reflected in the fact that less than 1 percent of responses came from this group.

Because measurements used were different, we were unable to compare these results to New Zealand-wide[19] data. We do know, however, that the population by family type consists of 39.0 percent cou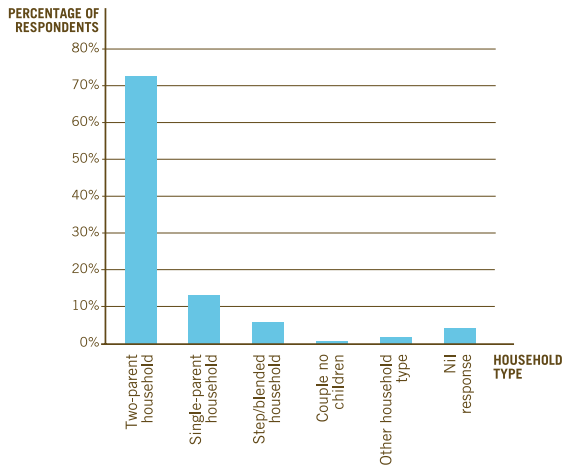ples without children, 42.1 percent couples with child(ren) and 18.9 percent one-parent with child(ren). There is no separate data readily available on the number of step/blended families in New Zealand (who are included into the 'couples with children' group in these statistics).

2.6   SHARED PARENTING

Seven percent of all respondents indicated that their parents did not live together in their families and parenting responsibility was shared. Of this group, parenting was largely shared between parents. A smaller group shared parenting with other people – 4.3 percent with their ex-partner (who may or may not be the parent), 5.0 percent shared with grandparents, and 2.0 percent shared with someone else. These results are shown in Figure 7.

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19   Source: Statistics New Zealand Census 2001. NB: The Census measures families according to households, rather than families spread across households. For example, families who share care across two households may not be counted by the Census.

**PERCENTAGE OF
RESPONDENTS**

WHO PARENTING
IS SHARED WITH

Base: 7 percent who
said parents don't live
together and parenting
is shared.
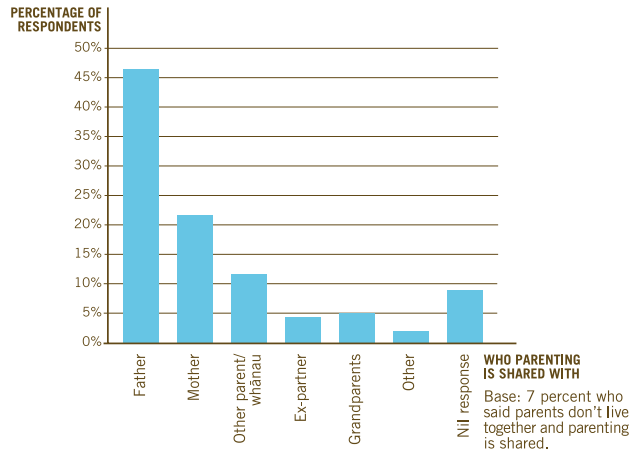
2.7   HOUSEHOLD SIZE

The majority of responses came from households with four family members currently
living in them. Most of the responses from households of two or three members came
from single-parent families. Most of the households with four or more members came
from either two-parent or blended families. Household size in relation to family structure
is depicted in Figure 8.

FIGURE 8[20]: HOUSEHOLD SIZE IN RELATION TO FAMILY STRUCTURE

**PERCENTAGE OF
RESPONDENTS**

NUMBER OF PEOPLE
IN HOUSEHOLD
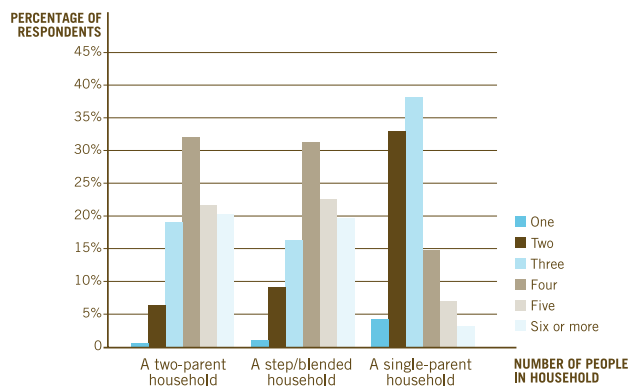
It should be noted that only 12.6 percent of responses came from small households
of two or fewer family members. This is likely to be a reflection of the nature of the
consultation, in that individuals living alone and couples without children would be
less inclined to take part than households with one or more dependent children.

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20   This figure should be interpreted with caution as there appears to be a degree of inconsistency in the data
received. This shows up most clearly in the results for one- and two-parent households. Specifically, it is not
possible to have a one-member household, yet describe the family type as two-parent or step/blended.

2.8   SUMMARY

On some dimensions, notably region and ethnicity, the number of submissions received matched the population demographics quite closely. On other dimensions, especially sex and age, they did not.

Women were far more likely to respond than men, and people in the childrearing age groups were more likely to respond than either younger or older people.

The subsequent chapters explore the perspectives of those people who responded to the consultation, with some consideration of these views in relation to respondents' demographic profiles.

3. time

In *Focus on Families* we found that one of the most significant challenges faced by families with dependent children was achieving a reasonable balance between family time and time spent at work. Many of our focus group participants felt time-pressured, either because of work or family commitments or both. They thought it was critical to have a good balance of time alone, time with the family and time with partners. We noted that single-parent families and/or those with low incomes in particular, found balancing work and family life challenging. Focus group participants told us that they wanted to have a choice about how they balanced their time and income.

Time was also a significant issue for consultation respondents, with 86 percent mentioning 'time' within their submissions. It should be noted that discussion of time and money issues often overlapped; consequently related issues are discussed both here and in Chapter 4: Money and living standards.

This chapter explores consultation respondents' views on how time can contribute positively to family life, the types of challenges families face in balancing their time, and respondents' suggestions about how their time use may be enhanced.

3.1   WHAT MAKES FAMILY LIFE GOOD

The significance of time for family wellbeing was reflected in the importance respondents attached to ensuring that the family did things together. They suggested that having fun activities and outings or doing everyday chores ensured that the family had common goals and opportunities to communicate.

"Spending time together as a family – especially the evening meal where possible, as well as playtime – being outside together playing team sports, gardening. At the moment, building a shed. We also try to do special activities in the school holidays with everyone included, eg day trips to hot pools and bush walks."
—**Region unknown, two-parent household, female**

Regular gatherings of the extended family or whānau could provide rich opportunities to express and enjoy family unity.

"…Adding to this beauty is the generational presence from grandfather, sons and grandsons aged 72 down to two years old… The family gathers at the family home monthly to discuss issues, to plan strategically for the future, focusing on health, education and housing. […] our teenagers love the family discussions, stories, laughter – there is no pressure to stay but they do stay. There is a lot of love, respect, caring and openness – we are proud grandparents watching the importance of family love, respect and unity."
—**Auckland, grandparent living in two-parent household, female**

"The simple things. Playing games (cards, Trivial Pursuits, or sports etc). Reading stories together. Watching movies together. Working on homework together (yea!). The beach. Western Springs. Teaching them to ride a bike. Teaching them to swim. In short, having the time as adults to help our children discover the best things in life and to appreciate and understand the opportunities and choices they will have."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, male**

The importance of time for family life was consistent with the findings of the *Focus on Families* research, which noted the positive contribution to family life of parents having adequate time – with their children, as a couple or alone.

"Enjoying time on our own away from the kids every now and then. Both parents being happy in their relationship."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

"Spending time together, but also having time apart. (Time out for both myself and my son.)"
—**Wellington, single-parent household, female**

Some respondents felt that their children's lives were enhanced when one parent was able to spend time with them at home full- or part-time rather than being at work (refer also to Chapter 5: Relationships and parenting).

"Stay at home Mum!!! Not encouraging Mums to go back to work!!!"
—**Waikato, single-parent household, female**

3.2   TIME CHALLENGES

Many respondents reported they felt short of time. Families in which both parents worked full-time, single parents who worked full-time and parents of very young children,

were particularly likely to feel short of hours to spend with their families, and wanted to have more quality time with them.

Where time seems constantly rushed and compressed, it can detract from the quality of family interactions.

"…it would be great to not be so rushed and to be able to have some time to be spontaneous."
—**Wellington, step/blended household, female**

According to submissions, the two key causes of a lack of family time were parental work commitments and single parenting. Balancing work and family life, including childcare responsibilities, was a problem affecting a great many respondents.

"One of our challenges is trying to juggle our jobs around our children. Only one of us is able to do that at the moment to a certain extent. Another challenge is trying to find someone to look after our children during school holidays etc. We cannot afford daycare at the moment. Family members are all too busy with their own lives and whatnot."
—**Northland, two-parent household, female**

"Working full-time and trying to balance school, sports and quality family time."
—**Wellington, step/blended household, female**

Research from Australia (Pocock & Clark 2004) indicates that children are very sensitive to the stresses of parents struggling with long working hours.

"My Dad being away for the whole year at the moment and not being around. My Mum travelling and working hard and never around either."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

Some consultation respondents felt that having an inadequate amount of time to spend with children could have negative consequences.

"Children rebelling due to my working and not having an older person around to keep an eye on them. Since completing employment my children are not out roaming the streets. I know that the younger children are being fed and that things are maintained around the home."
—**Auckland, single-parent household, female**

As well as paid employment, family life can involve a great deal of unpaid work in caring for dependants and the general household. Often this unpaid work is done by women and research on time use indicates that mothers of young children have heavy workloads. One Australian study found that mothers who stayed at home did an average of 80 hours per week in unpaid work, while those who entered the workforce did on average 90 hours work per week, combining paid and unpaid work (Apps 2001).

Time pressures also appear to have a bearing on the extent to which people engage in voluntary work, placing strain on the very community organisations that offer support to families.

"…it seems ironic that I spend such a large amount of time in community groups such as Playcentre, primary schools and kindergartens, doing voluntary work to keep them functioning day to day. This takes up time that I would like to spend with my children but I put into these groups so that they remain in place so my children can get the benefits they provide. Working for free gets less and less attractive but the groups need it more as more parents are encouraged to go back into the workforce

and volunteers get fewer… I quit voluntary work thinking it would be better to get paid for the hours I was putting in, but when I realised we can survive without my income but that Playcentres and kindergartens can't survive without their volunteers, I went back."

—**Bay of Plenty, two-parent household, female**

Consistent with the *Focus on Families* research, it is clear that single-parent families face particular challenges in meeting personal, family and work obligations without the physical and financial support of a partner. These challenges can have negative implications for family relationships.

"Not enough daylight hours… Having to work my arse off, and not spending quality time with my kids… Always running around doing things quickly."

—**Northland, single-parent household, female**

"It's important solo parents have time out too… Not being able to socialise and having little to no adult contact because I am stuck at home – no relief for solo parents. Becoming socially dysfunctional. Loving your child so much but can't help yelling and feeling suffocated with no space for self-growth or reflection."

—**Auckland, single-parent household, female**

A study undertaken for the Department of Labour, *Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Work-Life Balance in New Zealand; A Qualitative Study* (Department of Labour 2003), found that most workers had a sense of work-life *imbalance*, that it took a crisis for them to do something about it, and workers from lower socio-economic groups felt forced into a work-life imbalance just to earn enough to meet basic needs.

time, income and employment conditions

For many of the consultation respondents there was a conscious trade-off between spending time with the family and time spent in paid employment.

"One thing we have resisted is working more than one job each, otherwise that would take us away from the family for too long a period."

—**Waikato, two-parent household, male**

"Having two parents working. It is a trade-off to have the challenge of adequate finance or staying at home. For a period one of us did stay at home but our finances became too strained so we now both work again. We have three sons ages 8, 12, 15. As they grow so does the financial commitment needed for all aspects of their lives."

—**Waikato, two-parent household, male**

Sometimes employment conditions had negative consequences on the quality of time families spent together. Both self-employment and shift work had very mixed reviews. While both offered families the ability to earn additional income and resolve childcare problems, these positive attributes could come at a price.

"Being self-employed is more stressful than being an employee as there are other considerations (taxation, employee issues, compliance) that cannot just be left at work. These pressures impact on our family time together."

—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

"Not having the time together as a family. Parents work different shifts so one adult will be at home with the children at all time[s]. Therefore children do not have a proper family time 7 days a week due to one parent being absent!"

—**Nelson Bays, two-parent family, male**

"SHIFT WORK: Has killed our family time and started to ruin our relationship, it's caused resentment on both sides as the kids don't see their Dad for long periods, I get left doing everything 24/7. Very difficult with pre-school children."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

parenting and childcare

One of the fundamental choices faced by families in how they should organise their lives was whether a parent should stay at home to care for their children or enter the workforce. These decisions were influenced by beliefs about the needs of children and financial considerations. Staying at home with the child(ren), or rearranging one's working life so that either parent could spend more time at home, invariably involved financial sacrifice.

"Before my husband and I had children we made some decisions re the life we wanted to give them. One of the key decisions we made was that we wanted them to be raised by a parent in their early years, which meant the lowest income earner leaving work. That was me. I have now been at home for 2.5 years, and I have a two-year-old son and a three-month-old daughter."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

"We had to get a MUCH bigger mortgage to afford me to stay at home with the kids for 10 months postnatally. We are lucky to be able to do this but we paid financially big time!"
—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

Other respondents had decided not to work, as the costs of childcare outweighed the benefits.

"Childcare was very expensive for three children. Even when we were entitled to the subsidy it was a waste of time me working as we would have to pay around $230 a week."
—**Region unknown, two-parent household, female**

Consistent with the *Focus on Families* findings, other childcare difficulties reported by respondents as needing to be addressed were lack of reliable childcare standards, inadequate coverage of working hours, particularly for those involved in weekend or shift work, and lack of locally accessible facilities, especially where families did not have their own transport.

"Would like longer opening hours for childcare facilities, eg 7pm. This would suit parents who are shift workers, work irregular hours."
—**Wellington, two-parent household, female**

"Someone who they can hire to care for their children out of normal day hours. Like daycare this also needs to be subsidised so they can afford it."
—**Auckland, single-parent household, female**

3.3   WHAT WOULD MAKE FAMILY LIFE BETTER

Respondents' suggestions involving 'time' covered both the hours available outside of work, and the quality of time that parents were able to, or chose to, spend with their families. The solutions they proffered, depending on their circumstances, involved more family-friendly working hours or holidays, higher wage rates, subsidised childcare, or

simply putting into practice a personal resolve to spend more time with immediate or extended family.

Many parents wanted more time available to spend with their children without a loss of income.

"Being able to separate work and family life. Going away on more holidays together."
—**Auckland, family type unknown, female**

Some respondents sought working conditions which enabled them to spend more time with their family even if this meant a financial sacrifice.

"Three years ago we left inner-city Auckland and two well-paid professional jobs so we could live in a lower-cost environment and spend more time with our children. We kept spending to a minimum, and have bought no luxury items in the past three years so that we can afford to live well, but not have to both work full-time."
—**Bay of Plenty, two-parent household, female**

"Stayed in lower paying job with family friendly employer rather than moving up the career ladder."
—**Nelson Bays, two-parent household, male**

"My husband works Tues-Sat so he can have a day caring for our two-year-old while I work so she has a day with her father and less time in $$ care."
—**Christchurch, step/blended household, female**

A number of full-time mothers with a working partner wanted their partners to be more involved at home.

"The main thing to help would be my husband having more hours at home."
—**Timaru, two-parent household, female**

"Father being able to work slightly reduced hours also (would make shared parenting more of a reality and enable children to spend quality time with both parents each evening), […] stronger government (ie legislative) support for addressing challenges faced by working parents who want to be good workers AND great parents (childcare costs, flexible working hours, extra sick leave for those with dependent children."
—**Wellington, two-parent household, female**

More time with the extended family was another frequently mentioned change that would make family life better.

"Strengthening extended family ties is important […] Time spent with them is important to our family strength, to know we belong to others."
—**Hamilton, step/blended household, male**

Suggestions for what would help tended to focus on finding ways for government policy and employer practices to work better together for families with children. Many respondents wanted arrangements that would make it possible for them to earn enough to support their families at a good standard of living and allow more time with the family.

"More family-friendly governmental policies, especially ones that recognise both parents are equally important in the role of bringing up children (extended, paid maternity/paternity leave; subsidised home help for mums who want to be with their kids and work too; a limited working week and extended annual leave; annual leave and school holiday timetables changed to better suit our climate)."
—**Bay of Plenty, two-parent household, female**

Childcare was an underlying issue for many respondents with young children who wanted or needed to work. Childcare services are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4: Money and living standards. Respondents identified flexible working conditions which would enable them to easily meet childcare needs as solutions to some of their time challenges.

"…1. Finding a crèche. 2. paying for the crèche. 3. getting time off work when our child was a baby, as fathers are not recognised well in this regards. […] Getting paid parental leave would have helped, but this is not available to fathers unless the mother is also working. This is discrimination based on gender!"
—**Wellington, two-parent household, male**

Several respondents recognised the benefit of employers offering school-friendly hours, and it was suggested that working hours and/or statutory holiday entitlement could be reviewed.

