

LIFE PATTERNS: COMPARING THE GENERATIONS

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Josie Reade, Helen Cahill & Andy Furlong.
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LIFE PATTERNS

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

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At the Youth Research Centre we acknowledge the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which our centre is located and where we conduct our research and teaching. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past, present and future.

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The Life Patterns participants have generously provided data over many years, which has allowed the study to track changes in the lives of young Australians over the past three decades. Crucially, these have included the need for more education, greater insecurity in employment, and the decreasing relevance of traditional patterns of living. These changes have created conditions in which young people have needed to conceptualise their lives as a personal project.

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The Life Patterns research program:

- follows two generations of Australians over time – Cohort 1, who left secondary school in 1991 (corresponding to the popular notion of 'Generation X') and Cohort 2, who left secondary school in 2006 (corresponding to the popular notion of 'Generation Y'). This dynamic design allows multiple comparisons to be made within and between the two cohorts across different points in their lives.
- is a mixed-methods longitudinal panel study. It surveys Cohort 1 every year during the 1990s and every two years since 2000 and interviews a subset of 20-40 participants every third year. It surveys Cohort 2 yearly since 2005 and interviews a subset of 30-50 participants every second year. Cohort 1 focuses on young people in the state of Victoria, while Cohort 2 focuses on young people in the states of Victoria, Tasmania, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). For the purpose of this comparative study, we are only focusing on Cohort 2 participants from Victoria.
- explores young people's pathways and experiences in different areas of life, including their experiences in education, the labour market, their family and personal relationships, attitudes to life, concerns, and health and wellbeing.
- provides a detailed picture of young adults' lives, different from the stereotypes of smooth transitions from education to work, or of a narcissistic or complacent generation, often described in the media or by politicians. The Life Patterns research program highlights the importance of paying attention to the diversity of experiences that characterise young people's lives.
- generates insights that feed into policy advice and public debate and that are often used in the media to dispel simplistic claims about young people.

INTRODUCTION

This report draws together longitudinal data collected from the two cohorts that are part of the Life Patterns Project. Cohort 1, which left secondary school in 1991, corresponds to the popular notion of 'Generation X'. Cohort 2, which left secondary school in 2006, corresponds to the popular notion of 'Generation Y', or the 'Millennials'.

We highlight similarities and differences between the two cohorts, exploring the following topics:



Education



Employment

Opportunities for their generation



Finances & cost of living

Personal relationships & family



We use the lens of social generation to understand the defining experiences of the two cohorts of Life Patterns participants.¹ Although popular conceptions of generations are simplistic and often negative, the idea of social generation has a strong legacy in social science as a tool for analysing the ways in which individual lives are shaped by their circumstances, creating distinctive experiences and outlooks. It enables us to understand the ways in which young people's lives change in response to shifts in labour markets or educational policies. It also enables us to understand how different groups of young people respond to changes, depending on the resources they can access.

Young people born after 1970 experienced new social and economic conditions compared with the previous generation, and this created new challenges and distinctive outlooks on life.² By the early 1990s, when the first cohort of Life Patterns participants were leaving secondary school, Australia, as well as other Western countries, was shifting from an industrial to a post-industrial economy resulting in the shrinking of the youth labour market and an increased demand for educational credentials for new kind of jobs based in the service sector. This radical transformation of the Australian economy and its labour market, accompanied by a decline in the welfare state and a significant economic recession in the early 1990s, pushed more young people into further and higher education.³ Indeed, it became common for young people to continue studying well into their twenties. As a result, our Cohort 1 participants were among a generation that had a much higher average level of education than the one before. However, due to the economic and labour changes, they were amongst the first to experience an extended period of time seeking work, even with the appropriate qualifications. This normative shift in turn had an impact on those who did not complete Year 12 or the equivalent, or enter post-secondary education, entrenching their disadvantage.

While stereotypes of this generation as having an 'extended youth' began to circulate, the reality was that a new adulthood was being shaped. The conditions of adulthood that were available to the Baby Boomers were disappearing. Generation X began the work of 'rewriting the rules' of adulthood. A task that the Generation Y group have carried on in the face of further changes in the labour market, education, and new opportunities and challenges, particularly related to digital technology.

In developing an understanding of the new adulthood experienced (and shaped) by Generations X and Y, we have also highlighted the diversity of young people's experiences. While generations as a whole face shared social, economic and political conditions, young people have different access to resources, creating inequalities based on structural categories such as class, gender, place and ethnicity.⁴ As one of the few longitudinal research programs that can compare two generations, the Life Patterns research program is able to provide insights into the diversity within each generation and between generations, as well as the similarities between Generations X and Y over time. Thus, in this report we ask: what are the similarities and differences in the challenges and opportunities faced by both cohorts? Has Cohort 2 learned how to manage and negotiate the reality of ongoing labour market unpredictability faced by Cohort 1? Do Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 life goals differ? Are there enduring patterns in how young people in these generations manage their challenges?

Our analysis shows that there are many more similarities than differences between Cohorts 1 and 2. Both have struggled with balancing their lives and both highly value family and job security, placing them as their top priorities in life. For both cohorts, gaining work in their chosen field has taken (and continues to take) longer than they anticipated. These intergenerational commonalities are an indication of their belonging to a particular period of Australian economic, social and cultural history.

For an in-depth sociological discussion of generations see:

- Woodman, D. & Wyn, J. (2015). Class, Gender and Generation Matter: Using the Concept of Social Generation to Study Inequality and Social Change. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 18(10), 1402-1410.
- Woodman, D. & Wyn, J. (2015). *Youth and generation: Rethinking Change and Inequality in the Lives of Young People*. United Kingdom: SAGE Publications.
- Wyn, J., & Woodman, D. (2006). Generation, Youth and Social Change in Australia. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 9(5), 495-514.

For more analysis of Cohort 1 see:

- Cuervo, H. & Wyn, J. (2012). *Young People Making it Work: Continuity and Change in Rural Places*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- Cuervo, H. & Wyn, J. (2011). *Rethinking Youth Transitions in Australia: A Historical and Multidimensional Approach*. Research Report 33, Melbourne: Youth Research Centre.
- Andres, L. & Wyn, J. (2010). *The Making of a Generation: The Children of the 1970s in Adulthood*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Dwyer, P. & Wyn, J. (2001). *Youth, Education and Risk: Facing the Future*. London: Routledge.

For more analysis of Cohort 2 see:

- Crofts, J., Cuervo, H., Wyn, J., Smith, G. & Woodman, D. (2015). *Life Patterns Ten Years Following Generation Y*. Melbourne: Youth Research Centre
- Cuervo, H., Crofts, J. & Wyn, J. (2013). *Generational Insights into New Labour Market Landscapes for Youth*. Research Report 42, Melbourne: Youth Research Centre.
- Crofts, J. & Coffey, J. (2016). Young Women's Negotiations of Gender, the Body and the Labour Market in a Post-feminist Context. *Journal of Gender Studies*, published online 18 Jan 2016.
- Woodman, D. (2012). Life out of Synchrony: How New Patterns of Further Education and the Rise of Precarious Employment Are Reshaping Young People's Relationships. *Sociology* 46(6), 1074-1090.
- Wyn, J., Cuervo, H., Smith, G. & Woodman, D. (2010). *Young People Negotiating Risk and Opportunity: Post-school Transitions 2005-2009*. Research Report 32, Melbourne: Youth Research Centre.