"Pushing for companies to start being more family-focused so that between getting to and from work and actually working I am not out of my house for nearly 12 hours a day."
—**Auckland, single-parent household, female**

"Four weeks annual leave would allow working families like ourselves more opportunity to spend quality time together on family trips and holidays."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, male**

"A workplace that truly did have a family-friendly approach would be wonderful, a lot of companies claim that they do but then make no allowance as far as sick leave or flexible working hours are concerned. We get 5 days a year sick leave, my son can use this up in one good bout of flu, leaving me none if I get sick."
—**Auckland, family type unknown, female**

Being able to obtain time off work to look after sick children was one of the most commonly mentioned aspects of employment.

"Flexibility of work to be able to juggle sick kids…"
—**Nelson Bays, two-parent family, male**

Finding "well-paid, flexible part-time work" which fits with children's school hours was suggested as a solution by several respondents, who felt this would offer both flexibility and regular income. But this is not always easily achieved.

"If I was able to go back to work during the hours the kids are at school – this is very hard to find."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

It should be noted that the Department of Labour is currently leading a Work-Life Balance project which aims to improve work-life balance from the perspective of both employers and employees. Working with "employers, project partners [including other government agencies], employees and unions in both the private and public sectors" the project aims to "develop practical tools to address work-life balance issues in workplaces" (http://www.dol.govt.nz/worklife/index.asp January 2006). It is anticipated that this project may address some of the challenges and suggestions which have been raised by consultation participants.

3.4 SUMMARY

The consultation findings reported here are highly consistent with the earlier research findings as reported in *Focus on Families*. Unlike the research, however, consultation submissions placed more focus on how time positively enhanced family life rather than how a lack of time could challenge families. Respondents recognised the importance of spending time together and mentioned time-related issues more frequently than anything else when discussing what made family life good. Their emphasis on time strongly supported the notion that time was one of the family's most significant resources, and that time pressure was a major challenge for families.

The factors which enabled or inhibited family members' ability to spend time together could stem from within the family itself, or might be influenced externally.

Within the family, preferences and beliefs about how time should be spent influenced its availability, as did care commitments (often related to the age and health of dependent family members) and how family members shared family responsibilities. Challenges from outside the family included long working hours/high work expectations, inflexible working conditions and low wages. Consequently, enhancing families' access to time is likely to require support both from within and outside the family.

Respondents described a range of strategies they had tried to assist them to overcome time challenges, from having one parent at home with the children to moving to less expensive areas. Many had made choices or trade-offs about family time (with work or childcare for example). A large number said that they would like to have more options available to them, particularly being assisted financially or otherwise to enable them to stay home with children rather than placing children in childcare.

While families themselves can make some choices about how to overcome time challenges, external factors often limit the range of choices available. Options can be restricted by an individual's low skill levels, low rates of pay, employment conditions, lack of childcare availability and cost, and the policies (employer and government) which guide these. Consultation respondents suggested that more flexible working conditions (time off for family crises or events, greater statutory holiday entitlements and better parental leave provisions for fathers), enhanced employment training opportunities, and more flexible childcare arrangements (including funding for at-home carers/ family members, enhanced availability, quality and access to after-school and holiday programmes for dependent children of all ages) would improve their choices and their family life. A number of respondents called for government to address these issues. Underlying all this was a general desire for a workplace practice and culture which paid more attention to the importance of family.

4. money and living standards

In *Focus on Families* we found that many families experienced a range of financial challenges, although some families experienced greater challenges than others. The Ministry of Social Development has identified that families most likely to experience family strain are single-parent families, benefit recipients, families with at least one non-European adult, and those in rental housing (Ministry of Social Development 2005). Our focus groups wanted more choice about how to balance their time and income, and participants made several suggestions about how their balance of time and income could be improved. These suggestions included better access to appropriate childcare, financial and/or tax assistance for families with dependent children and flexible working conditions.

Money and matters regarding living standards were also important for consultation respondents, perhaps more so than for the focus group participants. Many respondents (86.8 percent) mentioned 'money' within their submissions. Money challenges permeated many of the other issues discussed in this report, overlapping particularly with time (as discussed in Chapter 3: Time).

This chapter explores consultation respondents' views on how income and living standards can contribute positively to family life, the types of challenges families face in achieving a reasonable income and living standards, and respondents' suggestions about how their finances and living standards may be enhanced.

The consultation and focus group exercises were conducted before families would have felt the impact of the Working for Families package. This package was announced in 2004, but will not be fully implemented until 2007. It will provide significant tax rebate assistance for working families, with the poorest families receiving the greatest assistance, gradually decreasing as the family income increases. It provides some additional assistance for families dependent on benefits. The Working for Families package also increased the accommodation supplement and subsidies for childcare costs, and some of this assistance also applies to beneficiaries. In addition, the Government has announced further changes that will incrementally reduce the financial burden on families, namely, greater support for early childhood education and paid parental leave for the self-employed. The comments made by families did not take these changes into account.

4.1   WHAT MAKES FAMILY LIFE GOOD

While respondents did not necessarily think that higher incomes would secure a good family life, they stressed the importance of sufficient income to meet the basic needs of family members.

"In order for families to be healthy and for kids to live a proper life, they need money."

—**Auckland, two-parent household, male**

Families who had just enough to cover the basics often aspired to be able to afford the occasional luxury or a higher standard of living involving, for example, the purchase of a second car, an overseas holiday, a larger house or a home in a better neighbourhood.

"To be able to afford: schooling, health care, childcare and all the general basics. It would be nice to be able to afford a holiday once or twice a year; for the adults to get timeout as we have 6 children (5 live at home); to have recreational time together; for everybody to be happy and unstressed."

—**Region unknown, step/blended household, female**

Respondents often stated that they saw a link between housing and the quality of family life, and recent research has identified home owners as the least likely to have low living standards, followed by those occupying and purchasing, and then those renting privately. The highest incidence of low living standards was being experienced by those housed by Housing New Zealand whose tenants were selected on the basis of demonstrated need (Ministry of Social Development 2005).

"To be able to clothe, feed and provide a roof for my children. I want to ensure that my family have what they need, spiritually, emotionally and physically. For them to not starve and be without a meal, to be clothed and not feel the cold so they won't get sick, and to have a roof over their heads so that they have a stable home to go to."

—**Auckland, single-parent household, female**

"Getting our own home has been a huge benefit for our family – we had to save really hard to stay committed to our budget. But after five years of saving we bought our first home four years ago. That was the first thing to make our family life better. It is an awesome boost to a family to say 'that's my house'."

—**Waikato, two-parent household, female**

Family income, living standards and wellbeing are often linked to employment and its financial rewards. While only 14 percent of families whose main income is from employment have a low living standard, this rises to 57 percent for those on income-tested benefits (Ministry of Social Development 2005).

The aspects of employment that were most prized by respondents were income security, adequacy of earnings, and flexible working conditions.

"Financial security from available and accessible employment."
—Rangitikei, step/blended household, female

Paid maternity or paternity leave and supportive employers both made a special contribution to a good family life. Access to appropriate and affordable childcare was often mentioned as an associated issue.

4.2   FINANCIAL AND RELATED CHALLENGES

Financial problems were the key challenges experienced by respondents. People from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds described struggling to achieve what they considered to be a satisfactory living standard after becoming parents.

living costs

When faced with reduced incomes as a result of having children, and the costs of supporting those children, families who were already in financial difficulty experienced greater distress and increased reliance on social benefits. Those in the middle- and higher-income range also had to tighten their belts. Large families often faced financial pressure. Blended families are often larger in size than other types of families, and may have family expenses equivalent to two smaller families. Some families also reported that child support costs added to their financial problems.

Although a considerable number of single parents (mainly mothers) reported that they received no assistance from the non-resident parent, many of the families who reported having a child living elsewhere said that child support obligations had created financial difficulties for their families.

"The current child support system causes a huge amount of stress on us as a couple and a family – the imbalances in this system need addressing. We pay to support my husband's child from a previous relationship and we have no say whatsoever as to what this money is spent on, or whether it is even spent on the child at all. This child is living a very privileged life and my children will never have the same benefits as [it] is not financially viable for us to provide for them in the same way."
—Auckland, two-parent household, female

"Although we only have two children at home, our other child whom we pay child support for does not count as another child we pay for. In short we are a three-children family with one living elsewhere (which we still make family support payments for) and yet we still don't qualify for any income assistance."
—Bay of Plenty, two-parent household, female

This self-reporting of financial pressure on families is consistent with recent New Zealand studies of relative income poverty and living standards which have reported that about 30 percent of New Zealand children live in families with low living standards (Ministry of Social Development 2005).

Financial difficulties arose for different reasons: the most commonly mentioned was low income. Respondents on lower incomes described living from day-to-day, choosing which bills they could pay and having to restrict expenditure on essentials such as food, heating and healthcare, and above all on their children. As a result, medical and dental conditions were left untreated, school activities missed out on, and sometimes meals gone without.

"Realising the challenges are there and moving on with it, trying not to stress over it and just calmly working out what can wait – or not getting as much food so that hubby can get those shoes or son can have clothes or baby a bed to sleep in and clothes to wear – planning ahead and being strong on wants and not getting them."
—**Hawke's Bay, two-parent family, female**

"Not having enough money to pay ordinary bills like electricity because we spent the wages on groceries this week."
—**Timaru, two-parent household, female**

Families may enter into debt in order to pay bills or as a result of a family crisis, such as ill-health or temporary unemployment. Loans and credit can be another way of affording higher living standards in the short term. Some respondents faced challenges in obtaining loans, because they had no collateral.

"Short of money to pay bills, difficulties in getting loans."
—**Bay of Plenty, two-parent household, female**

A few respondents described serious problems in repaying debt and suggested mechanisms to help deal with high levels of debt could help reduce financial stress.

"Bad credit due to money being used on household and kids expenses. Debt collectors and mounting bills."
—**Wanganui, single-parent household, female**

"Being able to consolidate my debts into one huge amount so that I can pay it off and have an opportunity to buy my own home."
—**Wellington, single-parent household, female**

Some families avoided taking on debt by curbing discretionary expenditure, prioritising wanted items, and carefully planning expenditure on regular items like food.

"We decided not to take on any HPs which would limit our flexibility financially and not being burdened financially."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, male**

"Living on a shoestring budget. I do [a] meal plan and write lists for the supermarket to keep the food bill down. We moved to a cheaper town."
—**Timaru, two-parent household, female**

housing costs

It is clear that in recent years housing costs have increased. Since the late 1980s the proportion of households spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing has more than doubled, from 11 percent in 1988 to 24 percent in 2001. Lower-income households have been more heavily affected, with the proportion who spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing rising from 16 percent in 1988 to 35 percent in 2004 (Ministry of Social Development 2005).

Respondents living in state housing were particularly likely to experience financial difficulty.

"High accommodation costs. Not qualifying for assistance from WINZ because we are in a HNZ home. Not able to purchase HNZ homes. Keeping up hire purchase payments."

—Hawke's Bay, two-parent family, female

Because of high housing costs many consultation respondents described difficulty in purchasing their own home, or renting a home of the right size and quality for their family, in the 'right' neighbourhood.

"Finding accommodation suitable and safe enough for us at a reasonable rate is highly difficult as rent prices have skyrocketed. We had to sell the house to finance our living during my husband's study and this does not include student fees."

—Christchurch, two-parent household, female

Low-income families with children, particularly larger families, have little prospect of achieving home ownership from their own savings.

"Finance challenges, ie saving up a deposit to buy a house. Family death overseas. Children who has special needs, ie disabled. Security and safety due to our family income. This has a direct effect on choice of housing available, which isn't always in areas desirable to live in."

—Auckland, two-parent household, male

Even middle-income earners may experience difficulties in qualifying for housing loans.

"As a family we are a great credit risk – we have no bad history, a reliable income, no huge debts (we don't even have a credit card, by choice), and yet the banks won't give us a home loan – as is their prerogative – they are a business."

—Taranaki, two-parent family, female

Sometimes, living with extended family can provide access to otherwise unaffordable housing. Depending on the quality of family relationships and the size of the house relative to the size of the extended family, this arrangement can supply both cost-effective housing and a support mechanism across generations. On the other hand, it can result in overcrowding.

According to *The Social Report*, in 2001 10 percent of the New Zealand resident population lived in crowded[21] conditions, and crowding has been linked to the spread of certain infectious diseases, poor educational attainment and as a potential cause of stress for individuals in the household (Ministry of Social Development 2005).

"We would like assistance to help us into our own home in which our children do not have to sleep three to a room."

—Northland, two-parent household, female

Often respondents reported balancing housing, financial choices, and other quality of life choices. For example, some respondents reported having moved to an area to seek a healthier or safer environment for their children.

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[21] The standard used is the Canadian National Occupancy standard which sets the bedroom requirements of a household according to the following compositional criteria: "there should be no more than two people per bedroom; parents or couples share a bedroom; children under five years, either of the same or of the opposite sex, may reasonably share a bedroom; children under 18 years of the same sex may reasonably share a bedroom; a child aged five-17 years should not share a bedroom with one under five of the opposite sex; single adults 18 years and over and any unpaired children require a separate bedroom." (Ministry of Social Development 2005, Appendix 2).

"Move to good area for kids. We sold our last house in the city and moved to a 'good' area in the suburbs to ensure our child (singular at the time) went to a good school and grew up in a closer knit area."

—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

"To pay more rent to live in a safer area with better schools and to be closer to other supportive family members."

—**Taranaki, two-parent household, female**

While some parents chose to pay more for a house in a good neighbourhood, others had chosen to move to less expensive areas in order to free up finances for their family.

"[We sold a] large home in a flash area to own a small home in a less flash area (ie we now have a fenced house with a guard dog) so that family overheads are less and we have more cash for what children need/want. We choose to let [the] kids do lots of things – eg gymnastics, athletics, hockey, water polo etc. All adds up, but we choose to spend (invest?) money on these activities rather than not because of development opportunities – apparently some DSW staff recommend that families on benefits CUT these things out of the budget!!!!"

—**Auckland, two-parent house, female**

inadequate income

Families who receive income support from the government reported financial challenges, and as reported earlier, a high proportion of families on government benefits have low living standards. In 2003, 6 percent of couple families with dependent children had both parents unemployed, and 45 percent of single parents were unemployed (Statistics New Zealand 2005). As families continue living in this situation they are likely to run down savings, go into debt, or seek assistance from family, friends or charitable organisations.

Some benefit recipients found their current incomes completely inadequate for a 'good life', and they challenged the Commission accordingly.

"What makes you think [my family life] is good? People on the DPB or unemployment or sickness benefits do not have a good family life. Perhaps you should try to bring up a child or two on $200 per week and see if you think it's a good life."

—**Bay of Plenty, single-parent household, female**

"Come and live as the lower income family. Go shopping with a limited unemployment pay to meet all living expenses. Get sick and then sicker and wait in [the] queue for a medical staff. Rent low, run down flats, for time on end with a family of four to six that cost an arm and a leg. Walk your children to school with barely any lunch and uniform that are hand me downs and no shoes on their feet with such sad faces of facing another hard day at school. It is not easy for family of low income to budget so you do live from day to day."

—**Bay of Plenty, grandparents as caregivers, female**

While it is possible to supplement some Work and Income benefits with pay from employment, some benefit recipients were unable to work because of high-need dependants, eg very young children, children with special needs, or a sick parent.

As discussed in *Focus on Families* single parents can face particular challenges in supporting their families. In addition to time and money challenges, other research has found that single parents are disproportionately likely to suffer other problems which may present obstacles in the search for labour market earnings. Butterworth (2003) studied data from an Australian survey of mental health and found that single parents had a much greater incidence of mental health problems, substance abuse and prior exposure to violence.

In New Zealand, spending on services for single parents is low in comparison with benefit payments, whereas services have the greater share[22] in some Scandinavian countries.

Employment conditions can also impact on a family's income. A lack of paid employment, low wage rates or an inability to obtain the desired number of hours' work per week, can have negative impacts on a family's living standards.

parenting and childcare

As discussed in Chapter 3, the costs of childcare commonly affected respondents' decisions about returning to paid employment. Many respondents – both those eligible for financial support from the government and those not eligible – considered the costs of childcare to be high. For couple families, having both parents work to minimise the fall in living standards was only viable when earnings were sufficient to cover childcare costs.

"Mother forced to go back to work for financial reasons. Part-time is not enough, it all goes towards childcare, so must be full-time while they are young."
—**Bay of Plenty, step/blended household, male**

education costs

As children mature into school-aged years there is increasing pressure on financial resources to supply them with educational and leisure equipment, and possibly membership fees and donations. Where parents are struggling to make ends meet the additional costs associated with school and sporting activities are considered to be a real burden.