GOALS & ASPIRATIONS

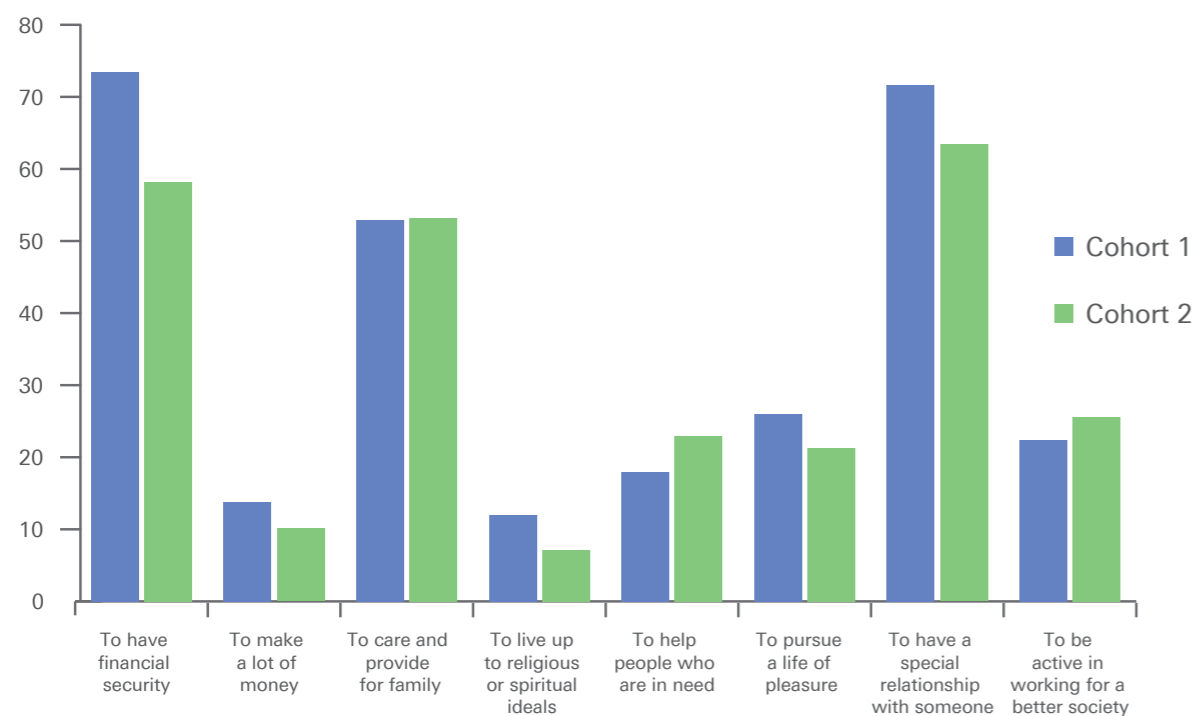
Over the course of several survey waves we have asked participants in both cohorts about their aspirations and goals in life. While the generations have similar goals and aspirations, participants in Cohort 2 expected that these would take longer to achieve than Cohort 1 did. We interpret this difference as a reflection of the fact that the Cohort 2 have taken on board the experiences of Cohort 1.

Figure 1 reveals that 'to have a special relationship with someone', 'to have financial security' and 'to care and provide for a family' have continued to be the highest priorities for both cohorts. Establishing meaningful relationships and financial or job security are the two main priorities for both groups throughout the history of

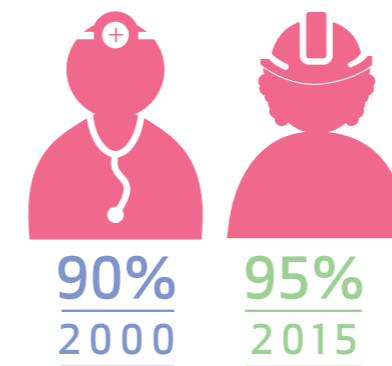
this research project. They form the core of participants' ambitions in life. Interestingly, financial security is slightly less important for Cohort 2. This might not mean that it has a lesser importance but perhaps reflects a better understanding of the uncertainty of the labour market and its impact on financial security.

Job security is also an ongoing goal for both generations. When surveyed at age aged 26-27 in 2015 95% of Cohort 2 participants rated 'job security' as a 'very high' or 'high' consideration when deciding on a career job. In 2000, and at the same age, 90% of Cohort 1 participants rated 'job security' as a 'very important' or 'important' consideration when deciding on a career job.

FIGURE 1. HOW DO YOU RATE THE FOLLOWING AS GOALS TO AIM FOR THROUGHOUT YOUR ADULT LIFE? (BY 'VERY HIGH', IN 2000 (COHORT 1) & 2015 (COHORT 2), AGED 26-27, %)

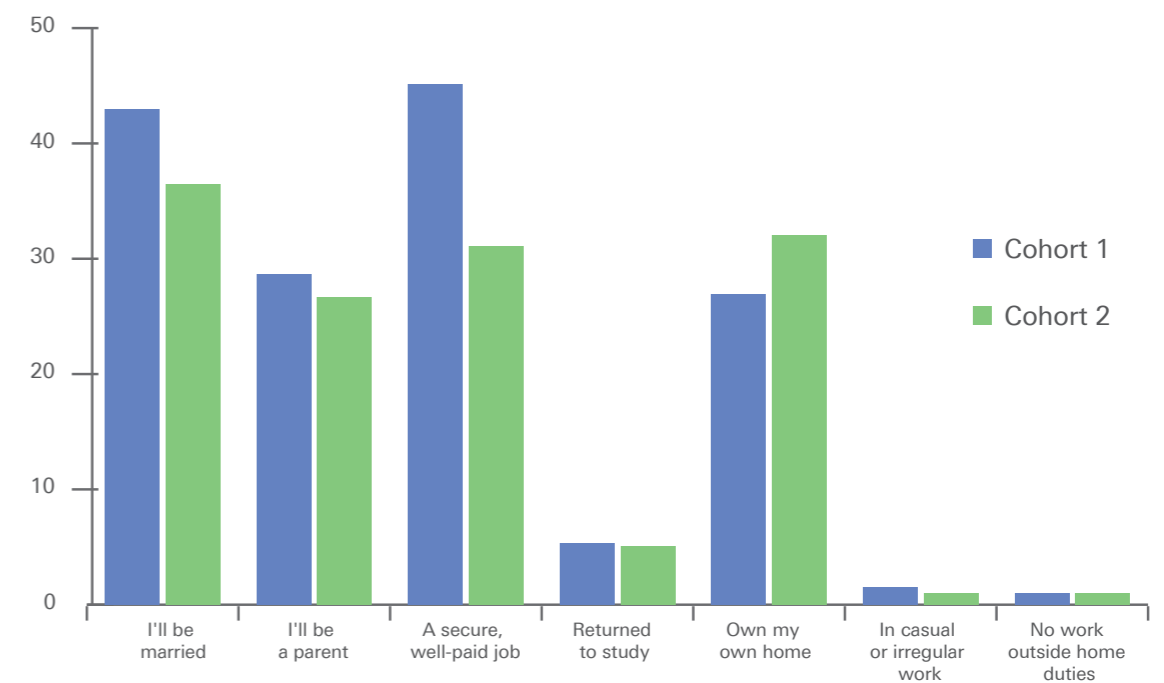


HOW MUCH IMPORTANCE WOULD YOU GIVE TO 'JOB SECURITY' IN DECIDING ON A CAREER JOB? (By 'high' & 'very high', in 2000 (Cohort 1) & 2015 (Cohort 2), %)



As seen in Figure 2 below Cohort 2 has adjusted their expectation of when they will obtain a secure, well-paid job compared with Cohort 1. This may reveal a better sense of how the labour market has changed, and changes have embedded and even accelerated since the 1990s. The graph below compares both generations' views for the future when both groups were aged 26-27 (2000 and 2015).

FIGURE 2. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS LIKELY FOR YOU IN 5 YEARS FROM NOW? (BY 'VERY LIKELY', IN 2000 (COHORT 1) & 2015 (COHORT 2), AGED 26-27, %)



A number of differences stand out in Figure 2. The first is that while both cohorts place a similar priority on having secure and well-paid jobs (see Figure 1), members of Cohort 2 are less optimistic than Cohort 1 about achieving this within five years. Only three out of ten Cohort 2 participants believe that is 'very likely' that they will achieve a 'secure, well-paid' job by the time they are in their early thirties. This highlights the uncertainty that young people feel in the labour market.⁵ As mentioned above, both cohorts put a lot of value on forming a special relationship and caring for family but it is again Cohort 2 participants that anticipate they will take longer to reach it than participants in Cohort 1. While they were less optimistic of having a secure, well paid job in their early thirties, Cohort 2 participants were more confident they would be able to own their own home in five years. Nonetheless, only 32% of Cohort 2 participants believe that is 'very likely' they will own their home in their early thirties. Further, in interviews, some participants point to financial support from their parents or their in-

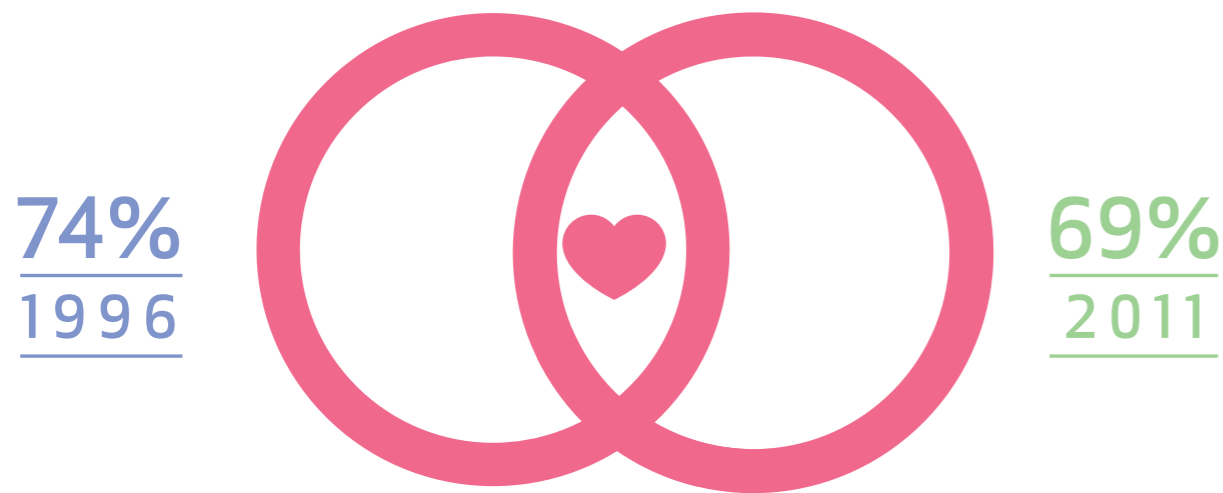
laws as necessary to realising this goal. This highlights the continuing importance of intergenerational connections and the way that families have adjusted to the increased financial pressures that impact particularly on young people.