"We have to cope with money problems every week, there is always $2-5 needed at school most weeks, the embarrassment of not having it when needed."
—**Christchurch, single-parent household, female**

Parents who were trying to save often mentioned student loans as a challenge or a source of worry for the future.

"Trying to save to buy a house. My student loan has just passed my husband's: his is going down because he's earning money, mine just keeps getting bigger because I'm not. Or not much. New baby on the way."
—**Waikato, two-parent household, female**

22   Seminar presentation by Mark Pearson, Head of Social Policy Division, OECD, *The Role of Social Policy in Boosting New Zealand's Productivity* sponsored by the Institute of Policy Studies, School of Government and the Family Centre Social Policy Research Unit, Victoria University, Wellington, 8 December 2005.

As this section has demonstrated, families tend to experience a wide range of financial pressures. Suggestions as to how these pressures could be resolved are discussed below.

4.3   WHAT WOULD MAKE FAMILY LIFE BETTER

In discussing what would make things better, respondents overwhelmingly suggested that having more money or being free from financial stress would improve family life. Respondents described a range of strategies for improving their financial situations ranging from working more, working in better paying jobs, careful budgeting, going without and moving to lower-cost areas. As we have heard, however, often these strategies came at a cost. In addition to steps that families were able to take themselves, they also nominated a number of ways in which communities, government and society could help them to overcome financial challenges.

income support and childcare provisions

Parents who were living on income support payments such as the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) suggested these payments could be increased in order to cover the essentials.

"An increase in family support and also make the limit with working higher. An increase to keep in touch with inflation and allow for replacement of furniture."
—**Christchurch, single-parent household, female**

Some respondents wanted Work and Income to treat beneficiaries with more respect and to tailor assistance programmes to fit the circumstances of individual families.

"WINZ and Inland Revenue are very much an authority of their own and are hard nosed about it. They put everyone in the same basket and they are not. WINZ need to learn better public relations especially IF a family needs to gain support for a short time. Not treat them as criminals."
—**Auckland, single-parent household, female**

Ellwood (2003) has suggested that the way a policy is administered may be just as important as the outcomes of the policy itself.

A number of respondents, who do not currently receive income support, suggested that government-subsidised training would help them to enter the workforce. Subsidies given to groups on even lower incomes, eg single parents on the DPB, elicited some envy and resentment.

"Courses helping mothers return to work. Normally you have to be on a benefit to get any help."
—**Region unknown, two-parent household, female**

"What I would like to see is a government subsidy of tertiary fees, so stay-at-home mothers can study and re-prepare themselves for entry into the workplace once the children are old enough… Perhaps the government could be a bit more forthcoming and review applications individually – not disregard them based on that year's trust tax return."
—**Wanganui, two-parent household, female**

Some respondents suggested that there should be more incentive for former beneficiaries to commence work. Those families who had moved off the benefit to low wage employment did not necessarily find themselves any better off, particularly when the additional costs of work (travel, clothing etc), and the loss of fringe benefits, such as the community services card, were taken into account.

"Policy change to allow a period of adjustment between being a beneficiary to having an income which takes into account the amount of debt you bring into your new situation."
—**Northland, two-parent household, female**

"The move from the benefit to full-time employment being $1,000 over the threshold for the community services card. […] we were not informed when we came off the benefit what support there was for us. We made a decision for [my] husband to take a job that would be $50 less than we were receiving on the benefit and he had to travel. Better support [is needed] for non-beneficiaries who are still in the low income bracket."
—**Waikato, two-parent household, female**

Respondents often mentioned access to good quality, affordable and flexible childcare as a prerequisite for mothers moving into the workforce. (Refer also to Chapter 3: Time.)

"Daycare charges are SOOO high, surely there is some way to help out in this department, staying home is just not an option for a lot of people who cannot afford to live on one income."
—**Auckland, family type unknown, female**

"The ability to afford to send the children to school holiday programmes at a reasonable cost. With three children at $125.00 per week per child is far beyond our reach. The subsidy does not apply in our household – we still can't afford it."
—**Nelson Bays, two-parent household, female**

Many single-income families felt that the government should provide them with assistance to meet the additional costs of children incurred at a time when one income had been sacrificed to enable one parent to be a full-time carer.

It should be noted that there have been recent developments in government policies to address the costs of childcare, which were only partially in place at the time of the consultation. Since October 2004, Working for Families[23] has progressively introduced increased childcare assistance subsidies and thresholds for families. In addition, the Ministry of Education's *Pathways to the Future* strategy will provide up to 20 hours of free childcare per week for three- and four-year-olds who attend recognised childhood education services, available from 1 July 2007. It is anticipated that these developments may address some of the challenges and suggestions regarding childcare costs raised by consultation participants.

tax concessions

Some families not eligible for government benefit assistance felt less fortunate than those who currently received it. These people felt entitled to more tax relief or other forms of assistance for families with children.

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[23] Working for Families is a joint package introduced by the Ministry of Social Development and the Department of Inland Revenue. It was first announced in the 2004 Budget.

"[…] we are now in a position where we earn so much money (on paper) that we do not qualify for assistance – the government does not take into account our personal circumstances or the amount of debt we brought into our new 'income' bracket."
—**Northland, two-parent household, female**

"It is demoralising seeing people on benefits with the newest, flashest clothes and pushchairs etc, out on the town and having takeaways when we are seen in the eyes of the government as 'well off' when we are the ones using hand me downs and cast offs and who consider having takeaways maybe once every three months a luxury! When you see the amount of tax we pay and when a good chunk of it goes, it is quite annoying not to mention unfair. We just keep on working and paying taxes to support the so called needy while getting by on bugger all. Bitter and twisted? You bet!"
—**Wanganui, two-parent household, female**

Many submissions from couple families, where one partner was in paid employment and the other was a full-time parent, suggested that the value of parents providing full-time care for children should be acknowledged through the tax system. Specific suggestions included tax concessions for a dependent spouse and/or children, or for 'income splitting' between partners for tax purposes. The latter proposal is based on the idea that better equity in taxation would be achieved by taxing income shared amongst dependants in a family unit.

"Recognition of a stay-at-home mum's importance through income sharing for tax purposes. […] tax split for couples would free up the money. Access to help/support. And ease of finding information. The only family type not supported in NZ is the single income 2 parent household."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, male**

Many respondents from dual-income families said that their situation would be improved by lowering overall tax rates and/or subsidising family necessities; childcare, insurance, superannuation and fresh food were all mentioned.

"Paying less tax or being able to get a childcare subsidy so that we are rewarded for both working instead of penalised and forced to pay for others who don't work as hard or at all."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

"Tax relief – take into account family circumstances."
—**Northland, two-parent household, female**

housing

Many of the respondents who highlighted concerns about housing costs felt their family life could be enhanced if they did not have to dedicate such a large percentage of their total income to housing, if they could rent better quality or larger accommodation, or if they could live in a better quality area.

"If we could afford a house to rent rather than flatting. […] living in a flat rather than our own space restricts my daughter's ability to be herself and our own family from developing as a family unit."
—**Auckland, single-parent household, female**

Housing was a particular issue for Pacific families, many of whom lived in extended family situations. This need was likely to be reinforced by the fact that these families were much more likely to experience low wages or unemployment than other ethnicities (Ministry of Social Development 2005).

"A better house enough for large families… Not enough residence or state house for the families especially enough rooms for large family like I have."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

The idea of home ownership played a particularly important role for migrants seeking to establish themselves and achieve financial security in a new country.

"Owning our own house (and having a space for each child) is a dream for all members of our family. Home for us as a migrant family brings security to us. I wish that we can have a home!"
—**Christchurch, extended family unit, female**

"Owning our own home would be huge. It would allow us to maintain our living space with pride, and to be able to see where our money is going to would mean we wouldn't resent it disappearing so quickly!"
—**Taranaki, two-parent household, female**

The quality of the neighbourhood and community facilities formed part of the judgements respondents made about the adequacy of housing.

"Living in a nice community where we feel safe. Good local school."
—**Hawke's Bay, two-parent household, female**

A group of respondents expressed concern about the perception of the growing incidence of crime in some communities. They placed value on having a safe and clean environment which they felt contributed to good living standards for families. Some called for the government to accord greater priority to crime control.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, one of the changes introduced through the Working for Families package was an increase in the Accommodation Supplement which applies both to those renting houses and those paying mortgages. This applies equally to families whose income is provided by benefits. The benefits of this change to policy would not yet have been experienced by families at the time they made submissions in this consultation exercise.

4.4 SUMMARY

Money/finance was rarely mentioned as a factor that directly enhanced family wellbeing, suggesting that respondents believe being a 'good' family is about more than just having money. A lack of money, however, was by far the most commonly mentioned challenge, contributing to numerous problems for families.

It is of interest that while findings concerning money challenges were often discussed in the *Focus on Families* research, they were even more commonly discussed by respondents to the consultation. This may reflect the opportunity for freer, franker disclosures of information by way of an anonymous submission than was available to focus group participants. When both pieces of work are considered, the importance of money to family life is clear, suggesting that assisting families to overcome these challenges is of key importance.

Access to money and good living standards depend on a range of factors both internal and external to the family. A person's own skills, abilities and values have an influence on whether or not they are in paid employment, the type of job they have and the level of pay, and how they budget family income. Suggestions by respondents for ways in which families themselves can improve their income and living standards included choosing to move to lower-cost areas, taking up higher-paid employment (often resulting in spending less time with families), retraining, and improving budgeting and life-skills through adult education.

Respondents identified that a lack of money was largely caused by factors outside of the family – insufficient income, too much taxation, insufficient assistance for families in the form of government payments, and high living costs. These causes were largely consistent across families of all sizes, ethnicities and incomes, and were not the reserve of the lowest income groups. It is apparent from living standards studies, however, that some groups experience greater financial challenges than others – particularly single-parent families, those living on state benefits, those living in rental housing, and families where at least one member belongs to an ethnic minority (Krishnan, Jensen, Ballantyne 2002).

Correspondingly, the key solutions proposed by respondents to their money problems (summarised below) come from outside the family, from government and other policies and programmes. First, however, it is necessary to point out again that the Government's Working for Families package will not come into full effect until 2007 and may have some impact on some of these money problems. The respondents either stated directly or implied that:

> The benefit levels should be raised and benefit recipients should be treated more respectfully by government officials.

> There should be a transitional period when people come off the benefit so that families do not continue to be financially crippled by high debts incurred while on the benefit.

> More subsidised training should be provided to prepare mothers or other unemployed persons to return to the workforce.

> There should be better tax breaks for low-income families with children.

> Policies should be more flexible so that the individual circumstances of families can be taken into account when considering family financial assistance.

> More affordable, flexible, quality childcare should be provided to assist families where the parent(s) work.

> There should be more financial assistance to enable families to own their own home, and more state houses which cater to larger families should be provided.

5.   relationships and parenting

In *Focus on Families*, research participants defined successful families as those which could cope with challenges, had positive parenting skills and strong communication between family members. They described parenting as a rewarding, if challenging, task. They thought most parents needed parenting advice at one point or another, and suggested that seeking this advice should be considered normal rather than embarrassing. They also noted that current parenting advice and its availability could be improved.

Relationships and parenting were also important to people who responded to the consultation, with 54.8 percent of all respondents making reference to these issues within their submissions. This included reference to the quality of relationships, support offered by relationships, parenting style, and childcare issues.

This chapter explores consultation respondents' views about how relationships and parenting can contribute positively to family life; the types of relationship and parenting challenges facing families; and respondents' suggestions about how relationships and parenting may be enhanced. It should be noted that childcare is touched on briefly in this chapter, and is dealt with in more detail in Chapter 3: Time, and Chapter 4: Money and living standards.

5.1   WHAT MAKES FAMILY LIFE GOOD

Respondents identified the quality of relationships between family members and between family members and their extended family and good friends, as an important factor in what made family life good. Relationship quality was described in various forms: as the love and support of a partner or other family member; as good communication with a partner or child; as a "strong relationship", or as the respectful way that family members treated each other.

"That we respect one another, that we can trust, love and share. That we can have an opinion about something and still value another member of the family's opinion as well. Awareness about each member of the family's personality, their achievements, goals and aspirations. Knowing the boundaries, so as not to hurt one another. And knowing the means in which to heal the hurt that sometimes happens. Encouragement and support when needed or not. Appreciation of the gifts, talents and skills that each of us contribute to the family life. Having a kind ear or shoulder to lean on. Creating a positive atmosphere around the home and social areas of family life. Asking for help and offering unconditional assistance. Honesty in everything we do. Clear and non-threatening communication. An understanding of the consequences should we stray from our goals etc. A natural and involved sense of belonging to the family."
—**Wanganui, single-parent household, male**

"Mutual respect of one another's ideas, opinions and views. Family time together sharing over a meal with laughter and friendship. Knowing when trouble strikes family will always be there for you. Being there for each other to celebrate the highs in our lives. Family should be a place of strength and security."
—**Christchurch, two-parent household, female**

Respondents frequently described an ideal family environment being characterised by "love" or "aroha".

"Having someone to love you and be happy about all your achievements. Having a family to love."
—**Auckland, family type unknown, female**

Some respondents had themselves come from troubled backgrounds. Having experienced these difficulties, they had consciously chosen to alter their approach to life, in order to improve the quality of their family life, and to provide the right environment for their children.

"We stand strong to our beliefs – boundaries, discipline and consistency. We choose to hold to these values even though we both, the parents, have come from rough childhoods. We made the choice not to have a rerun with our children. We want far better for them than we had!"
—**Northland, two-parent household, female**

A substantial group of respondents from both couple and single-parent families felt that ideally one parent should be at home with children. Some maintained this arrangement only during pre-school years; others opted for a model of the family in which the mother remained out of the workforce until the children left home or indefinitely. These families attached great importance to the idea that children should be raised by their own parents (refer also to Chapter 3: Time and Chapter 4: Money and living standards).

5.2 RELATIONSHIPS AND PARENTING CHALLENGES

Respondents reported that they had faced a wide range of challenges in terms of their family relationships and/or their role as parents. Sometimes these related to the breakdown of the relationship and to dealing with the subsequent stresses of separation and divorce; some families had been affected by traumatic events such as the death of a partner or child. Parenting challenges – especially the life changes involved in the birth of a first child and in parenting teenagers – were consistently referred to as testing times for caregivers.

relationship challenges

Respondents who reported long periods of relationship difficulty commonly suggested that conflict was caused by a breakdown of communication and/or lack of trust. Ongoing conflict between family members could be both stressful and difficult to resolve. One respondent described an earlier relationship in the following way:

"Selfishness, judgemental, critical, bossy, abuse toward spouse or offspring. Lies, infidelity, no hugs, anger, […] profanity (swearing), shift of role model responsibilities to siblings or grandparents. […] lack of trust/interest, hostile: name calling, defensive, control of money, emotional checkouts/withdrawals, didn't communicate, disrespect, unsupportive, demanding."
—**Wellington, two-parent household, female**

In some cases the disagreements were between extended family members rather than between partners.

Abuse and violence were mentioned by some respondents as major challenges they had faced within their family. In a number of these instances this was associated with drug and alcohol abuse. As noted in a recent Families Commission report on family violence, each year police deal with more than 45,000 calls relating to family violence, involving more than 200,000 people (Fanslow 2005:34). At least in one instance, the abusive behaviour was linked by the respondent to negative effects on a family member's health.

"Domestic violence – from alcohol or from money matters and other issues."
—**Auckland, step/blended household, male**

"We faced father becoming so stressed that he became uncontrollable in his anger and frightened us badly. We have faced health issues as a result of his unmanaged stress, eg mother had a stroke at 40. […] Our family has been parted with divorce after 3 years of help for father didn't help, because his stresses remained the same."
—**Region unknown, two-parent household, female**

Respondents cited divorce and separation as events that had presented challenges to their families. Separation/divorce was seen as stressful for the separating partners themselves through the loss of the relationship, and was associated with other stresses such as those caused by separation from one's children. Dealing with the emotional impact on children could also be stressful, particularly where family members needed

to adjust to large changes in material circumstances. Adult family members can find it difficult to work co-operatively with ex-partners in relation to property and ongoing parenting matters (including day-to-day care and contact arrangements).

"Divorce, separation from the children. Having to find everything needed for a household from scratch with limited funds. Paying child support."
—**Christchurch, step/blended household, male**

Some young respondents also referred to the impact their parents' separation had on them.

"Having half the family staying in one house and the other half in another house. I made a choice of staying with my dad, because we had this good bonding going on and we still do."
—**Wanganui, child living with his dad, male**

Blended families reported facing their own relationship challenges. A new family identity was not easy to establish with the legacy of the two previous families becoming part of the new family. In some cases the issues were within the new family, in others the difficulties related to an ex-partner or to in-laws.