Secondly, while both cohorts hold similar expectations about the likelihood of becoming a parent in the proceeding five years, Cohort 2 participants are less likely to expect that they would be married. Both cohorts hold relatively similar attitudes towards the idea of marriage in general. For example, in 1996 and 2011 respectively, 74% of Cohort 1 and 69% of Cohort 2 would feel 'unhappy' or 'very unhappy' if they never got married. This suggests a cultural shift to later marriage, likely after cohabitation, rather than marriage falling out of favour.

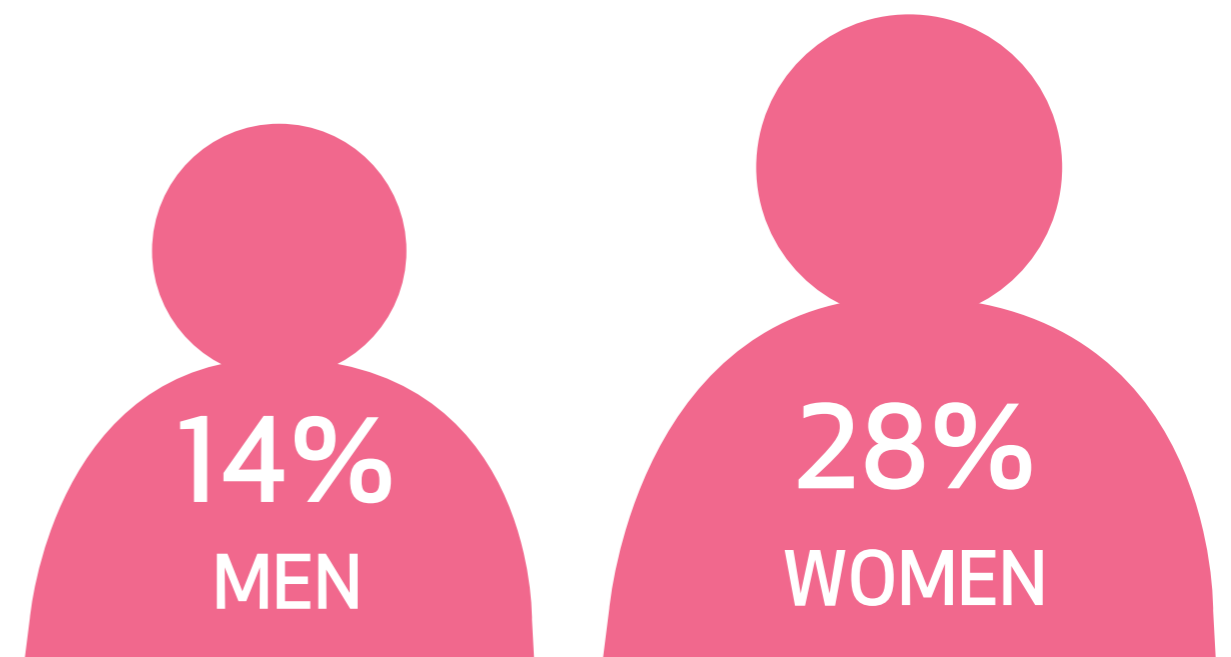
Young people's decisions about family are influenced by policies. This was demonstrated in the comparison between young Canadians and Australians by Andres and Wyn.⁶ Drawing on Andres' Paths on Life's Way study of young people in British Columbia, Canada, and Cohort 1 of the Life Patterns study, Andres and Wyn showed how education and labour market policies in each country impacted on young people's capacities to start families – with Australians taking longer to secure a stable financial position that would enable them to form a family or a close personal relationship and support children. By the year 2000 and aged 26-27, only 10% of the Life Patterns Cohort 1 participants were in a parenting situation compared with 20% of the Canadian Paths on Life's Way cohort at the same age.⁷

One of the other characteristics of both cohorts has been a preoccupation with achieving a balance in life between the areas of work, study, relationships, leisure and wellbeing. There is a constant struggle to balance competing priorities and commitments across these areas of life, with different emphases at different life points. The pressures of balancing different life spheres appear to lead to mental health problems and stress. For example, by 2016, 23% of Cohort 2 have stated that they feel mentally unhealthy. Women in particular (28%), are more likely than men (14%) to answer that they feel mentally unhealthy. Rebecca's narrative on the following page highlights the long road to obtain a career job following a heavy investment in education. In many instances, this hard-fought journey has had an impact on participants' mental health, as illustrated on the following page.

PARTICIPANTS WHO WOULD FEEL 'UNHAPPY' OR 'VERY UNHAPPY' IF THEY NEVER GOT MARRIED



FEELING MENTALLY UNHEALTHY (Cohort 2, 2016)



MANAGING COMPLEXITY: “I OFTEN FEEL LIKE THERE IS TOO MUCH GOING ON FOR ME TO HANDLE”

CASE STUDY COHORT 2: REBECCA

Rebecca attended an independent all-girls school in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Like the majority of the participants in this research project, after finishing secondary school she continued with tertiary studies. She started a degree in physiotherapy at a university in Melbourne but a year later, disappointed with the course, she discontinued and enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts at another university, majoring in psychology. During her undergraduate studies she combined her study with work as a sales assistant. In 2010, aged 22, she wanted to move into her own place but said she “*couldn’t afford to move out*” of her parents’ house. The following year, Rebecca told us:

“I sometimes become overwhelmed by uncertainty about the future, causing negative feelings. It’s hard to study and support yourself, which makes it difficult to move out of home and gain the independence and identity that young adults are often searching for.”

By 2012, Rebecca started a Masters in Speech Pathology. She said “*I had to stop working, I am currently unemployed due to the demands of my Masters degree.*” However, she felt she was “*choosing a career path and further study to get where I want to be.*” Rebecca supported herself through personal savings and was also receiving financial help from her parents. She actively worked towards keeping healthy. In that year, she affirmed, in our annual survey, that “*I exercise regularly and being in a great course and a stable relationship is (I believe) contributing positively to my mental health.*”

After a year of doing her Masters degree, Rebecca was still financially supported by her parents and started to confront the reality of having to begin to think of finding a job in her field of study. She found herself “*questioning my choice due to the limited jobs available in this field.*” On the one hand, Rebecca was ‘somewhat dissatisfied’ with her work and career, and the career opportunities for her generation. On the other hand, she was ‘rather satisfied’ by her personal educational attainments. This higher level of satisfaction with education than with work is a common generational pattern (see Figure 6 in this report). For Rebecca and her peers, education is seen to provide opportunities for self-realisation, something that is much more difficult to attain in

workplaces. In that same year, aged 24, Rebecca’s self-report indicated poor mental health status. This represented a deterioration from the previous year. Like many of her peers, she was finding it difficult to balance her professional commitments with dedicating time to her personal relationships:

“I feel very stressed most of the time and feel like I am losing friends because I am so busy with study that I cannot catch up with people as often as I would like.”

In addition, she was still feeling frustrated with her financial dependence on her parents and felt that she compared unfavourable with her peers:

“I am unable to afford to move out of home at present which I get upset about at times as I am at an age where I would like to be more independent. Most of my friends are in stable jobs and living out of home which makes this harder, as they have not studied for as long as I have. Both of my parents are sick, which is an additional stress that I am facing at the moment. I often feel like there is too much going on for me to handle and I become overwhelmed by this, despite feeling like I am doing relatively well in life in terms of my achievements so far.”

By the age of 25, in 2013, Rebecca had finished her Masters degree, found a job as a paediatric speech pathologist and moved out of her parents’ home. Despite being highly qualified, she still considers doing “*further study in the future to specialise in a chosen area.*” Finding a job in her field of study involved the trade-off of moving to a regional area, “*away from my friends, boyfriend and family, which has been stressful, but still a great experience for me.*” Rebecca still felt mentally unhealthy and by the next year she started to worry about the nature of her precarious job situation (a renewal contract position). In addition, moving away from her family and friends made her “*feel isolated*”.

In 2016, after two years in a regional town, Rebecca found a job back in her hometown, Melbourne. While she now has to work some weekends, she feels that she has achieved a lot, and is in a favourable situation compared to many of her peers:

“I am lucky to be in the position where I have secured a full time speech pathology job in a location where I would like to live, as many of my peers are working part time or multiple part time jobs on limited term contracts.”