"Blended family issues – step-children who reject step-parents, and step-parents who reject step-children. Unsupportive and prejudiced in-laws. Lack of mutual commitment to our marriage at times."
—**Auckland, step/blended household, female**

"Trying to merge blended families, eg include step-daughter into family, but her mother makes this very difficult."
—**Auckland, step/blended household, female**

"I feel at times that she hates me, […] I know she would rather be with her mother than here… But yes if I could sort this out, with her and I, this would really improve our family life considerably as the tension would no longer be there, and I wouldn't feel like she only does what I tell her be'cos her dad told her too."
—**Christchurch, step/blended household, female**

The Family Court was seen by some respondents as adding to the challenges that separated family members faced. Both parents and children can emerge from the court processes with negative feelings.

"Not having enough money and Family Court. Talking to people from the Family Court."
—**Bay of Plenty, single-parent household, female**

"The Family Court system, which does not impose deadlines on people because of the nature of what they deal with, however, these delays can have a devastating effect on the children."
—**Auckland, step/blended household, female**

A new option of family mediation is currently being trialled, which should reduce appearances in the Family Court and assist families to overcome challenges such as those mentioned by respondents.

Respondents reported a number of other relationship challenges or stresses. In particular, the death or imprisonment of a parent, partner or child can have long-term consequences for the family and impact on all aspects of a family's life.

"Family bereavement and grief when our son died five years ago and then the aftermath of trying to deal with it as a family. Money problems which are on-going because our business suffered while we grieved."

—Auckland, two-parent household, female

"I have unexpectedly become a solo mother due to the imprisonment of my partner and father of all the children. It is a very hard road and not only for myself but for all the children. This is the first time we have had family members apart from us and it has been very trialling emotionally and mentally for the teenagers… Not having Dad around is very difficult – he was the head for a long time – working and bringing home the bacon – communicating with all the children especially teenage boys. Challenge for me is trying to keep the finances coming in, keeping all children on track. Being Mum and Dad, keeping family spirits alive."

—Waikato, single-parent household, female

parenting challenges

Parenting also presented challenges for some respondents. This was particularly so around the time of the birth of a first child and later in dealing with teenage children. They also referred to children with special needs (refer also to Chapter 7: Health and environment), differences of opinion about parenting, dealing with behavioural problems if they do develop, peer group influences of older children, and parenting stepchildren. Not all women felt well-prepared for childbirth and the demands on them as mothers.

"Birth of our first child – learning to operate on a new timetable and care for this newborn."

—Auckland, two-parent household, male

"Trying to stay healthy and giving my child the time he needs as well as running a business (staff, stress, long hours) etc and being a professional actually doing the work, ie doing 3 full-time jobs – business, professional and mother during pregnancy and first 2 years of baby's life… Sold my very successful business because I refused to have baby in full-time daycare and all the enormous stress of getting him there, disruption of routines, everyday stuff like shopping, cleaning etc. I just burnt-out badly as I was expected to keep on at the usual frenetic rate right after a 40 hour labour and caesarean and new baby."

—Wellington, two-parent household, female

Sometimes disagreements about parenting styles can place pressure on the relationship between parents.

"Learning to live together was very challenging. It would certainly be easier in many ways to live alone but we have agreed that we are a family. My partner and I also face relationship challenges, being from very different cultures and having had very different lives we have different ideas about what is appropriate for our daughter sometimes (in terms of managing her behaviour and letting her eat things) and we argue about this."

—Auckland, two-parent household, female

Communication problems with teenage children were recognised as placing pressure on family harmony and relationships.

"Enough time to spend together, teenagers are very bad communicators and it is only time and commitment that gets them to open up. [...] Teenagers are a challenge in a two-parent family, a single parent makes the disciplining (probably the most difficult area) heartbreaking at times."
—Christchurch, single-parent household, female

Teenagers look increasingly to influences beyond the family circle. Outside influences on teenagers were a source of concern to some respondents.

"To help your children make good decision[s] about the choices they make in their life. Knowing that as they get older, your input decreases and teenagers look to friends, media, image, while they try and understand for themselves, who they are."
—Auckland, two-parent household, female

Some parents felt that not being able to spend enough time with their children, and employment and financial pressures, could result in relationship and parenting problems. These challenges are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3: Time and Chapter 4: Money and living standards.

5.3   WHAT WOULD MAKE FAMILY LIFE BETTER

Good communication and respectful behaviour were often mentioned as central to ensuring good family relationships.

"We have to communicate with each other. If we can't communicate with each other properly, it can cause problems, and relationships can flourish with communication. We also believe in good manners, respect and discipline."
—Timaru, two-parent household, female

A number of respondents felt that good quality parenting courses would improve the quality of family life – particularly for new parents, and parents of teenagers. Some considered that these needed to be available to all parents.

"Programmes like 'Family Start' courses – hands on – for looking after a baby, not just aimed at uneducated mums but at professional women who also need help. That may sound odd, but the language and style is different for different levels of education and experience. I know other mothers in similar situations have been 'turned off' by the delivery of information."
—Auckland, single-parent household, female

"A nationwide parenting course with follow up for families with children up to the teenage years."
—Region unknown, single parent living with extended family, female

Suggestions for enhancing relationships and parenting included being able to spend more time with the children and reduction of parental stress, through more flexible childcare arrangements, working conditions and/or enhanced income (refer to Chapter 3: Time and Chapter 4: Money and living standards).

Other suggestions included increased availability of stress management courses for adults, and inclusion of more work on relationships and respect for others in the school curriculum.

5.4 SUMMARY

In common with earlier research participants (see *Focus on Families*), consultation respondents frequently mentioned the importance of good family relationships, including parenting of children, as the core of what makes family life good. They emphasised the importance of good communication and parenting skills as effective contributors to family relationships.

Not surprisingly, many respondents described difficulties in attaining ideal family relationships. Some families experienced difficulty with selfish, dictatorial or violent behaviour by one of their family members. Other respondents talked about the difficulties of relationships within blended families or between members of separated families. Parenting brings its own pressures. Some respondents felt unprepared for their first child, and for the associated lifestyle changes. Problems in dealing with teenagers were mentioned by a number of respondents, as were relationship difficulties between parents caused by disagreements over parenting.

Underlying some of these issues may be a lack of knowledge or skill in managing family relationships (including a lack of parenting skills) and isolation from family support networks (discussed more in Chapter 6: Family and community support).

The most common suggestion from respondents for ways of improving family life in regard to relationships and parenting was for families themselves to work on aspects of family functioning, such as communication and respectful behaviour. In order to be able to do so, however, often external support may be required (for which families need to be willing to access).

Some respondents suggested that there should be wider availability of external support through good quality and accessible courses on parenting, relationships, life-skills (budgeting, cooking, childcare) and stress management. These suggestions were also made, somewhat more emphatically, by earlier focus group research participants (Stevens et al 2005). This finding is reinforced by the Families Commission's recent *Review of Parenting Programmes* which concluded that "an overall strategy for supporting all parents in their parenting role needs to be developed" (Kerslake-Hendricks & Balakrishnan 2005:iv).

Further analysis of the relationship support and services currently available to families is required in order to make specific recommendations on how improvements can be made.

6. family and community support

In *Focus on Families* we reported that families needed good quality support networks to help them achieve good outcomes. Our research participants told us their first port of call for support was usually their own family, but that friends, neighbours and communities could also be important sources of support. We also reported that outcomes for families were enhanced where neighbourhoods were stable and had adequate resources. Research participants suggested improvements could be made to the availability of parenting and budget services and advice, and to the range and cost of recreational activities available to children and families locally.

The importance of good support was reinforced by consultation respondents with 75.9 percent mentioning family and community support issues, usually in the context of things which would help make family life better.

This chapter explores consultation respondents' feedback, examining their views on how family and community support can contribute positively to family life, the challenges in accessing family and community support, or problems caused by such support, and their suggestions about how family and community support may be enhanced.

6.1 WHAT MAKES FAMILY LIFE GOOD

The support of family, friends, communities and community groups is of great importance to family life, and the submissions clearly reinforced this notion. Support networks as identified by participants were the second most frequently mentioned contributor to good family life.

Respondents identified different forms of support including: encouragement or help from immediate and extended family (particularly grandparents); the strength of the relationship between parents; the encouragement and assistance of close friends; and the help provided by government and by community and religious organisations. 'Support' also included strong relationships, feeling loved, help with household chores and being part of the community.

For some families, support was the backstop which saved a family unit when it hit a crisis point, while for others it was more about good communication and the assurance that family members would stick by each other and step in to provide material assistance when necessary.

Members of respondents' immediate family were most commonly identified as providing emotional, practical and financial support to their family. Respondents identified the love and support of parents who themselves have a strong relationship as the basis for a rewarding family environment.

"Having great grandparents and parents to support me when I have trouble. Having mum and dad as really good teachers."
—**Auckland, nine-year-old child from two-parent household, female**

"Our great love for one another. Our support for each other. The fact that our place is a safe place. The fact that we are each other's friends. The time we spend together and the memories we make each day."
—**Wellington, family type unknown, female**

Submissions from many mothers indicated that they were particularly appreciative of partners who provided support by sharing the housework and care of children.

"Having a partner who realises how hard it is to raise a child – who is able to give me a break when I need it."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

Getting children to share in household tasks spread the burden, and helped them learn valuable skills.

"Getting our children to help with small jobs and chores, making themselves feel useful and needed."
—**Taranaki, two-parent household, male**

Many respondents of all ages and ethnicities placed a very high value on having extended family members as a resource in times of need. Extended family not only provided physical and practical support, but could be a source of encouragement, strength and wisdom.

"Importance of how our Samoan extended family can work in the NZ palangi society… [the] health of aging parents 77 and 81 yrs old…can be [a] strain on us children as we're all working, eg Dr appts, check-ups and hospital and taking them shopping. When a family member has been in trouble with the Police. A young

nephew has had to be taken into care and custody of Child Youth and Family...
Childcare for my grandchildren (school age) when parents are both working... To stay
in the same area as my parents and other brothers and sisters. I like to be close to
them all."

—**Wellington, step/blended household, female**

The findings of the consultation in this respect were very similar to the findings within
the focus group study *Focus on Families*. Young parents with children under five years,
who were struggling to amass enough income for big ticket items, frequently relied on
extended family for material assistance.

"We found it impossible to save enough money to buy a home for ourselves, between
daycare, rent, food etc there is not enough left to save, in the end we went into a
house with my parents and all own and live in it together, this was the only option
for us if we didn't want to rent for the rest of our lives."

—**Auckland, family type unknown, female**

Support across generations was particularly important to grandparents who wanted
to share their experience and wisdom.

"Our opportunity to support and encourage our children and grandchildren. It is
important that 'family' is read to be inclusive of the wider generic family across
the generations. We need to support and be there for each other through the whole
life process. Families are not about one set of adult and children alone but the full
dynamic of relationships where belief[s] and values are valued."

—**Manawatu, grandparents, male**

For many Māori respondents, the role of extended family was particularly significant for
the wellbeing and sustainability of whānau, hapū and iwi, in terms of providing support,
sharing resources and nurturing children.

"That more than the parents are involved in the raising of children – for us this
means aunties, uncles and grandparents."

—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

People who do not have family support readily available commented that friends
provided an alternative form of support.

"We draw upon a circle of close friends (also mostly ex-pats) for mutual support
– no family on hand."

—**Wellington, two-parent household, female**

Many of the respondents, particularly Pacific families, valued the support they gained
from their church groups and from their religious beliefs.

"Through [my husband's] illness we had huge support from our church. They cooked
us meals every night. I'd come home from hospital and there would be food just left
on my doorstep."

—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

Many families appreciated assistance from government and other community
organisations by way of financial or material assistance, healthcare, social support
(with housing, counselling) and parenting information.

"Support from family. Support and information from organisations such as Parents
Centre and Plunket."

—**Christchurch, two-parent household, female**

6.2 CHALLENGES TO FAMILY SUPPORT

The key challenges participants identified regarding support networks were a lack of access to such networks (predominantly because of distance from family and/or other networks), and pressures that these networks themselves could sometimes place on families.

Most parents need back-up when emergencies (such as a sick child, or an urgent need to work late) make it hard for them to meet the demands of work and family. Lack of networks to provide this back-up can be frustrating and stressful.

"Single parents seem to have a hard road though. My daughter would also benefit from a closer network of family support people and my family being a lot kinder and attentive, and her dad's family… my family live far away and my daughter's dad's family are all stressed too."
—**Auckland, single-parent household, female**

Where grandparents also work, they are not available to provide support through caring for children.

"Now we struggle with having quality time as a family due to the fact that my husband now works 70+ hours a week. As my parents and his parents work, we find that we have to press on with little and at times no support. We have come to accept that the only ones we can rely on are ourselves, and at times that is HUGE pressure."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

Distance from extended family also removes a potential source of support.

"Separation by physical distance from family support from close relatives."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, male**

Rural areas are likely to have fewer support services available for families, and accessing these services can also be problematic.

"Living in a rural area with no access to basic necessities. We are intending to build our own home on our family land. Not being able to afford a vehicle that we can all fit in."
—**Northland, two-parent household, female**

Respondents who had immigrated to New Zealand described particular challenges to accessing support. Because some lacked 'natural' support networks – their own family and communities – they needed to locate support from outside. Cultural, language and financial barriers can make accessing such support challenging, and isolation can result.

"We have faced the difficult challenge of leaving our native South Africa in 1998 and moving to NZ for a better life for the kids, as well as a safer lifestyle for us all… Emigrating is a huge emotional and financial challenge, and having to accept a lower standard of living while getting established; every aspect of life is affected by such a move."
—**Waikato, two-parent household, male**

"Emigrating was a huge challenge faced by us as a family. It still challenges us now. We found the welcome by New Zealanders to be a lot cooler than we expected… [My husband's] past work experience was not valued or wanted and he was told this. This put immense strain on the family. Especially financial, we planned the move well but when you are promised one wage and given another there is not much you

can do… Even after $2^{1/2}$ yrs I still feel we are just tolerated by NZers. The feeling of not belonging here does not seem to be diminishing."
—Christchurch, two-parent household, female

While immigration services do exist in New Zealand, there was some concern about the extent to which these adequately prepare immigrants for life in New Zealand.

Sometimes those networks which offer families support also have expectations which families may find hard to meet. Some Pacific respondents said that obligations to extended family placed pressures on them.

"Other family responsibilities, eg finances to help out with issues happening in Samoa – funerals."
—Wellington, single-parent household, female

Similarly, and as noted in the *Focus on Families* research, 'tithing' (contribution of one-tenth of income to the church) can place financial pressures on families who follow this practice.

While obligations to extended family and church can cause pressures, respondents did not necessarily perceive these pressures as negative to family life, rather they accepted them as part and parcel of their family or cultural practices which ultimately enhanced family life.

6.3 WHAT WOULD MAKE FAMILY LIFE BETTER

Respondents identified a number of ways in which their support networks could be enhanced. Suggestions regarding improvements to health and education support networks are discussed in Chapters 7 and 8 of this report.

Participants suggested ways in which family members could better support their family emotionally, financially and practically. Many of the suggestions which expressed a desire for more support from partners or children came from mothers.

"If we all co-operated and did our part, eg help with chores."
—Auckland, single-parent household, female

The need to have boys participate in household chores from an early age was a way of preparing the next generation for a more active role in the home.

"Chores for the boys – they need to learn the value of work from an early age."
—Waikato, two-parent household, female

As well as ensuring that no particular member ended up carrying an unfair burden, some saw sharing responsibilities within families as a unifying influence through working toward a common purpose.

As discussed above, community organisations such as Plunket were highly valued but many respondents suggested that these organisations need additional resources, especially at a time when community volunteers are harder to find.

"More Plunket availability to all levels of socio-economic groups would be good – this seems to be getting cut back and more centralised. Children are our wealth."
—Christchurch, two-parent household, female

Several respondents who had migrated to New Zealand felt that the government and employers could do more to ease their transition into a new country.

"Greater support in places of employment for immigrants, eg workshops. Flexibility to employ foreigners. Create awareness of assistance and products available to assist in the settling in a new country, ie IRD, Work and Income and other agencies, so that the transition to a new way of life would not have an adverse effect on the family."
—**Auckland, two-parent family, female**

Some respondents, particularly from single-parent and low-income families, suggested that their access to local sports and leisure activities and services could be enhanced, particularly that the costs of these activities could be reduced.

"More free activities for children, ie sports teams etc for children to be able to participate in to create healthier more proactive children. It is not easy for your child to sit out a soccer season with his mates because fees are just not in the budget!"
—**Wellington, single-parent household, female**

"Support for a wider range of activities, eg assistance to pay coach fees, buy uniforms or sports equipment, to help get children to activities – these should not be seen as a luxury but should be available to all Kiwi children."
—**Christchurch, two-parent household, male**

Many families wanted more done to ensure continued access to the natural environment – a low-cost way of providing quality time together for all members.

"I would like to see more being done to preserve our Kiwi way of life (ie don't take away our parks, beaches and camping grounds, families need them)."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

Local and regional councils and agencies may have a role in developing and funding such activities.

6.4   SUMMARY

The support of family, friends, communities and community groups is of great importance to family life, a notion clearly reinforced both by consultation respondents and our earlier focus group research findings (Stevens et al 2005). Many groups of respondents felt that turning to their friends and community support networks helped them to overcome challenges to family life.