At the age of 28 years old, she has mixed feelings about where she is in life. She is concerned about her mental health:

“I believed that moving back to where I grew up would make me happier, but I am unable to afford to live where I work and where I would like, so I moved back in with my parents. I am now unsure if moving back was the best move for me as it does not feel like a step forward in my life and I often miss the quality of life I had in a regional setting despite how much I love the city. I am paid the same amount in a place with a higher cost of living and I feel like I need to plan something to look forward to change my mental state, like travel or a business venture, however I also feel this isn’t possible due to my income.”

Rebecca, like many of her peers, reflexively assesses her accomplishments by comparing herself with her peers.

“Overall I feel I have achieved a lot for my age but I do not feel fulfilled and wish that I did. I would love to buy a property in Melbourne but at present this is not possible on my own. I often feel as though I am being left behind as my peers get married, travel, start families and buy homes, even though I have travelled and purchased a small, affordable house in a regional area on my own. The more that I do and achieve alone, the more I feel as though I will not have such things with a partner. I enjoy my work but at the moment it is the biggest part of my life and this is something that I would like to change, as other aspects of life are more important to me.”

Rebecca’s story is not an unusual one for this generation. Investing in their education well into their twenties, making sacrifices to work in a job in their field of study and finding it difficult to balance different spheres of their lives are common traits of this generation.



EDUCATION



Our participants are likely to have spent more time in formal education than their parents. Australia wide, nearly double the proportion of young adults (aged 18-34 years) were attending a tertiary institution in 2011 than in 1976 (26% compared with 14%).⁸ When compared at the same age in 2011 and 1996, 90% of both cohorts have done some form of post-secondary study. Cohort 2 participants have however studied for a longer period. Eighty-one per cent of Cohort 2 participants had studied for 3 years compared with 74% of Cohort 1. This is linked to a greater percentage of Cohort 2's post-school study being at Bachelor level or higher.

Cohort 1 was part of the first generation of Australians for whom continuing study into their twenties became normative. This new experience of education led the way for Cohort 2 for whom education also holds an even greater significance. Cohort 2 has benefitted from the pioneering experience of the previous generation. We have previously documented the challenges of the relatively inflexible educational options faced by Generation X in the early 1990s.⁹ Since that time, more flexible post-secondary options have become available.

In 2002, at the age of 28-29 years old, 58% of participants from Cohort 1 had completed or were studying for a second qualification. In 2016, 14% of Cohort 2 participants (aged 27-28 years) have completed a second post-school educational qualification and a further 30% were undertaking a second tertiary education degree. In 2016 20% of Cohort 2 participants that have completed some tertiary study felt that they need yet another degree to help them get work in their chosen area.

INVESTING IN EDUCATION

Education credentials are now a necessity, but not sufficient requirement for job security. Throughout the waves of surveys and interviews in the Life Patterns program, all groups of participants have confirmed the importance of further education as a strategy to achieve employment security. We asked both cohorts at age 23 'what is the link between doing post-school study or training and getting a better job in the future?' Their responses revealed generational parity with 47% of Cohort 1 and 44% of Cohort 2 participants stating a 'very strong' belief in this link.

THERE IS A 'VERY STRONG' LINK
BETWEEN EDUCATION & WORK
(Aged 23)

47%
1996

44%
2011



WORKING TOWARDS "JOB SECURITY & FINANCIAL STABILITY"

CASE STUDY COHORT 2: TAMARA

Tamara has spent 8 years in higher education and changed degrees multiple times. After high school she began a nursing degree but opted to change after six months to a Bachelor of Medical Science. After a year, she changed once more to a Bachelor of Applied Science majoring in Sports Science. Changing to Sports Science made Tamara realise "that this is something I was really interested in... I'm really glad I stuck with it because I absolutely love what I do now." After finishing her honours year in Canberra, Tamara realised that she was in "a highly competitive field with very limited job opportunities" but as she still felt passionately about the field she decided to undertake a PhD that to "broaden my job opportunities in this field." In 2012 she was offered a PhD position and scholarship at a university in Adelaide which she accepted, saying that a PhD was "essential to be competitive against other candidates", however a year later decided quit the PhD and leave the field due to the lack of jobs. Tamara also cited mental health problems that year due to a combination of physical illness and lack of social connections in her new city.

In 2014, Tamara was working full-time as a teaching assistant with casual jobs on the side leading to "personal and professional stress" taking a toll on her physical and psychological well-being. During this period she had made the decision to study medicine, and studied 5-10 hours a week every week for 9 months. This added "some stress and time away from hobbies and relationships" but Tamara remained motivated and committed. In 2016, ten years after completing high school, she began studying Medicine in a regional Australian city, while doing tutoring at a university. Aside from tutoring work Tamara was financially supported by personal savings and direct financial support from her family. Job security has consistently been a goal for Tamara and she states that "the decision to return to study medicine will ultimately lead me towards the career I want and should result in job security and financial stability." Tamara would be 'very unhappy' if she couldn't get a full-time job, had casual or irregular work or had to change jobs frequently. Her continued investment in education has been a strategy to gain secure, full-time work and has sacrificed personal time with friends and family to achieve this.

"The major struggle is balancing the study load with other factors such as time to see family and friends and also exercise, as this is important for overall health."



EMPLOYMENT

National data shows that despite the high investment by young people in education the nexus between education and employment is becoming more complex, with precarious and insecure work affecting all groups of young people including those that have completed tertiary studies.¹⁰ Researchers have pointed out that the current Australian labour market is increasingly dominated by flexible, casual, precarious and insecure patterns of employment.¹¹ Previously we have argued that the working lives of Cohort 1 have been characterised by elements of precariousness, flexibility and mobility, as well as attempts to maintain a work-life balance.¹² When Cohort 1 participants were aged 25, it was apparent that “the predictability of life-paths that their parents had believed in has been replaced by the need for flexibility and pragmatic choices as the only reliable basis for future security.”¹³

A comparison with Cohort 2 reveals very similar patterns. Both generations have experienced changing labour market expectations which pressured them to gain skills and further

education qualifications to navigate an evolved labour market. In their initial post-secondary years, Cohort 1 faced high levels of youth unemployment linked to a recession. While youth unemployment was better in 2006 when Cohort 2 finished school, the Global Financial Crisis hit Australia soon after this, raising unemployment and particularly underemployment.

Over the years we have asked participants about the most important factors considered when deciding on a prospective job. Job security is the number one concern for both cohorts, closely followed by the desire for a full-time position. These two factors are more important to participants than ‘it pays well’, has a ‘high status’ and ‘has flexible hours’.

The results in Figure 3 demonstrate intergenerational agreement that job security is of paramount importance. As Andres and Wyn¹⁴ argue, Generation X had to confront a precarious labour market and short-term contracts, only finding more secure positions in their early thirties – 14

years after finishing secondary school. Cohort 2 is aware of the long road to job security. As seen in the section on goals and aspirations, Cohort 2 anticipates an unstable path through the job market and is cautious about planning their work or family lives too far into the future.

One of the consequences of labour market uncertainty is high demands in the workplace for our younger generation. Of Cohort 2 participants in 2016, 70% were working irregular hours and 36% were working more than 40 hours a week. The participants’ comments in response to an open-ended question about experiences at work asked in our survey reveal the toll that long working days and labour market uncertainty is having on young people’s health. For example, this young man from Cohort 2, working as an engineering manager, said:

HOW LIKELY IS IT THAT YOU’LL BE IN A SECURE, WELL PAID JOB 5 YEARS FROM NOW? (By ‘Very likely’, in 2000 (Cohort 1) & 2015 (Cohort 2), aged 26-27, %)

45%
COHORT 1

31%
COHORT 2

“I am now expected to produce a higher output without an adjustment in pay. With the extended work hours and stressful job role I feel that my health is starting to deteriorate and I am not able to do as much with friends as I would like. My work is a bit of a roller coaster. The stress of not knowing what to expect when I get into work has added to the deterioration of my mental health.”

FIGURE 3. THE FOLLOWING ARE VERY IMPORTANT IN DECIDING ON A CAREER JOB (BY ‘VERY IMPORTANT’, IN 2000 (COHORT 1) & 2015 (COHORT 2), AGED 26-27, %)

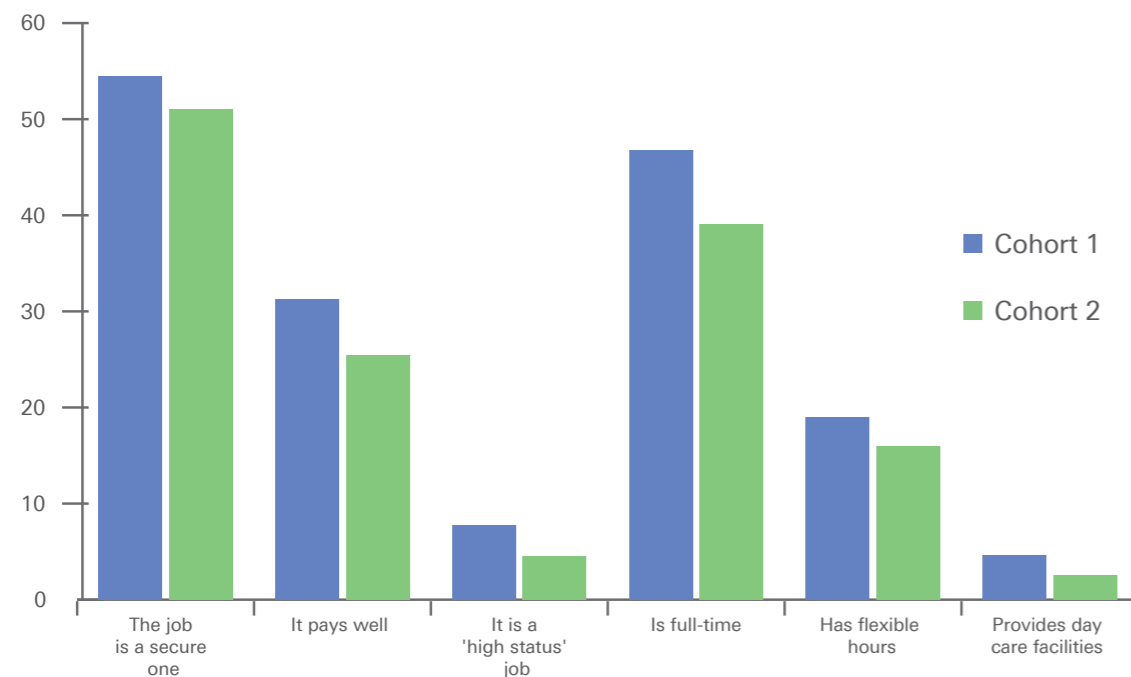
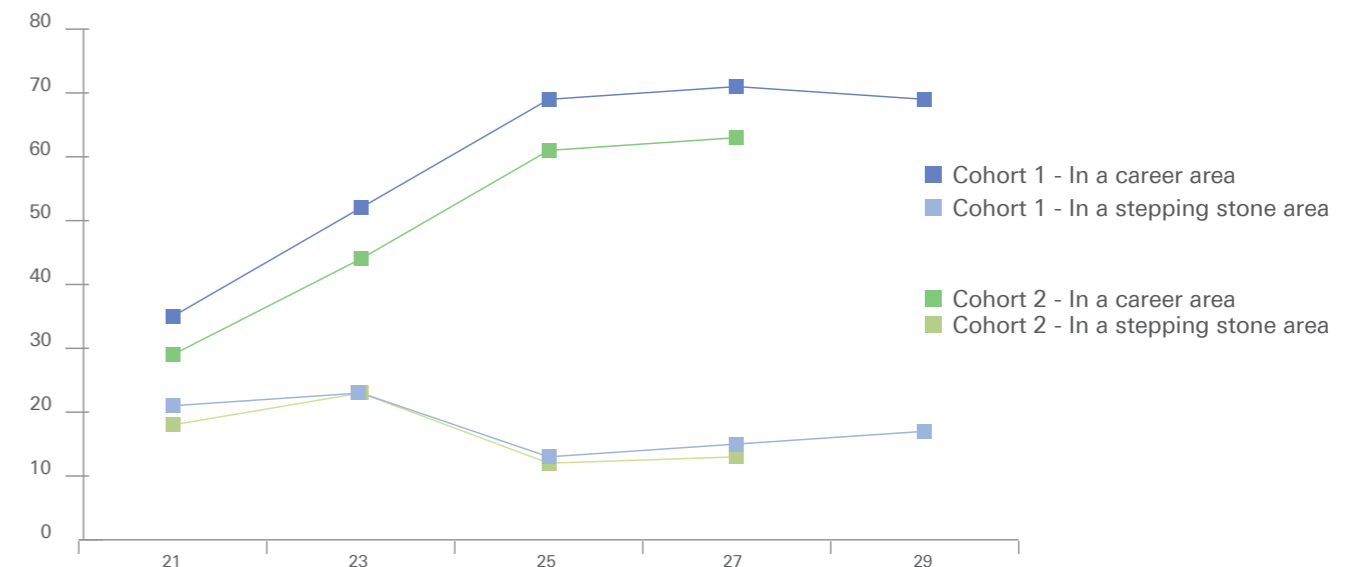


FIGURE 4. THE JOB IS ‘IN MY CAREER AREA’ OR A ‘STEPPING STONE’ TOWARDS A CAREER JOB (COMPARING COHORT 1 & COHORT 2, AGED 21-29, %)



Similarly, the experience of this woman from Cohort 2, working in a non-permanent job as a public servant, reflects some of the pressure for those in a more unstable labour situation:

“The uncertainty in not being a permanent employee can be stressful. I am employed on a renewable contract basis and am currently re-applying for the role. This has placed a lot of mental stress as I’ve just purchased a home. As a result, I have not been able to look after my physical health as much as I would like to. Stable, fulfilling work is very important to me and at times appears unattainable.”

We have also tracked our participants’ journey towards achieving a job in a preferred career area. Figure 5 reveals both generations’ journey towards this goal.

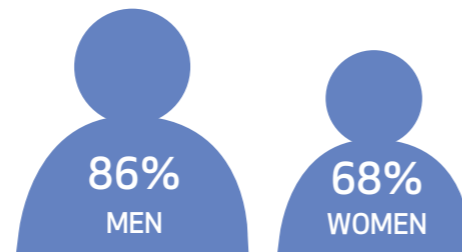
Over the years, a slightly higher number of Cohort 1 participants had jobs in their preferred career area or jobs that were seen as ‘stepping stones’ to a career. This difference between cohorts may reflect the fact that Cohort 2 were students for longer periods than Cohort 1. It may also be a reflection of the increasingly precarious labour market and the tenuous link between education and work. Interestingly, at the age of 25, in 1998 and 2013 respectively, 16% of Cohort 1 ‘strongly agreed’ that their work was ‘what I expected to have at this stage’ while 20% of Cohort 2 ‘strongly agreed’ with this statement. While many still do not achieve what they were expecting, there is perhaps a slightly higher recognition that secure jobs are taking longer to achieve.

PATTERNS OF GENDER INEQUALITY AT WORK: WHAT LIES IN STORE FOR GENERATION Y?

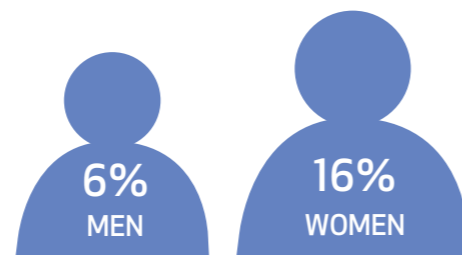
In 2014, for Cohort 1, men (86%) were more likely to be in permanent work positions than women (68%). Women were more likely to have contract (16% vs. 6% of men) and casual positions (11% vs. 5% of men). An important gain for the whole cohort is the increase in participants working in ‘regular’ hours (9am to 5pm) since 2011 (47% in 2014 vs. 41% in 2011).

STATUS OF MAIN JOB IN 2014 (Cohort 1, aged 40-41, %)