Also consistent with earlier research findings, some respondents suggested more support should be offered to community groups which offered parenting services and advice and local recreational activities for children and families.

While only a minority of respondents viewed a lack of support as a challenge to their family, this group included single-parent families and migrants to New Zealand, suggesting isolation for these groups is a concern. While in some cases families themselves can make a difference (for example moving closer to family or other support), in other cases this is not feasible. In such instances, it may be up to communities and community groups to make efforts to engage with isolated families, which in turn may require encouragement and support from government. Further analysis is required of the level of support and encouragement provided by government for community groups to undertake such work.

7. health and environment

The importance of good family health and research participants' concerns about health issues, were discussed to a limited extent in *Focus on Families.* Some research participants reported experiences of family ill-health (physical, mental, learning difficulties or addictions to gambling, alcohol or drugs) affecting caregivers and/or children, and consequently the family unit. The cost of visits to doctors, nurses, dentists and optometrists was considered a major barrier, particularly for those on low or moderate incomes, and in some cases medical visits were put off because of cost. There was widespread support for free or heavily subsidised healthcare for children beyond the age of six and ideally up until they left school. Other concerns included decreasing support services for new mothers, hospital waiting lists and lack of services in rural areas.

Consultation respondents placed even more emphasis on health, with 55.5 percent of all respondents talking about health matters within their submissions.

This chapter explores how health and health services can contribute positively to family life; health challenges that families may experience; and respondents' suggestions about how family health may be enhanced.

7.1 WHAT MAKES FAMILY LIFE GOOD

In this chapter we have used the category 'health' to cover an array of medical services and personal health issues that were highlighted in the submissions. In a similar manner to the *Focus on Families* findings, appropriate, affordable, high-quality health services were regarded as important for family wellbeing. In addition, respondents mentioned awareness of personal health issues, such as a balanced diet and regular exercise, as factors that enhanced family quality.

Some respondents stressed the achievement of health and wellbeing of individual members as fundamental to their vision of a good family and a good family life. Seeing children grow and develop into healthy, happy and responsible individuals with a positive future, eating nourishing food, and keeping fit through regular exercise, were commonly mentioned aspirations. Many respondents saw ready access – geographic and financial – to medical and dental services as an important contribution to the enjoyment of good health.

Government-subsidised healthcare for children under the age of six made an important contribution to the realisation of desired health standards. For many parents the satisfaction came from knowing that they could take their children to the doctor or medical centre if needed, without having to worry about the cost or where they would find the money.

"I am able to take my sick kids to the GP whenever I think they are not well without regrets. Plunket has been a huge emotional and intellectual support with my kids health."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

Many families with babies and toddlers appreciated assistance from government and other community organisations with healthcare and parenting information. Organisations such as Plunket and Parents Centre not only assisted with health requirements and monitoring, they also supported parents during the years when the child was at its most dependent.

"[I would like to see] home help to all new mothers (govt funded) also parenting classes, Plunket funded help in those critical first two years as this is when the blueprints of a life are laid down."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

"The health subsidy set up by the PHO[24] has reduced the cost of doctor's visits not only for my children but for my partner and myself."
—**Region unknown, mother of one pre-schooler, female**

7.2 HEALTH CHALLENGES

While some respondents discussed health as making positive contributions to family life, they were more likely to raise health issues when they or someone within their families had experienced particular health challenges. These challenges included family illness, a lack of available services, high costs of services or a lack of knowledge about available services.

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24   PHO – Primary Health Organisation.

Some respondents considered that healthy, fresh food, sometimes also specified as organic, was an important aid to the health of their families. These respondents, however, commonly referred to this type of food as being costly, and some could not afford it.

"If food etc was cheaper. Living is very expensive and I feel that we are not as healthy as we should be because we tend to live on very cheap food which generally is not the best for you."
—**Waikato, single-parent household, female**

"Being able to afford healthy food."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

Respondents supported free or affordable healthcare as one of the 'basics' of family wellbeing. Problems with the health of family members undermine the quality of family life in several ways – they cause distress to the sufferer and to other family members, restrict quality time for other family members, and create tensions between family and other responsibilities, such as work or study.

"We nursed my grandmother in her home for three months until she passed away a week before Xmas. We are now dealing with my father being terminally ill as well (he is only 55 years). We have a few more weeks with him."
—**Waikato, two-parent household, female**

The cost of visits to doctors, dentists and other medical practitioners, especially once the children were no longer covered by government medical benefits, was seen as a major barrier to family wellbeing, especially for those on a low or medium income.

"Not being entitled to subsidies for the children – community card for medical reasons… Think twice before seeking medical assistance due to cost of medicines."
—**Nelson Bays, two-parent household, female**

"We (husband and I) absolutely cannot afford to go to the doctor's. At approximately $80 a visit with prescription we have to have been ill for days. I had tonsillitis for three days, a temp of 41 degrees and could only justify going then. It took three months to attempt to recover financially. Cheaper healthcare for Drs visits is a must – especially when I get every bug the kids get! Plus $75 for a smear test, essential… yes… affordable… no (no community services card)."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

Self-medication with traditional or complementary remedies can provide a cheaper way of responding to health problems for those who face recurrent problems on a low income.

"Health issues – I try all the rongoa and alternative medicines before taking my kids to the doctors. Except my 16 month old who is still free – I would go once a year (try not to actually)… try not to get sick or let my kids get sick."
—**Wellington, single-parent household, female**

New immigrants can lack knowledge about how to obtain medical support and the settlement services that are available to them. Where they come from a different cultural and linguistic background, these difficulties can be amplified.

"Better health services. Was shy to go to the doctor. Better education. Better living because it is cold. Not enough money – too high tax. Not enough education like speaking English. Our right as parent to discipline our children. Ashamed to talk about case for young people who commit suicide. Getting a home for our own because of so many things to pay. Pay bills and the cold. Shy to seek help."

—**Christchurch, two-parent household, female**

Mental illness of a parent or child can place intense stresses on family relationships, as the sufferer may need constant care, which is time-consuming and expensive. A few respondents felt unsupported in dealing with these stresses.

"Lack of finance caused by unrecognised (at the time) mental ill-health, relationship difficulties caused by mental ill-health, redundancy of father, resulting in inability to do the work he was trained for, geographic isolation for other members."

—**Southland, two-parent household, female**

"Mental illness of main breadwinner. The cause was firmly identified to be workplace related – coping with impossible deadlines, grossly understaffed, being the main technical support in an environment that greatly lacked skilled staff. The impact of this affected the entire family – help only available to partner though – not the rest of the family."

—**Christchurch, two-parent family, female**

Respondents who had children or dependants with special needs raised a number of issues regarding the challenges associated with their care and medical support. Many felt unable to cope without more support than was readily available from over-stretched community organisations.

"Autistic child. Lack of money. On a benefit. Sick wife need[s] constant attention. Two other children to transport around. Hard to leave wife. Spend lots on petrol taking children everywhere especially to IHC. When one of us is sick it is hard to care for children. Waiting lists for hospital too long. Need more home help. This gives a lot of stress and pressure. We struggle and don't manage these challenges well. One day at a time. What will happen with my autistic son in the future?"

—**Wellington, two-parent household, male**

"We are trying to keep our family together while struggling to meet the needs of our high needs special needs son, and trying to function as a family too. Having quality time with our daughter is important as she has her needs met secondly after those of our son. Being able to have quality time together as a family is difficult as my husband usually works 7 days a week to try and pay the bills and meet all of the extra costs we face."

—**Northland, two-parent household, female**

7.3   WHAT WOULD MAKE FAMILY LIFE BETTER

Health is an issue that affects everyone at some point, either through current sickness or reducing the risk of becoming ill in later life. Media attention and public health reports have highlighted the dangers of poor diets, reduced physical activity, inadequate protection from UV rays, and other issues such as alcohol and drug abuse.

Substantial numbers of respondents mentioned cheaper or free healthcare as something that would improve their family life.

"Health – affordable and to have urgent or lifesaving medication and services available."
—Auckland, family type unknown, female

A number of respondents mentioned that incentives for individuals to maintain their own health through 'healthy behaviour' would benefit families.

"A bonus payout for looking after our health and not participating in risk-taking activities putting less cost on the public health and ACC."
—Auckland, two-parent household, female

It should be noted that changes in health services and costs have recently been made under the Ministry of Health's Primary Healthcare Strategy (first introduced in 2001). This strategy aims to improve the health of all New Zealanders and reduce inequalities. Amongst other things it aims to "improv[e] accessibility, affordability, and appropriateness of health services" (http://www.moh.govt.nz/primaryhealthcare January 2006) and from 2003 to 2007 will progressively increase primary healthcare subsidies. The strategy also aims to place greater emphasis on health promotion and preventive healthcare, improve co-ordination and continuity of care, and improve community involvement. The extent to which the strategy addresses the concerns raised by consultation participants will not be known until after it has been fully implemented in 2007.

7.4   SUMMARY

While family health issues were raised in our earlier research (*Focus on Families*), these issues and particularly health challenges, came through more strongly in the consultation findings.

While some respondents described ways in which families themselves could improve their own health – such as eating more healthily, doing exercise and avoiding drugs and alcohol – many experienced barriers to doing so arising from outside of the family. Some families noted their health needs were undermined by the high costs of healthy food and a lack of exercise due to long working hours and caring responsibilities.

The cost of professional healthcare and necessary prescriptions was identified as a financial and emotional drain on family reserves. While families with young children received free healthcare, the cost of taking older children to the doctor became an issue especially for people with long-term or reoccurring ailments. Consistent with the comments of some of the focus group participants, some consultation respondents delayed seeking personal medical support in order to give priority to their children.

Support for subsidised healthcare, particularly for children, was widespread. Additionally, community organisations offering healthcare services such as Plunket were highly valued. Many respondents suggested that these organisations needed additional government resources in order to offer families subsidised or free healthcare services.

8.   education

In *Focus on Families*, research participants told us that education was an important component of family wellbeing and good parenting. The importance of education was expressed particularly strongly by Māori participants. Competing concerns were voiced regarding the quality of children's education, ranging from perceptions that expectations of children were too low, to the notion that excessive pressures were placed on children to achieve academically at too young an age. Migrants had specific concerns about conflicts between their own values and those observed by schools, as well as the need for adult English language training. Concerns were raised about 'voluntary' school fees, the cost of uniforms, stationery, school trips, and student loan repayments, and the pressures these costs placed on families.

Educational matters were also important to consultation respondents with 49.6 percent referring to education within their submissions.

This chapter explores consultation respondents' perspectives on how education and related services can contribute positively to family life; the education challenges that families may experience; and suggestions about how family education may be enhanced.

8.1   WHAT MAKES FAMILY LIFE GOOD

Respondents recognised the benefits that can be derived from education for both their children and themselves. For many, education is their key to the future, opening doors to better employment, income and quality of life.

"Education – having it available and accessible regardless of income or where we live."
—**Auckland, family type unknown, female**

Some parents made considerable sacrifices in the short to medium term in order to pursue further education for themselves, with the long-term goal of improving their standard of living and their family life.

"To move nine hours away from family so I can go to university and not work in a supermarket the rest of my life or rely on benefits moving so my daughter can get to know her dad."
—**Christchurch, single-parent household, female**

"I made a choice to return to university and complete a degree. This required leaving work and taking out a student loan. This was not easy as I am older and come from the freezing works… Now, I believe our family life is happier and better than before."
—**Waikato, two-parent household, male**

8.2   EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES

Some parents reported having sacrificed the pursuit of tertiary studies in order to provide good living standards for their children.

"My husband and I have chosen not to study, not to further our careers (where it would require risk), not to stay home with babies, not to travel – so that we can bring home a good regular income to support our family."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

The value of good education for children as a way of improving their life prospects was also evident in choices to live near particular schools, and in other choices to assist children's levels of educational opportunities.

"We try and look for any scholarships that would apply for education. We are trying to teach our children about the importance of a good education and a good work ethic."
—**Waikato, two-parent household, male**

Many of the respondents, however, experienced barriers to education, in particular cost and access.

"Educating our children has come at a big financial cost to us – we are unable to consider saving for retirement, afford private healthcare, holidays or other luxuries that many other families can afford. For us being able to spend our education $ on the school of our choice rather than the school down the road, would make a big difference to the stress we presently experience. We would like to be able to reduce our mortgage debt for starters."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

"The education [of our special needs child] is the major difficulty. We have almost given up. Why is it that every parent of a special needs child seems to have to end up being some political lobbyist or activist even if they don't want to be? Why is there no 'pathway' through school for children who are not suited to the mainstream – or even for kids who are?"
—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

A not uncommon complication associated with education was bullying at school. Parents whose children had experienced bullying felt that not enough was being done to address the problem. Many reported having moved the affected child to another school, sometimes at considerable cost and inconvenience.

"School bullying, this resulted in [our] child changing school – now travels 40 minutes to school – which we juggle the driving ourselves. […] though the school tried to address bullying, there was still too much concern for the bully and not enough support for the victim."
—**Christchurch, two-parent household, female**

8.3   WHAT WOULD HELP MAKE THINGS BETTER

Respondents took the education of their school-aged dependants very seriously and expected that they should be able to access a high standard of primary and secondary schooling, whether in local government or private schools. They often wanted greater flexibility in sending their children to a government school of their choice, or tax breaks to subsidise their choice of private schools.

"Having my daughter attend a good school is important. I've made many sacrifices so that my daughter could attend a private school and get an excellent basis/foundation for learning. I hope that will provide her with a good basis in future years."
—**Wellington, single-parent household, female**

As reported in *Focus on Families*, many Māori respondents emphasised the importance of education to Māori. Some Māori respondents called for better tailoring of education to meet Māori needs, and others reinforced the importance of education about te reo and Māori tikanga for Māori children and adults. This may be in response to concerns that education tailored specifically for Māori has been lacking in the past.

"Better education for Māori within mainstream systems that takes into account Māori cultural differences. Better subjects at school and intro to trade training. To complete university study as an adult to get off a benefit and fully support my family financially."
—**Northland, two-parent household, female**

"Better secondary schools that care about our kids. […] that act honourably and with respect and honesty. Improved Māori education facilities in secondary school. […] More accountability for Māori teachers."
—**Northland, single-parent household, female**

Family life was sometimes hindered by poor financial management or poor self-management. A substantial number of respondents proposed an extension of education to cover home management.

"It would be helpful to be more clued up in terms of financial wisdom – not necessarily being an accountant but having a basic understanding of being able to read and understand a balance sheet or even one's own financial statement! A lack of financial wisdom has made it difficult because poor choices have been made and this has increased our liabilities. Unwise spending, lack of discipline, living beyond ones means is all part of this scenario, and impacts on family life because one's choices are limited and even removed."

—Waikato, two-parent household, male

Issues have arisen for migrants for whom English is a second language, where previous educational opportunities may have been restricted, or where their employment qualifications were not accepted in New Zealand. In turn, employment opportunities, living standards, and the ability to interact with others and develop support networks, can be limited. For these groups, family life could be improved by educational opportunities and supportive employment.

"I believe the moment I get good accommodation and am able to communicate properly the better my family life would be and it would be better and easier for me to try."

—Wellington, single-parent household, male

8.4 SUMMARY

As was the case in our earlier research, *Focus on Families*, consultation respondents viewed education as crucially important most often for their children, and sometimes for themselves. They recognised that through education they could get higher-income employment, and thereby improve their family's living standard.

Respondents described a range of strategies they had used to enhance their own or their children's education and subsequently their future wellbeing, such as taking out a student loan or making other financial sacrifices.

Many suggested ways in which government and educational policies could better promote access to good education for all. Commonly, and in common with earlier research findings, these suggestions were about reducing the direct and associated costs of education (school and university fees, uniform costs).

Some respondents sought more flexible education policies so that they could more easily send children to the school of their choice, and others thought schools' responses to bullying of their children could be improved. Some respondents felt their access to particular adult education services could be improved, such as training to assist them into paid employment (covered in Chapter 4: Money and living standards) and financial management training. Some recent immigrants expressed a desire to improve their English language skills.

9. values, morals and beliefs

In *Focus on Families*, we reported there were similarities among the basic values our research participants considered important for families, such as trust, respect and honesty. We noted that participants frequently felt their values were not well-supported by society. For example, some families felt their cultural values and beliefs could be better respected and tolerated by society. We also found that social stereotyping, bullying and violence were a concern for a range of family types, who felt society should be better educated about diversity and more aware of prejudice and discrimination. There was reference also to discrimination within institutional policies and practices (often unintentional) against particular family types or structures.

Values, morals and beliefs were also important to consultation respondents, with 64.4 percent of respondents making reference to values and beliefs within their submissions.

This chapter explores consultation respondents' views on how 'values' can contribute positively to family life, the challenges families experience, and their suggestions about how such challenges could be overcome.

9.1 WHAT MAKES FAMILY LIFE GOOD

Values, morals and beliefs (hereafter referred to as 'values') were one of the three factors most commonly perceived as being important contributors to family life. This came across more strongly from the submissions than in the focus group study *Focus on Families*, and may reflect the interests of those people who chose to make submissions.