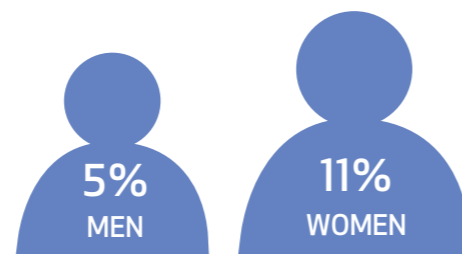
PERMANENT WORK



CONTRACT WORK



CASUAL POSITIONS

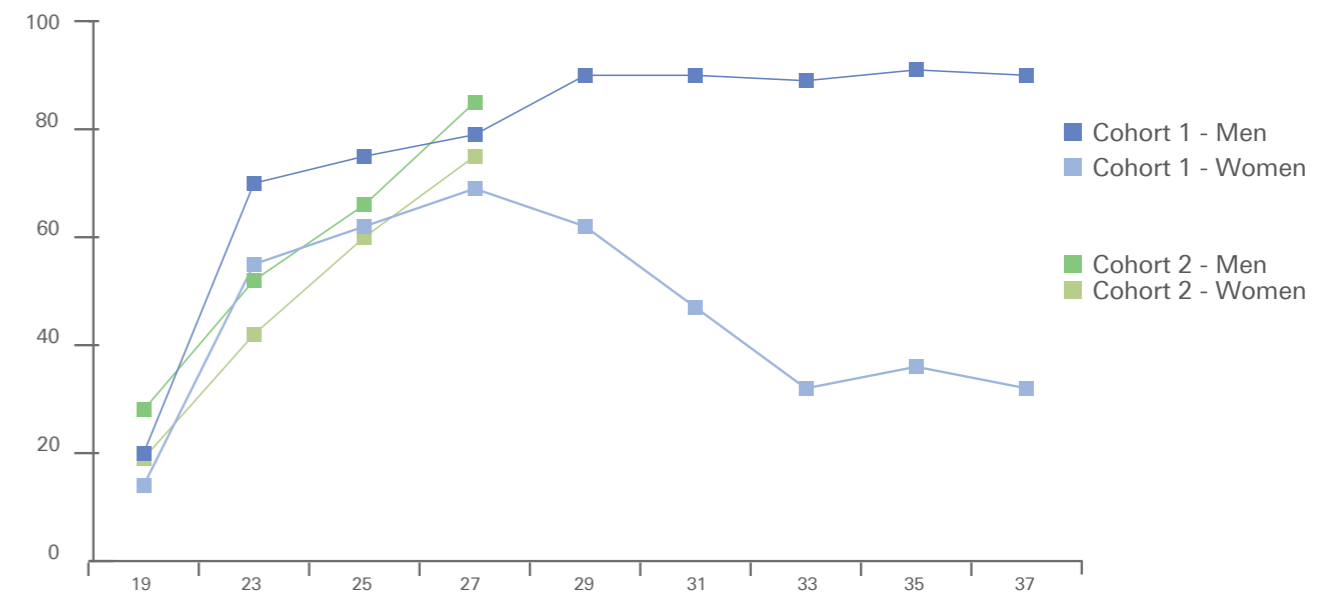


This gap in permanent employment for women and men is significant given that gaining a secure job has been a priority for both genders throughout the study. An important factor explaining this inequality in permanent work is women interrupting their careers to have and care for children.¹⁵ The gender gap in employment is perhaps most striking in terms of full-time work participation. Figure 6 reveals the full-time work patterns of both generations over the years.

Figure 5 shows the gender gap in full-time work participation for Cohort 1 over the years. At the age of 27, in the year 2000, only 10% of Cohort 1 participants were in a parenting role, and the gender gap was only 10% in favour of males. By the age of 33, there is a 60% gap in full-time work participation, largely due to females taking

parental leave or coming back to work after birth only on a part-time basis. Men in Cohort 1 continued with their full-time employment participation after the birth of their first child. For Cohort 2, very similar to Cohort 1 at the same age, there is currently a gender gap of 10% in favour of men, even though fewer than 3% of participants in this cohort are already in a parenting role. It remains to be seen if the collision of family and work will impact on these young women’s lives as it did for Cohort 1. Nonetheless, Cohort 2 women’s and men’s views of work and parenting already signal that the cost of having children and interrupting a working career will largely be borne by the women.¹⁶

FIGURE 5. FULL-TIME WORK PARTICIPATION, BY GENDER, OVER THE YEARS
(COHORT 1 AGED 19-37, COHORT 2 AGED 19-27, %)



For more on employment and the Life Patterns research program see:

- Cuervo, H., Crofts, J. & Wyn, J. (2013). *Generational Insights into New Labour Market Landscapes for Youth*. Research Report 42, Melbourne: Youth Research Centre.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THEIR GENERATION

Another set of intergenerational comparisons conducted at the age of 25 (in 1998 with Cohort 1 and 2013 with Cohort 2) shows similarities and differences between the groups. On the one hand, both cohorts report high satisfaction with their personal relationships and life and their educational achievements. On the other hand, roughly only 30% of each generation were 'very satisfied' with their own work and career status or accomplishments. Figure 6 reveals interesting generational differences.

Thirty-three per cent of Cohort 2 were highly satisfied with the educational opportunities for their generation compared to 4% for Cohort 1; while 19% of Cohort 2 shows higher satisfaction with career opportunities compared to 9% of Cohort 1. This data reveals a difference in perceived opportunities between generations. Cohort 2 participants' level of satisfaction with their opportunities is higher than Cohort 1 participants', but they have a much lower level of satisfaction with the educational opportunities for their generation than Cohort 2.

Higher proportions of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 women, compared to the men, were 'very satisfied' with their 'work and career', their 'educational attainments', 'career opportunities' and 'education opportunities' for their generation. The biggest gender gap in who was 'very satisfied' was found in 'your educational attainments'.

This data reflects one of the most significant changes in youth transitions over the last two decades: the embracing of the discourse of educational and work opportunities by young people, and in particular by young women. Overall, women from both cohorts have greater satisfaction with different aspects of their lives than men.

LOOKING BACK AT HOPES YOU HAD IN SCHOOL, HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE WAY THINGS HAVE TURNED OUT (By 'Very satisfied', 1998 (Cohort 1) & 2013 (Cohort 2), aged 24-25, %)

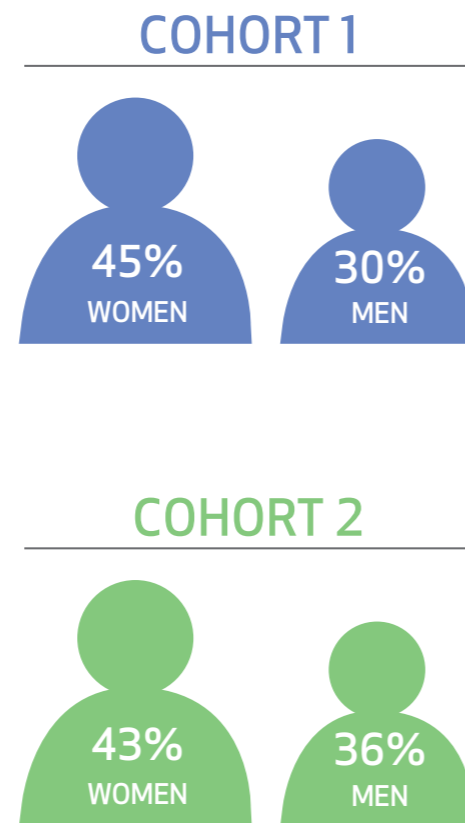
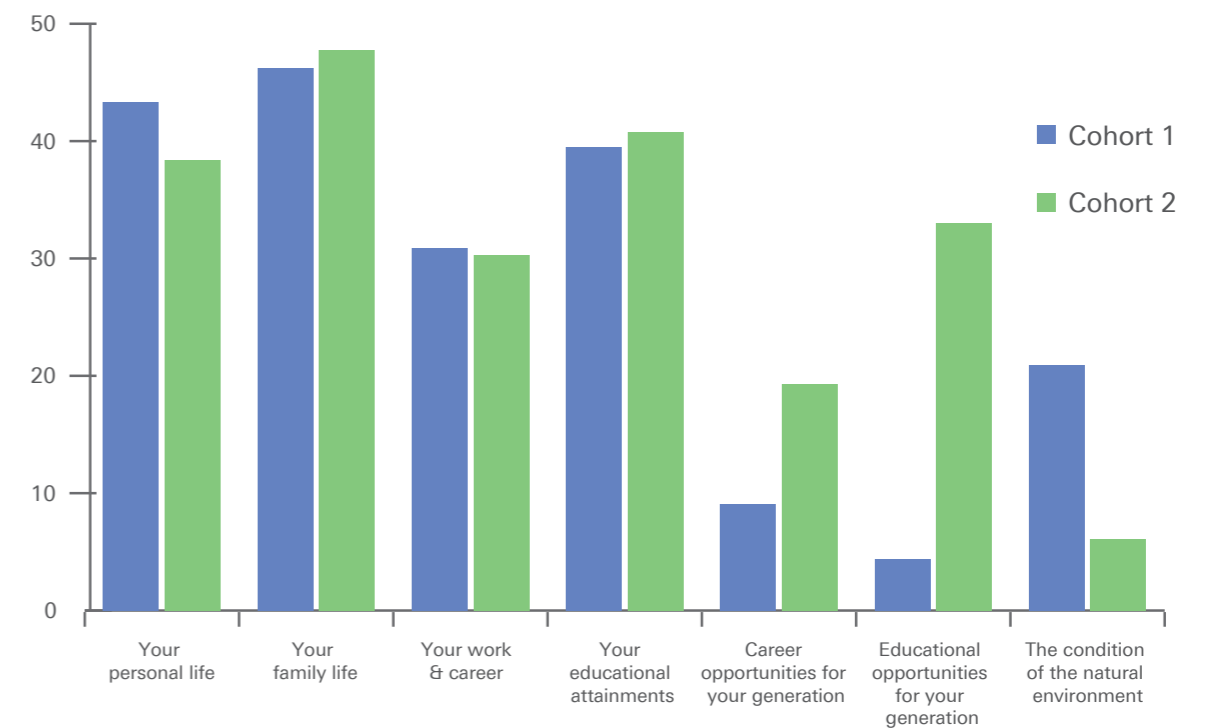


FIGURE 6. LOOKING BACK AT HOPES YOU HAD IN SCHOOL, HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE WAY THINGS HAVE TURNED OUT (BY 'VERY SATISFIED', 1998 (COHORT 1) & 2013 (COHORT 2), AGED 24-25, %)

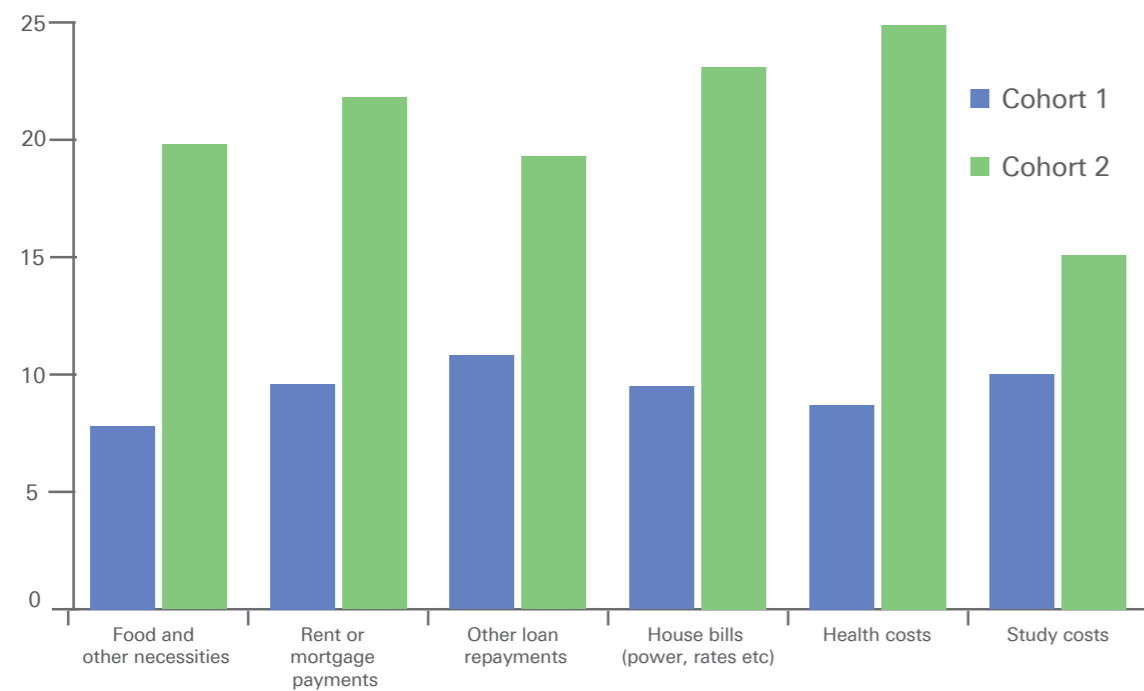


FINANCES & COST OF LIVING

Cohort 2 struggled more with paying for necessities such as food, rent and study costs than Cohort 1. One of the biggest differences between the two cohorts is increased difficulty meeting health costs and house bills such as power and rates experienced by Cohort 2. These increases could be

due to longer time spent in education or rising rent in most Australian capital cities over the past decade.¹⁷ Cohort 2 is also faced with rising costs of university fees and increasing house prices.

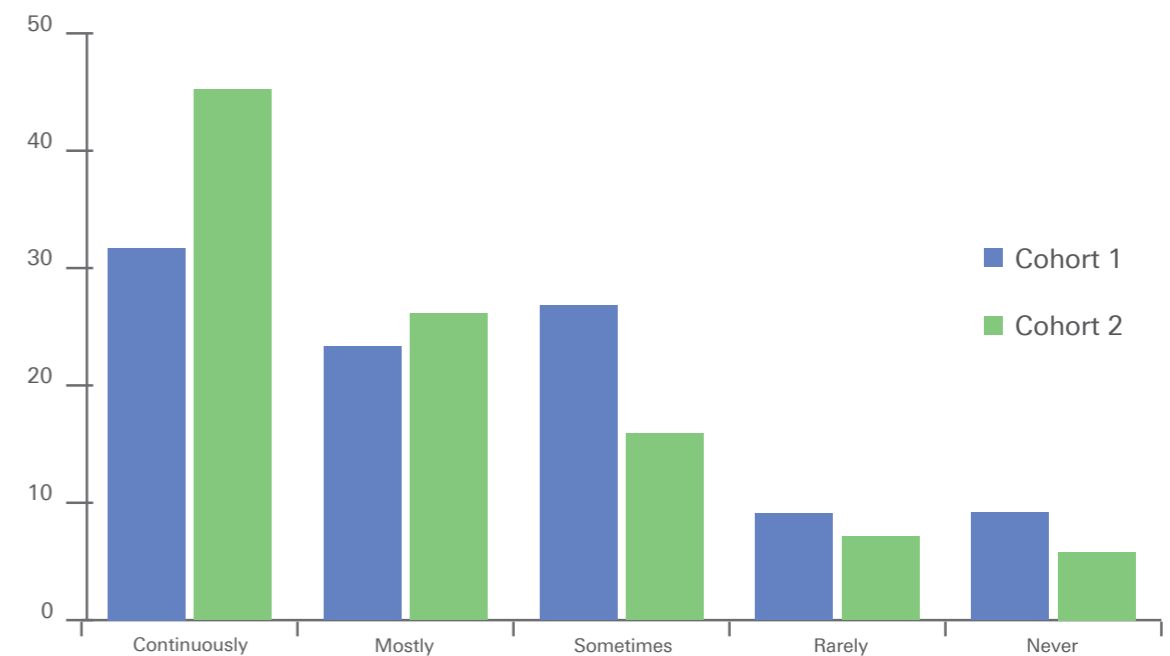
FIGURE 7. OVER THE PAST YEAR HAVE YOU HAD DIFFICULTY MEETING THE FOLLOWING COSTS? (MARK ALL THAT APPLY, 2000 (COHORT 1) & 2015 (COHORT 2), AGED 26-27, %)



Analysis of the effects of combining of work and study reveals interesting patterns of generational difference. Cohort 2 is more likely to have continuously worked and studied (45% to 32%) than Cohort 1. This difference may point to changes in welfare allowances (such as Austudy

or Youth Allowance) or the rising cost of rents and housing prices in capital cities around Australia. It might also be a reflection of the awareness by Cohort 2 of an increasingly competitiveness of the labour market and the need to actively build a work portfolio.

FIGURE 8. HAVE YOU COMBINED BOTH WORK & STUDY? (1996 (COHORT 1) & 2011 (COHORT 2), AGED 22-23, %)



For more on financial hardship and the Life Patterns research program see:

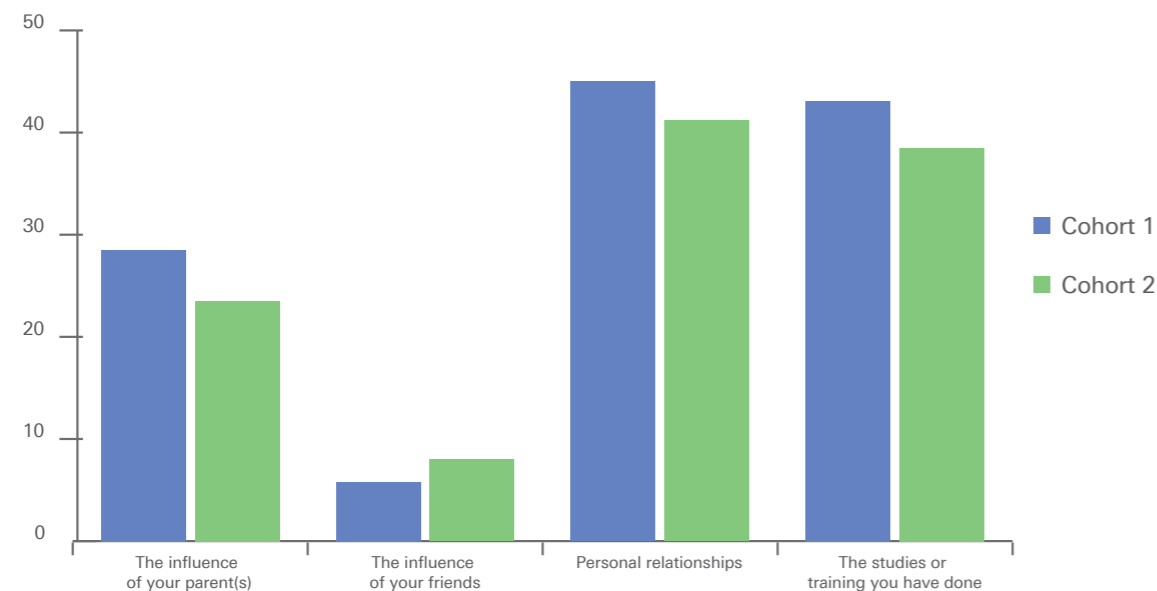
- Wierenga, A., Landstedt, E. & Wyn, J. (2013). *Revisiting Disadvantage in Higher Education*. Melbourne: Youth Research Centre.