Individuals' values reflect the influences of both personal experiences and cultural and social values. They are central to the aspirations individuals hold and the choices they make. 'Values' were perceived as making family life good by guiding members about what behaviours were acceptable or not, and by giving them principles to live by. Many considered that 'values' enriched not only their own families but society more broadly.

valuing family and children

Responses often mentioned the importance of providing children with core values to help them understand right and wrong, a happy active childhood and opportunities for their future.

"Keeping my children happy, active and healthy. Helping us all as a family to live life to the fullest. I don't underestimate the value of culture in my children's lives so I endeavour to take them to as many musical and cultural events as possible. [...] I try to ensure that they get the right balance of recreation/exercise/fun!"
—**Auckland, step/blended household, female**

A commitment to family life was also nominated as a value which would enhance family life through ensuring persistence, loyalty and dedication to the welfare of family members.

"To have a heart for my family."
—**Gisborne, step/blended household, female**

Being able to seek help for their family without fear of being stigmatised was perceived as something that could benefit family life. This finding is consistent with findings from the *Focus on Families* research.

"That it's all right to seek help."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, male**

religious values

Some respondents told us they belonged to religious communities. As might be expected, many nominated 'values' associated with their religious beliefs as being significant for family life, including freedom of religious thought and expression.

"Religious freedom – Sunday attendance [at] temple worship, to be able to teach our family, including children and extended family, our faith and beliefs without government restriction."
—**Auckland, extended family, female**

Some active members of faith-based groups placed a high value not only on personal expression of their faith, but on having their 'values' shared widely throughout the community and reflected in government policy.

Others felt that the quality of their own family life would be enhanced by greater tolerance of different beliefs and living arrangements.

"Quality of life – things to go and do and see, opportunities to be involved in community and help create community without bias and judgement because of beliefs, financial status, marital status, nor social status… We are tired of getting Christianity pushed at us constantly as the solution. It isn't and it is offensive."

—Auckland, single-parent household, female

beliefs about family structure and roles

For many respondents, family structure and the roles taken by family members are an essential part of what makes family life good, and are closely linked to 'values'.

Some respondents favoured a 'traditional' family form in which the different biological functions of men and women dictated specific, complementary roles in the family. Within this traditional framework, women generally did not work for pay, rather they cared for the children at home, presided over the domestic realm, and tended generously to the emotional and other needs of family members. Men undertook paid work, which enabled them to provide for the material needs of the family, and played a lesser or minimal role in caring for small children and tending to the emotional needs of family members.

"We believe the traditional family and extended family (whānau) to be the most important societal structure there is."

—Taranaki, two-parent household, female

Many respondents who favoured a traditional family also favoured a political system in which people managed their own lives and were supported by government policy to do so.

"A government that holds dear traditional family values – a government that does not promote things like gay civil unions – a government that will introduce tougher sentencing – a government that will take a closer look at abortion – a government that will allow more funding for private schooling so that we have the choice where to send our children for a better education. As a result we will have more money and will struggle less for basics like food and clothes – taxed less. …our family is facing a moral decline in the country and government. The happiness and safety of our children is at risk… We are seriously thinking of moving elsewhere where traditional family values are upheld…"

—Wellington, two-parent household, female

Support for the choice to care for children at home rather than return to the workforce was expressed by people who held both traditional and non-traditional views.

"I want to stay home and raise my children and run the house without being made to feel guilty or as though I'm not contributing to society… Lack of support out in the community whether it be from family or organisations…"

—Hawke's Bay, two-parent household, female

cultural values and experiences

Many families emphasised the important role their own cultural values and experiences played in family life.

Many Māori respondents described the significant role their cultural values and experiences played in nurturing and educating children, consequently contributing to individual and collective wellbeing.

"To be able to spend quality time with children so to teach values, beliefs, norms that will constitute healthy, well-balanced citizens and leaders for the future within whānau, and community iwi. A good education…that will enhance a person's ability to reach their potential and give back into whānau, iwi and community to build [a] stronger and more valuable standard of living."
—**Wellington, single-parent household, female**

The concept of turangawaewae[25] was also significant for many Māori respondents, with bonds to the land and to particular regions, contributing to a sense of identity. It was important for some Māori respondents that they were able to return to their homes for reasons of family.

"Being able to go 'home' for big family events."
—**Auckland, single-parent household, female**

"The ability to remain on the papakainga our turangawaewae and not move away for work, education or to access health facilities. Maintain our link to our whakapapa and whenua."
—**Northland, two-parent household, female**

Pacific respondents also emphasised the importance of their immediate and extended family, and of keeping in touch with their cultural and spiritual beliefs. Language, church and Christian values were important to family life for many Pacific families.

"Being grounded in our cultural meaning, understanding our language which helps form our identity."
—**Wellington, single-parent household, female**

Some Pacific families specifically mentioned their acceptance of tithing (contribution of one-tenth of their income to the church) as a practice that they felt would ultimately be of benefit to them.

"Paying tithing and knowing that I will be blessed abundantly (honest tithing)."
—**Bay of Plenty, single-parent household, male**

Other families who have immigrated to New Zealand also emphasised the importance of keeping in touch with their 'roots' to support their personal, family and cultural values.

"As immigrants we are in constant touch with our relatives overseas, ie telephone calls and emails so that we stabilise our relationship, roots and beliefs."
—**Taranaki, two-parent family, female**

9.2   CHALLENGES TO VALUES, MORALS AND BELIEFS

A significant number of respondents felt that the wellbeing of their families was challenged by the 'values' conveyed in popular culture and in government policy, or by an inability to participate in traditional cultural practices. Many felt that their ability to inculcate in their children the precepts and moral standards that they valued, was being undermined. Media portrayal of family life, and government policies about the

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25   A person's 'home ground' or the place that they are from.

legal drinking age, educational policies, income support policies and relationship-based policies (Civil Union Bill, same-sex relationships) in particular, were identified as going against some respondents' values.

As children matured through primary school years into high school, parents' concern about values became more common. Children's attitudes to adult authority was also of concern to some respondents.

"Discipline. Children need to know right from wrong, manners etc. We are making a nation of kids with a 'couldn't care less attitude', where children believe they are up there with adults."

—**Rangitikei, two-parent household, female**

One respondent described a range of challenges to 'traditional' 'values' as:

"Adults who break the rules and have sex outside the marriage, create families without Mums or Dads and others who think it's okay to be unfaithful. Alcohol. Dishonesty and adults who lack integrity… A society that condones women marrying women, and men having sex with men, and makes being unfaithful look like everyday common practice on television, without explaining the absolute devastation, betrayal and shattered lives the broken family is left with when people cheat on their partners."

—**Waikato, step/blended household, male**

Many felt that New Zealand society in general, and government policy in particular, did not support traditional 'values'. Of particular concern were the extent of support for single parents and other beneficiaries, and perceived lack of support for couple families with a full-time mother. Several respondents felt that families with many children encountered prejudice.

"Pressure to conform to a society where there are no spiritual values, and where family values are being constantly undermined."

—**Northland, aunt living with extended family, male**

"An anti-baby philosophy especially directed towards larger families. Lack of support for busy mothers who are finding life overwhelming."

—**Wellington, two-parent household, female**

Some respondents expressed strong views about what they saw as a conflict between the 'values of church and state'.

"Parent-led principles based on biblical principles Vs the State knows what's best for my kids."

—**Auckland, two-parent household, male**

Many respondent families were struggling to inspire in their children values that ran counter to those identified with the dominant culture – as portrayed in the media, and as modelled by many adults.

"The constant battle of trying to 'protect' our children from pornography and violence."

—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

Some respondents felt that the education system did not reflect the 'values' they wanted their family to live by, and strayed into areas that were traditionally the prerogative of parents, such as sex education.

"Having the right to say what they learn. Eg sexual education – not all that is taught in this area, is how we want our children to learn about sex![…] We would like our children to be taught the sacredness of life, not do whatever you like and not realise the consequences of your actions or our responsibility to God for our actions."
—**Auckland, extended family, female**

For some respondents it was the culture of competitive consumerism that subverted family values.

"The challenge to avoid 'keeping up with the Joneses'. The challenge to slow down and go at our own pace. The challenge for Dad to put work in its place, behind the family."
—**Southland, two-parent household, female**

As found in the *Focus on Families* research, minority cultures, immigrants and refugees also mentioned the challenges of balancing their cultural or religious/spiritual 'values' and practices with the ones perceived as mainstream in New Zealand society. For some this caused stress and internal family arguments; for others it was important to be able to fit in without losing a sense of identity.

"By immigrating the challenge of settling and establishing ourselves in a new country has been a process of great change and adaptation. This has been [with] sacrifices which each one of us has made."
—**Waikato, two-parent household, female**

Some respondents had experienced a lack of tolerance toward them and their culture.

"Racism, attitude towards migrants… Govt should explain the situation to everybody and try to develop more appropriate jobs for migrants."
—**Bay of Plenty, two-parent household, female**

In some cases, living up to cultural values or expectations created challenges to family life, particularly in relation to the cost of doing so. This is described below in relation to the ability of Māori families to stay near or be able to travel to their turangawaewae.

"Cheaper petrol so we can travel to the places where our marae and turangawaewae are."
—**Auckland, two-parent household, female**

Some respondents had suggestions about how challenges to their values could be mediated or overcome. These are discussed in the following section.

9.3   WHAT WOULD MAKE FAMILY LIFE BETTER

A large number of respondents felt that New Zealand society today placed too little value on the role of parent and carer, and that this under-valuation was reflected in government policy which gave insufficient assistance to families, particularly those with a stay-at-home parent.

"[We need a] shift in the national psyche, towards a culture that places more value on raising children."
—**Bay of Plenty, two-parent household, female**

A substantial number of respondents said that more widespread support for certain 'values' would improve their family life. There were calls, on the one hand for greater

support for particular views of marriage, family and relationships, and on the other, greater support for diversity of family forms and relationships. The former were more numerous than the latter among this group of respondents.

"Not childless lesbians or homosexuals who wouldn't be here if it wasn't for their heterosexual parents love for each other and generosity in accepting them."
—**Wellington, two-parent household, female**

"Understanding and support from the nation about us as a family, same-sex family blend. Support from other families in the same situation especially for the children regarding peers and bullying… The general public view of same-sex relationships marginalises us as a family unit; it also makes life challenging (more than it should for the children)."
—**Gisborne, step/blended household, female**

Many benefit recipients reported that life on the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) was far from easy, and could involve prejudice, strained financial circumstances and difficulty finding secure paid work. They reported that greater support and less judgement from society would make their family life better.

"If you are a DPB recipient female, society views you as sluts and losers looking for an alternative to work. You are treated like scabbers and second class citizens. Constantly reminded about your lifestyle choice or no choice! When the fathers not only don't or refuse to acknowledge you and child but don't pay child support once you are off DPB, and get away with not paying taxes which I feel they should be heavily financially held to account – not NZ taxpayers."
—**Auckland, single-parent household, female**

A substantial number of respondents felt that 'mainstream' moral standards fell short of their personal ideals, and threatened their ability to instil the right principles in their children. Some strongly supported the view that those who earned money should determine how it was to be spent and many wanted the government to stop interfering in family life – 'social engineering'. A 'laissez faire' philosophy, favouring lower taxation and small government, was the preference of this group.

"The ability to make independent decisions re how we organise our finances, our children's schooling, where we choose to live and work. I don't want any government taking excessive amounts of money in taxation and then paying it back in welfare (family benefit schemes). This is an expensive concept in terms of administration costs and downright interference in family life. It also encourages citizens/families to become dependent on government, very dangerous! …The government needs to keep out of its citizens' lives as much as possible and resist the desire to social engineer our lives. Government does NOT know best."
—**Auckland, step/blended household, female**

Some respondents felt that the structure of government programmes provided perverse incentives – that people were in fact being rewarded for bad behaviour, poor choices, bad lifestyle, planning and poor self-management. These respondents felt such programmes should be changed.

"It seems in this country, the more you help yourself, the less the Govt helps. But if you're a lazy drug addict who eats unhealthy junk food all the time, the Govt will pay for you all your life – clothe and feed you, give you methadone and pay to bury you. If people aren't prepared to try to help themselves, or better themselves or stop BREEDING(!!) then the Gov. should stop propping them up! Use the money to

EXTEND paid parental leave and give something to our group who never get help. That is, the group who are married, employed, Caucasian, middle (to low) income earners who take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing. How about REWARDING US? !! ☺"

—Manawatu, two-parent household, female

Some Māori respondents suggested that Māori values could be better promoted in society.

"Te reo recognition by government, and society in general of the differences in culture as Māori/Tangata Whenua and accept these differences as positive."

—Northland, two-parent household, female

"Our Māori culture brings us together, gives us all an area to improve, eg Te reo but to be proud of and sense of community/identity."

– Nelson Bays, two-parent household, female

9.4   SUMMARY

Both our earlier research participants in the *Focus on Families* study and consultation respondents, talked about the importance of values, morals and beliefs (including cultural and religious values) for families, although the role played by these in family life emerged more significantly from the consultation findings. Generally 'values' were perceived as making family life good by guiding members about what behaviours were acceptable or not, and by giving them principles to live by.

Many people have strong beliefs about core personal values and broader social mores they see as appropriate for society. There was, however, an enormous range in what were perceived as the 'right values'. Some respondents expressed a more 'traditional' set of beliefs, particularly in relation to same-sex relationships, marriage and discipline of children. The voices of this group came through more strongly in the consultation submissions than in earlier focus group research (Stevens et al 2005) and this is likely to reflect the self-selected nature of the consultation respondents. Others expressed more 'liberal' views sometimes in direct opposition to those espoused by the more 'traditionalist' group. The range of 'values' advocated by focus group participants was broader in comparison, with acceptance of diversity an important issue for many.

Having one's values contested – whether intentionally or unintentionally – by individuals, government policies, media and society more broadly, was perceived as a challenge to family life. Conflict can impact on family relationships, community engagement and inclusion in society.

Suggestions made by families on how they themselves can overcome challenges to their values included taking part in groups that held similar values and beliefs, or alternatively, taking personal responsibility for being educated about diversity and respect for other people's beliefs.

Many respondents made suggestions about how government services, policies and the media could be changed to fit better with those respondents' particular sets of 'values'. Advocating for one 'right' set of values for all of society is unrealistic and goes against the principles of human rights. Rather than choosing one set of values to adhere to, social education about the diverse beliefs and values held by families, and encouragement of acceptance and tolerance, may be a more realistic solution.

10. influences on family: discussion and conclusion

As we have seen in previous chapters, there is a range of factors which enhance or challenge family life, and families are able to identify a number of ways in which family life may be improved.

In this chapter, we summarise the findings from the earlier chapters and, at the same time, we identify the implications for families, the community, local and central government and society generally. The chapter is arranged according to the main themes which have been discussed in the preceding chapters, and closes with a short conclusion. We continue to compare what family members told us through the consultation process with the findings from the earlier parts of this project, namely, the literature review (Families Commission 2005) and the focus group study (Stevens et al 2005).

In order to understand these challenges and potential solutions more fully, the literature (Families Commission 2005) tells us we need to understand fully a family's context. That is, both individual members of families and the family unit must be considered along with the quality and nature of family relationships, the dynamic and changing nature of families and individuals within them, and the family's social, cultural, economic and environmental context.[26] These factors influence not only family life, but families' expectations of how family life should be.

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[26] One tool that can help us to think systematically about the diverse impacts on families is an ecological framework. The framework we used is adapted from the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979), Bowes and Hayes (1999) in Kolar and Soriano (2000), and Lippman (2004). It provides a guide which organises the influences on families into four different systems: the microsystem – within the family itself; the mesosystem – the environment with which the family directly interacts, such as friends, other families and the workplace; the exosystem – such things as government and local body policies and services, eg health and education services, over which the family has little influence; and the macrosystem which includes culture, society norms and global trends. More detail on this framework is provided in Appendix Two.

10.1 TIME

One of the most important things for family life, according to respondents, was being able to spend time together to nurture family relationships and care for personal wellbeing. The nature of that time – having quality time – was important, but in order to have quality moments, spending time together was crucial. As one author has noted, "'*Quality time*' needs time" (Smyth 2005:17).

The consultation has demonstrated that it is common for families to feel significantly time-pressured. Some people had chosen less stressful or time-consuming employment in order to reduce these time pressures. These findings confirm those noted in *Focus on Families*, that being able to balance time alone with time spent with family and partners was critical for achieving family wellbeing. Other evidence for this feeling of being time-deprived comes from Statistics New Zealand (2001), which found that on average men and women aged 25-54 (frequently childrearing years) were those with the least 'spare time'.

The time available for family members to interact or have time as individuals is affected by diverse factors ranging from the distribution of family tasks through to long hours in paid employment. These factors are examined in turn in the rest of this section.

First, however, it should be noted that family issues are often interdependent. This is particularly true of time and money. Respondents to the consultation and the participants in the focus group study indicated that trade-offs were often made. Paid employment was seen as enhancing family life by bringing in much needed income. It was, however, also the source of many family challenges. In particular, respondents suggested that employment restricted the amount of time family members had available to spend together and created childcare challenges. These money/time trade-offs were particularly at issue for single-parent families or those with low incomes.

It is apparent from the consultation that some people experience or perceive that they lack support from other family members for carrying out work within the family. This is not, in usual circumstances, an issue for direct state intervention. Rather, respondents suggested that this was an issue that families should address themselves.

Long working hours were mentioned by some families as one of the reasons why their families were time-pressured, and at least two reasons were advanced for this. First, many families have insufficient income, some to the extent that they cannot afford essentials such as healthy food, clothing and visits to the doctor or dentist. This is further addressed below in the section dealing with financial issues.

Second, a small number of families suggested that they needed to think more clearly about what they really needed, rather than what they desired. This could relate to material goods, such as houses and cars, as well as lifestyle choices such as how much the family spends on holidays, entertainment and eating out. Another possibility is that some people may be working long hours in order to pursue some personal ambition, or they may simply be caught up in a workplace culture which encourages this approach to work.

Some people referred to difficulties of getting working hours to suit their family's needs, including part-time work compatible with school hours, and time off to deal with sick children, or to cope with other family crises. Some also mentioned the desirability of getting more paid parental leave for fathers.

Many families mentioned that problems getting access to affordable, quality childcare were a significant concern, affecting their work-life choices. For some people in work, their inability to find childcare with which they were happy was a significant problem. Other people wanting to enter the workforce found this desire thwarted by a lack of suitable childcare. People seek a range of childcare options, including more affordable childcare where they can place their children during the working day, or childcare where someone comes into their home. People working non-standard hours of work or shift work want childcare to be available outside the usual hours.

implications

Some of the issues in this section are associated with work-life balance. While families are able to influence some aspects of this themselves, to perhaps a greater extent, work-life-balance is affected by the policies and actions of others, mainly governments and employers.

Some people suggested that families themselves could address one factor affecting the time available to family members, that is, the distribution of tasks within the family. They suggested that families should consider whether more could be done to help those family members doing most of the unpaid work at home, so as to relieve some of the time pressures on them.

Work-life balance is one of the Families Commission's work priorities for the next three years, and a programme of work related to this priority is currently being planned. This is likely to include an examination of policies on parental leave, flexible work and access to affordable, quality childcare.

The Department of Labour and other government agencies are also currently looking at the issue of work-life balance. The results of this project suggest that the following should be examined in order to enhance families' work-life balance:

> policies that would allow family members working excessive hours in paid employment to reduce those hours without harming the family financial position

> more family-friendly policies which would encourage employers to provide such things as more flexible and part-time working hours, better maternity and paternity provisions, and time off to care for sick family members and to deal with other family crises

> policies that would provide greater access to quality and affordable childcare and out-of-school care at times that meet the needs of families.

10.2 MONEY AND LIVING STANDARDS

As previously explained, there is considerable overlap between money and time issues, and much of the material in the previous section is also relevant here.

Most respondents noted that an adequate income is necessary to meet families' basic needs, achieve a reasonable standard of living, and support people's choices and aspirations for their families. A strong message coming through this consultation and *Focus on Families* was that families found it very hard to achieve either basic or desired living standards. Many felt forced to trade-off necessities against each other.

These perceptions have some consistencies with New Zealand data which suggest that relative to other population groups, families with dependent children[27] are more likely to experience low living standards. Whereas 7 percent of people aged 65 years and over experience low living standards, 29 percent of families with dependent children under 18 years are likely to do so (Krishnan et al 2002). Together these findings suggest there is scope to further enhance family living standards in New Zealand.

Respondents made a number of suggestions focused on improving their financial position through increasing their net income, or reducing their financial burden.

Respondents called for a reduction in the living costs experienced by families (for example the costs of food, housing, education, childcare, medical services and public transport). Many also thought that government tax and social assistance policies should provide more significant financial support to families with dependent children. The submissions were received before the Working for Families changes were fully implemented. This package will go some distance toward addressing the tax burden for a significant number of families with dependent children, and it has also increased childcare subsidies and thresholds. In addition, the Ministry of Education's *Pathways to the Future* strategy will provide up to 20 hours of free childcare per week for three- and four-year-olds who attend recognised childhood education services, available from 1 July 2007. The full impact of these policies on family life are as yet unknown.

Many individuals felt that taxes took away the additional income that they needed to make ends meet. Raising the tax threshold for parents was suggested, and income splitting was viewed by many as a more equitable way of taxing families. Few respondents considered whether earnings should be distributed among all dependants before they were taxed. A more generalised form of assistance for all families was also suggested.

Some respondents also appeared to have limited understanding of the contradiction involved in wanting lower taxes and higher levels of government services. There was no consensus on welfare spending, although some individuals resented such spending and considered it wasteful. These findings suggest that public understanding of the implications of taxation and welfare policy changes could enhance families' understanding of the associated issues.

Respondents also suggested higher income levels as a solution to families' time and financial challenges. While real wage rates have risen in recent years and the Government has increased the statutory minimum wage, many families still struggle to get by on relatively low wages.

Many respondents described challenges to family life in relation to the high cost of housing (rental and ownership). New Zealanders still aspire to home ownership, although affordability is continuing to drop. Respondents in rented homes in particular faced numerous challenges such as overcrowding or isolation when they could not afford to live near their extended family. These challenges are consistent with findings from the New Zealand Living Standards 2000 (Krishnan et al 2002) which found that people living in rental housing have the lowest living standards.

Respondents made suggestions about government policies on rental subsidies and home-purchasing schemes. While the Government has recently introduced measures

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27   In particular, single-parent families, those on income tested benefits, those with at least one non-European adult, and those in rental housing.

such as the KiwiSaver Scheme and increases to the Accommodation Supplement, further work to enhance housing affordability may be warranted.

implications

Financial strain is commonplace among families. Recent government initiatives, most notably the Working for Families package, will reduce this strain to some extent for many families. Other families, particularly those where there is a sole parent not in paid employment, will not benefit as much as others from these initiatives. The pervasiveness of comments about financial difficulties for families with children suggests that some families will continue to struggle financially, and that further policy initiatives could be required to rectify this. The financial health of families can be monitored through the Living Standard surveys and Social Reports of the Ministry of Social Development.[28]

Apart from family income levels, particular cost issues that could be reviewed are the costs to families arising from housing and rental accommodation, education, childcare and health services.

10.3 RELATIONSHIPS AND PARENTING

Respondents identified supportive, loving family relationships with both immediate and extended family as factors important to family life. Other studies confirm this, and have found that such relationships are a protective factor for children (Kalil 2003). The significance of loving relationships is consistent with findings from the earlier part of our project (*Focus on Families*). There it was found that good communication and parenting skills were effective contributors to family relationships, and areas in which many families could benefit from additional support.

Similarly, this consultation exercise has identified that family relationships and parenting problems are the source of many challenges for families. Respondents said that lack of knowledge or skills in these areas and isolation from family support networks left them feeling at a loss.

Disagreements between family members, separation/divorce, family violence/abuse, addictions and traumatic events (eg death of a family member) can also have a negative impact on individual family members and on the wellbeing of the family unit. These impacts may be physical, emotional and financial. For example, studies show that even when all other factors are taken into account, the children of divorced or separated families are at greater risk of poorer developmental outcomes (MacKay 2005).

Parenting problems were sometimes mentioned by families, particularly learning how to parent a newborn, and how to deal with difficult teenage behaviour. Differences of opinion about appropriate parenting were also identified as a source of conflict within families.

The most common suggestion from respondents for ways of improving family life in regard to relationships and parenting was for families themselves to work on aspects of family functioning, such as communication and respectful behaviour. In order to be able to do so, however, often external support is required (which families must be willing to access).

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[28]   See for example, *The Social Report 2005* (Ministry of Social Development 2005) and *Living Standards 2000* (Krishnan et al 2002).

Some respondents suggested that there should be wider availability of external support through good quality and accessible courses on parenting, relationship, life-skills (budgeting, cooking, childcare) and stress management. These suggestions were also made, somewhat more emphatically, by earlier research participants.

implications

In both the consultation and focus group exercises, participants recognised that many families had it within their means to improve aspects of family functioning, and so overcome relationship and parenting challenges. It was, however, also commonly suggested that some families needed to be able to access external training and support to overcome their difficulties. The Families Commission has recently reviewed the availability of parenting programmes and concluded that there should be "an overall strategy for supporting all parents in their parenting role needs…" (Kerslake-Hendricks & Balakrishnan 2005:iv).

Parenting education is one of the Family Commission's principal priorities for the next three years. The plan for this is currently being developed, with the goal of ensuring that parenting education and support are available to all families.

As part of this work, the Commission will consider how and to what extent families can be encouraged to address parenting and relationship challenges for themselves, given that many families have determined that they have the ability to do this.

10.4 FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Having access to support was of great importance to family life. Some respondents referred to the support they received from other family members within the same household. More often respondents mentioned the assistance they received from grandparents and other extended family members, or the difficulties they experienced because they were separated by too great a distance from these relatives.

Some respondents mentioned that friends were an important part of support networks, second only to family. Other support commonly mentioned included church, Plunket and community groups (including ethnic and cultural communities). There was concern about the resourcing of these groups, particularly about their ability to attract volunteers. Contrary to what may be thought, there was a relative lack of discussion within submissions about the importance of neighbours as a support for families. This is consistent with the literature (Families Commission 2005) which indicated that support communities are more often communities of interest than geographical communities.

Although a minority of respondents viewed a lack of support as a challenge to their families, such statements were more common among single-parent families and migrant families, suggesting that isolation for these groups is a particular concern.

Many groups of respondents felt that turning to their friends and community support networks helped them to overcome challenges to family life; and some felt more support for community groups was required. Suggestions included more access to free parent support groups and education, and more funding of community organisations and groups that helped families. To some extent, this overlaps with the findings about parenting and relationship support discussed in the previous section.

To get more support, families may decide to move closer to family networks, or they may form new non-family networks. External assistance can support such processes and consequently have a positive impact on family life.

implications

Family-friendly neighbourhoods and networks of community support can enhance family outcomes. This project suggests that more could be done in some areas or for some types of family. In particular, it is apparent that sole parents and migrant families often need more support than they are currently getting. Further, it may be that those agencies that support families need more external support themselves. A comprehensive mapping of the existing community or government support for families would allow us all to see where there are gaps in support, and what most urgently needs to be provided.

10.5 HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

Respondents believed that having access to local, low-cost, healthy activities, that can be easily reached, enhanced family health and relationships. They considered good quality neighbourhood playgrounds and unspoilt nature reserves and beaches, to be very much part of the Kiwi lifestyle, and should be available to everyone. Some respondents described feeling challenged in their access to such resources, for example by overdevelopment of coastlines. Some families suggested that the government should ensure that these resources were available, and that people should be encouraged to use them, along with generally adopting healthy lifestyles.

Having a safe environment in which to raise children was important for families, although few mentioned that this was of particular concern where they lived.

Families placed high importance on being able to access the full range of health services for all family members. Respondents described the importance of both preventive healthcare and treatment services. Many families had experienced challenges in accessing both healthy living (good food, water and housing) and health services, predominantly because the costs of both placed a significant burden on families. This was particularly true for families where one or more members had significant health problems, and where these health problems affected the extent to which supporting family members could work and earn income. Many respondents (both low and medium income) described not accessing services (medical, dental) until absolutely necessary, sometimes resulting in health problems becoming more serious. This finding is supported by other research which shows that "people with low incomes, poor housing and few qualifications are likely to have disproportionately poorer health" (Ministry of Social Development 2005:22). While in recent years some policy changes have been made to decrease the costs for particular groups (older people, high users and children), many who do not fall into these groups are likely to still struggle to afford basic healthcare.

A number of groups felt development of some services was required, in particular improved services to and additional support for families with a member who has special learning, physical or mental health needs (including addiction problems).

implications

It should be disturbing to all New Zealanders that there are people who are unable to afford essential medical services when they have medical or dental needs. Notwithstanding initiatives in recent years to enhance access to primary health, it appears that further work is needed to ensure no families miss out on these services. The Families Commission will bring this finding to the attention of the Ministries of Health and Social Development, and the District Health Boards.

10.6 EDUCATION

Education was highly valued by many participants both in the consultation and the earlier focus groups, and some families reported making considerable short-term sacrifices in order to improve their educational qualifications. As was reported in *Focus on Families*, some groups – in particular Māori, Pacific and migrant groups – saw education as the key to overcoming problems associated with discrimination and social inequity.

Many families felt particularly challenged by the high costs of education and thought the government could do more to help them meet such costs. 'Voluntary' fees at primary and secondary schools, uniforms, school trips and resources at primary and secondary schools, were burdensome for many. The high costs of early childhood and tertiary education meant families frequently chose not to access these, and student loans had consequences for people's ability to remain in New Zealand, start a family or purchase a home.

Quality of education was an issue for some, resulting in children being home-schooled or moved to a different school. Some respondents felt schools could do more to be inclusive of their family's particular values (often cultural or religious).

Submissions addressed adult education in a number of different ways, particularly education about family life, such as parenting, budgeting, family health and relationship management. Some suggested that courses in a range of life-skills could help them to improve life for their families, although they identified problems in accessing good quality courses. These issues regarding education are highly consistent with the findings of the *Focus on Families* research.

implications

These findings, together with those discussed earlier in the section on money and living standards, indicate many families have difficulty affording the costs associated with the education of their children, including the costs of state education. The size and significance of the problem should be investigated, so that appropriate solutions can be identified. We will refer this finding to the Ministry of Education.

Some families have stated that they have difficulty accessing budgeting and life-skills courses. This issue should also be further investigated so that the reasons for this can be better understood and rectified.

10.7 VALUES, MORALS AND BELIEFS

A large number of respondents discussed their values and morals – and being able to live up to these – as important to family life. Many considered their values and morals contributed importantly to making family life good, by guiding family members about what behaviours were acceptable or not, and by giving them principles to live by. Many considered these principles – *their* principles – enriched not only their own families but society more broadly.

While a family's behaviour may be shaped by their values and morals, these are influenced to some extent by factors outside of the family such as religion, media and prevailing social mores. Social values and morals differ among individuals and groups according to factors such as culture, religion, history, politics, location and time. Prevailing social mores are expressed through societal representations of families, ideas about what constitutes positive or negative family outcomes, and in the policies and practices of government and other social institutions.

Consistent with the findings from the earlier *Focus on Families* report, consultation respondents identified a range of instances when their values and morals clashed with those advocated by society, as portrayed either in public policies and services, or by the media.

Some respondents expressed relatively traditional views, and felt society and government supported behaviours which went against traditional 'family values'. For example, they considered that government policies on single-parent families, working mothers, sex education in schools, use of drugs and alcohol, same-sex relationships and prostitution supported unacceptable or undesirable behaviours. Such views came through more strongly in the consultation than in the earlier *Focus on Families* report, and this may be related to the self-selection of consultation respondents, compared to the sampling method used to select the focus groups. Other respondents reported experiences of social discrimination on the grounds of their particular family structure, sexual orientation or ethnicity.

Many respondents expressed concern about images and values promoted by the media – particularly violence and consumerism – which can influence the behaviour of adults and children. Consequently, some parents wanted to protect their children from exposure to these influences. Despite common beliefs about the potential for television violence to influence viewers' behaviour, a recent review of research concluded that the relationship between these two things was comparatively modest (King, Bridgman, Smith, Bell, King, Harvey, Crothers, Hassall 2003). It is likely that a child's behaviour is influenced by the whole environment in which they are immersed, of which television viewing is just one part.

implications

The Families Commission advocates for *all* New Zealand families. We support the views of those respondents and focus group participants who called for tolerance of diversity. As noted above, some of the consultation respondents opposed government policies that supported diversity within society. The perspective of individuals who feel confronted by socially accepted behaviour that runs counter to their strongly held beliefs is understandable – but can only be met by a plea for greater understanding and tolerance.

The Families Commission appreciates the concerns of those parents who consider that children and adults can be influenced by what is portrayed through television and other media, particularly when these images are pervasive and presented as the norm. Although research does not currently suggest that there is a strong link between television violence and viewers' behaviour, we believe that the media should be careful about the images that it portrays, and families should consider what is appropriate media access and viewing for their children.[29]

10.8 CONCLUSION: ENHANCING FAMILY OUTCOMES

This report presents the views of 3,673 people expressed through a consultation process conducted by the Families Commission. These have been compared with those of several hundred other family members who participated in a series of focus groups, and our analysis has been assisted by a literature review. These three components comprise the Families Commission's *Families with Dependent Children – Successful Outcomes* project. There were differences between the consultation respondents and the focus group participants on some topics, but on the whole, their views were complementary. Although both these exercises have been qualitative, this uniformity of views gives us confidence that we have been given a good understanding of what families believe, and the nature of the challenges that they face.

In particular, the views of consultation respondents overlapped strongly with those of the focus group participants on the subjects of time pressures, money and living standards, relationships, family and community support, health and education. There were differences in the areas of: work-life balance and parenting, with more consultation respondents of the view that mothers should remain at home, particularly when children were of school age; and values, morals and beliefs, with more of the consultation respondents opposed to government policies that they considered to be in opposition to traditional family values.

We have discovered that the factors that influence families are complex and interrelated. Some factors are to do with the families themselves, some are to do with their communities, and others are about employers, government and local body policies, and society generally. If we are to provide the best possible environment in which to raise the future generations of this country, we need to consider all these levels of influence.

This is the conclusion of a major programme of work for the Families Commission, and while this project has provided us with a wealth of information, that is not an end in itself. The information in this report serves a number of purposes – it will feed into the future development and advocacy work of the Commission, and will be used by other government agencies and community groups to improve their policies and services for families.

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29 www.mediascape.ac.nz, launched in February 2006 in a joint sponsorship initiative supported by the Families Commission, Advertising Standards Authority and the Christchurch Polytechnic Foundation, provides a clearinghouse for information on the media, and www.mediascape.ac.nz/content/family-whanau/smart-media-habits provides a guide for parents.

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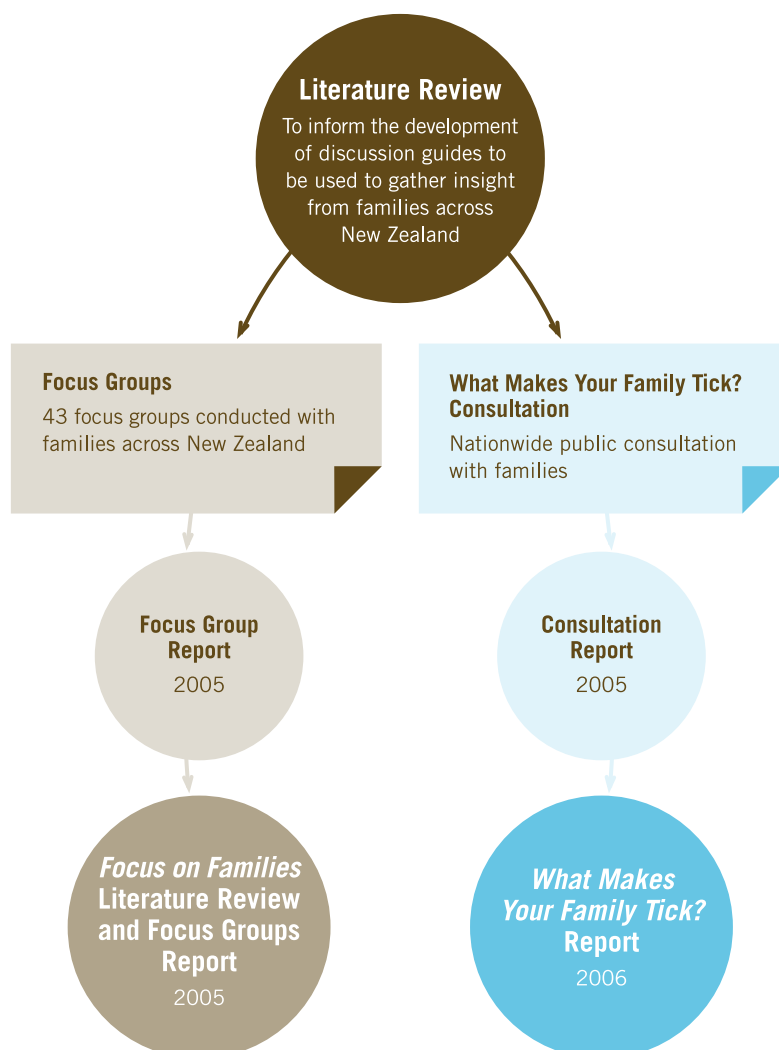
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APPENDIX ONE: METHODOLOGY

The key objective of the *Families with Dependent Children – Successful Outcomes* project was to improve understanding of successful outcomes for families with dependent children by exploring the characteristics of family wellbeing as defined by families themselves. The project also examined the factors that contributed to or acted as barriers to family wellbeing and the trade-offs that families make to achieve wellbeing.

project approach

In order to achieve these research objectives, the *Families with Dependent Children – Successful Outcomes* project was designed in three key stages: a literature review, qualitative research and consultation. This approach is represented in the diagram below:

Literature Review
To inform the development of discussion guides to be used to gather insight from families across New Zealand

Focus Groups
43 focus groups conducted with families across New Zealand

What Makes Your Family Tick? Consultation
Nationwide public consultation with families

Focus Group Report
2005

Consultation Report
2005

Focus on Families Literature Review and Focus Groups Report
2005

What Makes Your Family Tick? Report
2006

In the first stage, a literature review of the factors of success and wellbeing for families with dependent children was completed. The key questions addressed by the literature review were:

> What does the literature describe as successful outcomes for families?

> What are the characteristics of family wellbeing, as designed by the family?

> What are the factors that contribute to enhance family wellbeing?

> What are the barriers to family wellbeing?

> What trade-offs do families make to achieve wellbeing?

This resulted in a literature review, available on the Families Commission's website.

In the second stage, the qualitative research, 43 focus and mini-groups were conducted involving family members from a range of family structures. This resulted in a report (produced by UMR Research 2005a), which is available on the Families Commission's website. Fuller discussion of the method followed by the literature review and focus groups study is available in *Focus on Families* (Families Commission 2005), which synthesises the findings from the literature review and focus groups research.

In the third and final stage of the project, a nationwide consultation was conducted, referred to as the *What Makes Your Family Tick?* consultation. This stage complemented the earlier two stages of the project by providing an in-principle opportunity for any New Zealand family to be heard through participation in a nationwide public consultation that would have its findings published. Analysis of consultation submissions was conducted and a summary of submissions prepared (by UMR Research, available on the Families Commission website). Analysis of the consultation results in relation to the first two stages of the *Families with Dependent Children – Successful Outcomes* project was conducted by the Families Commission, culminating in this report.

consultation method

Public consultation is a common approach used by government and other organisations when exploring significant issues. It enables participants to have their say on an issue, and it helps to develop rapport and relationships between an organisation and participants. The advantage of conducting a consultation which is open to the general public is that it is an inclusive process in which everyone can have their say.

The limitation of a consultation which is open to the general public is that because responses are open, a self-selection bias may occur. That is, the results of the consultation are not statistically representative of the entire population of New Zealand because participants have control over whether they participate. Their decision to take part may be linked to things that affect the results – for example, participants may have a particularly strong interest or viewpoint on the topic being studied, and this interest may be stronger than that held by the broader population.

This consultation was open to submissions by all people in New Zealand. While questions were targeted primarily at families with dependent children (in line with the scope of the overall *Families with Dependent Children – Successful Outcomes* project), other family types were not excluded from making submissions to the consultation.

People who were interested in taking part in the consultation were provided with question packs that included the following:

INCLUDED IN THE PACKS	NOTES
Invitation to join the Families Commission mailing list	
Discussion booklet[30]	To stimulate and give broader contextual information
Two response forms	Listing the five key questions, with space for responses
Profile of the Families Commission	
Pre-paid/freepost envelope	For returning forms

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

The discussion document and consultation questions (contained in response forms) were informed by the findings of the literature review. Consultation questions were qualitative and open-ended, so as not to limit participants' responses. This was accompanied by a discussion booklet to help individuals focus and think about some of the issues posed, but again not limit their responses or enforce conformity.

In addition to basic demographic information about the respondent and his or her family[31], the response forms asked the following:[32]

1. What is important for your family life?

2. What has worked to make your family life good and what would make it better?

    >   What things make your family life good?

    >   What things would make your family life better?

3. What are the things that make family life difficult?

    >   What challenges is your family facing or has it faced?

    >   How is your family managing these challenges?

    >   What other things would help?

4. What choices have you made for the sake of a better family life?

5. Are there other things that would make your family life better?

MAKING SUBMISSIONS

Respondents were able to make submissions by returning their response form to the Families Commission in the freepost envelope provided to them, or submissions could be made online on the Families Commission website. During the early stages of the consultation a large number of online submissions were received, with this number decreasing over time. All submissions were anonymous, providing an environment in which individual respondents may provide fuller, franker details of their experience and views than may be expected in a focus group environment.

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[30]   Response forms and discussion booklets were available in (nine) languages – English, Māori, Tongan, Samoan, Tokelauean, Mandarin, Korean, Arabic and Hindi.

[31]   The information is confidential and not person-specific in any way.

[32]   As posed by the written response forms, and online submission forms.

TIMEFRAME

The consultation was conducted from 3 April to 30 June 2005, with submissions accepted throughout this period. In total, 3,673 submissions were made to the consultation.

ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION

The consultation was publicly launched by the Prime Minister during a family event at the Otara Fleamarket (in South Auckland) on 9 April 2005. It was widely promoted through a targeted mail-out to over 3,000 community organisations, schools and early childhood centres around the country, with additional promotion through television, radio and print advertising. In addition, Commissioners spoke about the consultation during meetings with community groups across New Zealand, and an open invitation to participate in the consultation was posted on the Families Commission website. Further description of these methods is provided in the table below:

FORM OF PROMOTION	DESCRIPTION	DATES
Television advertising	Thirty-second animated advertisement.	TV1, TV2, TV3, Prime, Māori Television and Sky all ran the advertisement, which appeared over 368 times between 10 and 30 April 2005.
Newspaper advertising		Community newspapers ran the advertisement between 3 April and 6 May.
Radio advertising	'Teaser' ad followed by full advertisement.	Commercial, regional and ethnic stations between 4 April and 7 May.
Community meetings	The consultation was noted during several community meetings, and question packs made available.	Community meetings held in various locations around New Zealand.
Mail-out	Introductory letter and question pack mail-out.	Over 30,000 question packs were sent out to community organisations[33], schools, early childhood education centres, and individuals who requested these. Requests for packs could be made through a Families Commission-sponsored freephone number.

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[33]   In the interests of reaching a wide range of families, the Commission asked a network of community organisations to assist it with distribution of the information/question packs. The criteria for selecting these community organisations included compatibility between their and the Commission's approaches to family advocacy, national membership and their ability to contribute to balanced coverage of all our target population and ethnic groups. Each selected community organisation was requested to support the consultation by suggesting participants or distributing the information/question packs directly within their networks.

CONSULTATION ANALYSIS

All submissions were analysed individually and according to their own merits. Responses were coded in relation to the consultation questions posed, and codes entered into an SPSS database for tabulation. Key themes were identified according to this coding. Coding was checked for consistency by both the Families Commission and UMR Research. A review of submissions and qualitative analysis was undertaken by both UMR Research and the Families Commission.

LIMITATIONS

Self-selection bias: The consultation is subject to self-selection bias. The Families Commission is aware that a number of community-based organisations placed links to the Families Commission website on their own websites, or otherwise encouraged their members to take part in the consultation (as some were requested to by the Families Commission to enhance participation). Consequently these groups may be more highly represented in the findings of the consultation, although due to the anonymity of submissions we are unable to comment on the direction of such a bias.

Multiple submissions: Because the consultation was open, and submissions were made anonymously, it is possible that individuals may have made more than one submission per person.

Face-to-face consultation: The method used for consultation was largely written, with limited opportunity for face-to-face contact between the public and the Families Commission. In order to enhance participation, particularly by Māori, Pacific, ethnic minority groups, and groups who are unable to provide written feedback, future consultations could consider further engagement with such groups by way of face-to-face meetings, and enhancing non-written methods of consultation, such as use of oral submissions.

In order to overcome these potential biases, the findings of the consultation need to be considered alongside the findings from earlier stages of the overall *Families with Dependent Children – Successful Outcomes* project which followed a more rigorous research methodology.

SYNTHESIS OF OVERALL PROJECT FINDINGS

In-house analysis of consultation findings in relation to the findings from the previous components of the *Families with Dependent Children – Successful Outcomes* project was undertaken by the Families Commission. This analysis was assisted by reference to an ecological model which helped unravel the complex influences on families and their relationship to one another. The ecological model was chosen because it allows explicit consideration of different levels of interactions impacting on family life. Further discussion of various analytical frameworks is contained in the literature review which accompanies this project (Families Commission 2005).
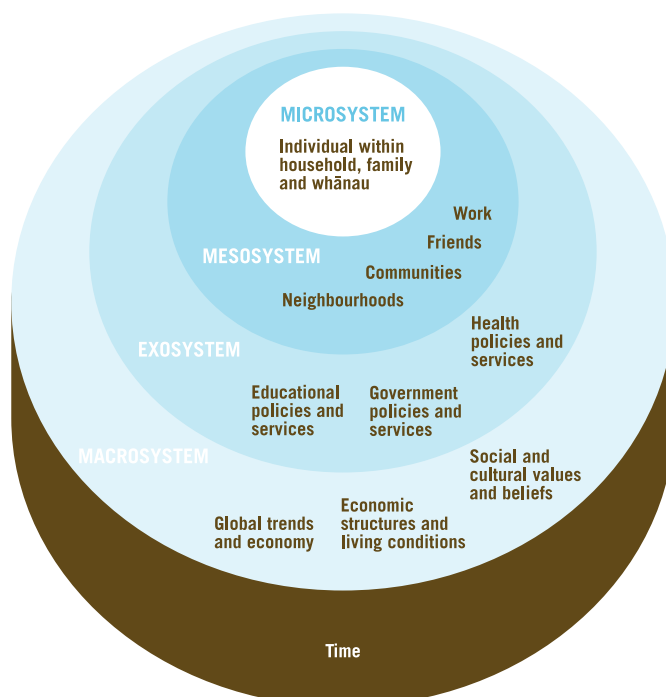
APPENDIX TWO: THE ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In preparing this report, we were confronted with a complex matrix of influences on the family. One tool that helps us deal with this is an ecological framework. This can assist us to think systematically about the diverse impacts on families and guide us as to where there are opportunities to enhance family outcomes. The framework we used is adapted from the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979), Bowes and Hayes (1999) in Kolar and Soriano (2000), and Lippman (2004).

The ecological framework takes the view that an individual's development is influenced by interaction with the environments in which they live. The framework identifies four key environments; the micro, meso, exo and macrosystems. Within each environment there are factors which influence people's lives. These environments range from those which contain factors the individual has most control over (such as the family setting) through to those containing factors the individual has little control over (such as global economic trends, social policy decisions). The theory suggests all of these environments, directly and indirectly, influence individual development.

Because the unit of analysis for our study is the family rather than the individual, we have adapted the ecological framework to place the family unit at the centre of analysis. This framework describes how the family unit develops and interacts within a series of systems. It must be noted, however, that within the family unit, individuals have their own needs, preferences and personal characteristics. Individuals also have their own set of environmental influences, which have consequent effects on the family unit. In analysing research findings, relational issues must be considered – that is, how outcomes for one family member are related to outcomes for other members.

Here is a diagrammatic representation of the ecological framework.

Within this version of the ecological framework, the microsystem refers to the family environment. The key characteristics of this environment are direct interactions between individuals (their characteristics and individual environments), and family roles and relationships.

The mesosystem refers to the interrelationship between the settings in which families are active participants – for example interactions between families and their friends, neighbours and communities, and employment settings. A key aspect of this environment is the nature of the links between the family and these environments – positive links resulting in positive influences, and negative links resulting in negative influences.

The exosystem refers to environments which families have less control over, such as educational settings, health services and other public service provision. Decisions affecting families are made within these settings, although family members may not be directly included in such decision making.

The macrosystem refers to the norms and expectations of society, culture and economic structures. Global events and trends are also elements within this environment. These factors influence families, often through public policies. Prevailing social ideologies/values about the family affect all of the environments that affect families.

The framework emphasises the interactions between environments, so that what happens in one environment influences and is influenced by what happens in another. For example, dominant social values and beliefs hold that families with dependent children are playing a vital social role in raising future adults who will be active contributors to society and the economy. These beliefs influence the development of policies which assist families with dependent children, for example, policies to meet children's healthcare needs, by providing state-funded healthcare until children are aged 18. Such policies could affect the family unit by, for instance, enhancing children's health, and consequently enabling the family to use their income in alternative ways – such as enabling parents to cover the costs of their own healthcare, so they are fit to care for their children. The ecological framework encourages us to consider holistic influences on outcomes for families.

As well as recognising that a range of environments affect wellbeing, the notion of time and its influence on families should be considered in understanding outcomes for families. The ecological framework recognises that the interactions between an individual and their environment will vary according to personal characteristics and personal history, environmental contexts, and over time (Bowes & Hayes 1999 in Kolar & Soriano 2000). These changes must be taken into account when assessing and analysing experiences. What may be a family strength at one point in time will not be at other stages of family life. Consequently, needs are likely to change over time. For example, a family's childcare needs usually ease as children grow older.

> Giving New Zealand families a voice *Te reo o te whānau*