FAMILY & PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The importance of family relationships to young adults, and particularly the material and emotional support that family can provide, have been of crucial importance to the participants of both cohorts. Each survey reveals how young people strive to spend more time with family and friends while balancing everyday activities such as work. Figure 9 below illustrates a number of interesting points. Education is extremely important and highly valued by both generations

and will continue shape their lives into the future. However, personal relationships were seen to be more important than education for both cohorts, followed by the influence of their parent or parents.

FIGURE 9. OVER THE PAST 10 YEARS, HOW IMPORTANT HAVE THE FOLLOWING BEEN IN SHAPING YOUR LIFE? (BY 'VERY IMPORTANT', 2000 (COHORT 1) & 2015 (COHORT 2), AGED 26-27, %)



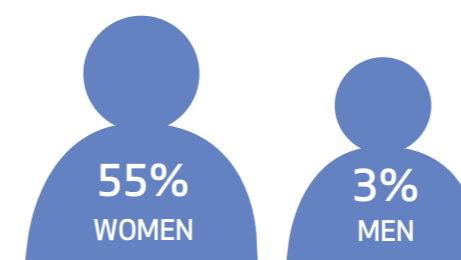
PARENTING

By 2014, 72% of Cohort 1 participants were parenting. As we have seen earlier in this report, educational and employment participation rates were similar while the Cohort 1 participants' were in their twenties, however, once children were born their lives became more strongly patterned according to gender. This reflects a relative lack of family-friendly, flexible workplaces and affordable and flexible childcare that would allow men and women to share the early years of raising a family more equally, leaving women with the burden of juggling work and parenting. In 2014, 55% of women in Cohort 1 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they do 'much more of the share of parenting than my partner' while only 3% of men said the same.

Cohort 2 appears to be facing similar challenges in achieving a work-family balance. Many of the Cohort 2 young women are heavily investing in and planning their careers, anticipating that the pressures of balancing work and family will mean that they will leave the work force for a period or return to work part-time.¹⁸ Only 4% of our Cohort 2 have children in 2015 and we wait to see if similar patterns play out in their generation as they get older.

I DO MUCH MORE OF THE SHARE OF THE PARENTING THAN MY PARTNER (By 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree', Cohort 1, 2014)

COHORT 1



For more on parenting, gender and the Life Patterns research program see:

- Crofts, J. & Coffey, J. (2016). Young Women's Negotiations of Gender, the Body and the Labour Market in a Post-feminist Context. *Journal of Gender Studies*, published online 18 Jan 2016
- Cuervo, H., Crofts, J. & Wyn, J. (2012). *Gen X and the Gender Revolution: Pioneers or Traditionalists?* Research Report 36, Melbourne: Youth Research Centre.

For more on the importance of family and the Life Patterns research program see:

- Cuervo, H. & Wyn, J. (2012). *Young People Making it Work: Continuity and Change in Rural Places*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

NAVIGATING LIFE & “WORKING LIKE A TROJAN”

CASE STUDY COHORT 1: CAROLINE

Navigating the changing education system of the 1990s, working hard for job security and balancing career and family goals, Caroline’s story demonstrates the struggles her generation have faced in achieving their goals. Caroline attended Years 11 and 12 at a prestigious private school in Melbourne. When she finished Year 12 she had hoped to do an interior design course, but the quality of her folio was not regarded as of a high enough standard for acceptance into this course. Reflecting back on this time, Caroline felt that she had been poorly prepared for the requirements for entry into this course due to her high school’s focus on preparing students for university degrees at the expense of preparation for other qualifications. After her unsuccessful application, she decided to do a Year 13 to focus on building a better folio with the view to applying again. She could do this because she was fully supported by her parents financially and was living at home, and she described her Year 13 as the “best year of her life.” She then applied again for the same design course and was again rejected. Following this she changed track and was successful in her application for an Associate Diploma in Furniture Technology at TAFE. Caroline said that this course was a great experience: she emphasised the “realistic, hands on” nature of the course, and the combination of practical and theoretical work that she was able to do. She enjoyed the atmosphere of the TAFE, the dedication of her lecturers, and the quality of the facilities.

During her time at TAFE Caroline met another student who was one year ahead of her in the course. At the end of her studies Caroline accepted a job with this student’s new company, entering the furniture manufacturing business. She said she loved the company, and soon became assistant general manager, a role she found fulfilling. Discussing this job, she emphasised the good career prospects that were on offer and the future expansion of the firm. She felt that her family had given her a strong work ethic. However, she also discussed working extremely long hours. Working sixty or seventy hour weeks, Caroline felt time poor and emphasised that she had not intended for her job to become her main priority, but that the needs of the growing business demanded this. Yet, she also maintained an active life outside of work, building a house with her partner and studying Japanese in her spare time.

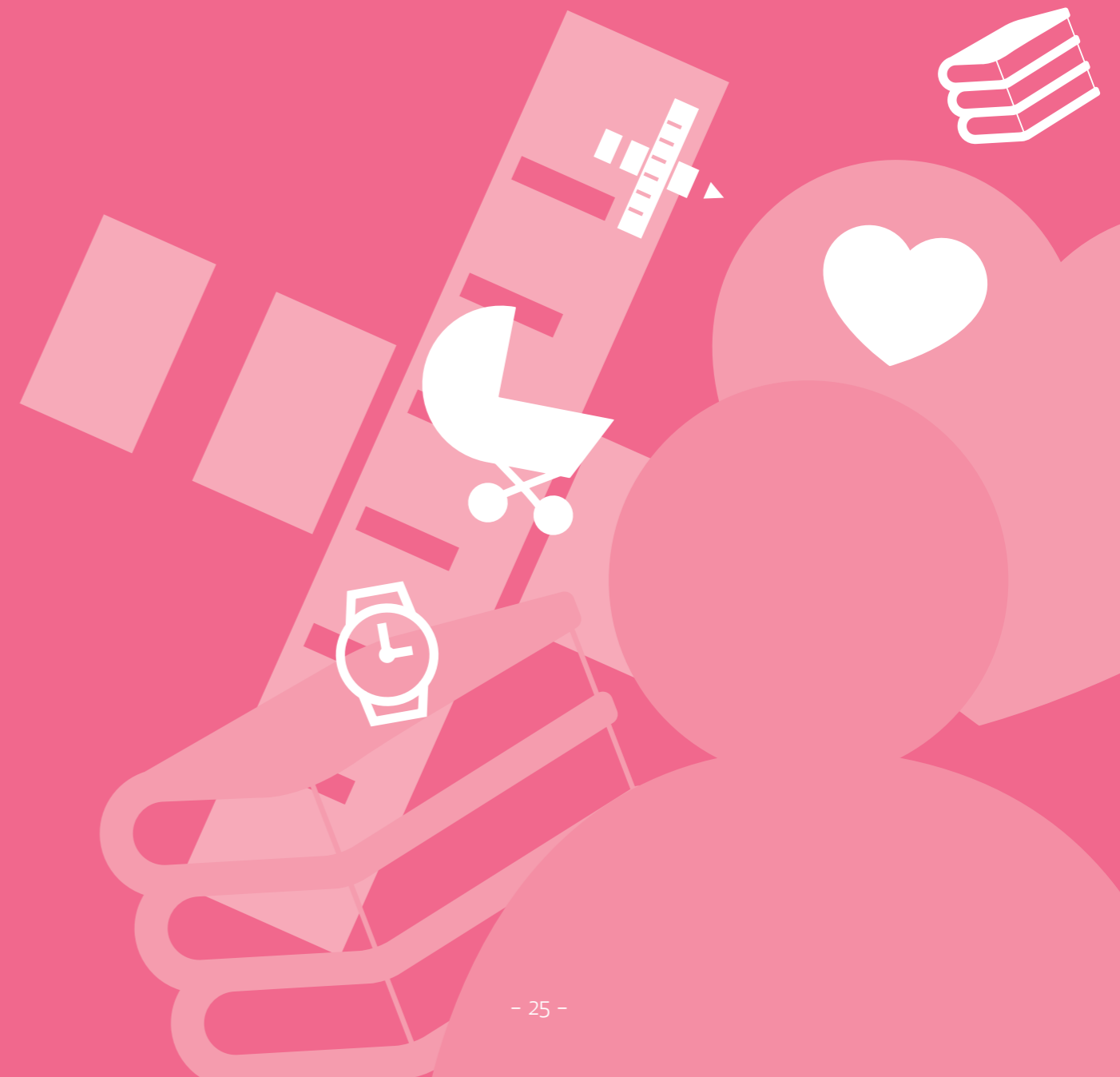
However, by the time we spoke to her again in 1998 her attitude towards work had changed. She had become disillusioned with the business, saying that she worked long and hard and did not feel that this was reciprocated by other workers. Caroline also said that working in a team of twelve men left her feeling that she constantly had to prove herself and be doing more than the others to be respected. Overall she had “lost the passion” for her job by this time, as the combination of long hours, hard work, and a lack of support from her colleagues took its toll. Despite this, Caroline did not change jobs. She had seen the effect of redundancy on her father, and described herself as terrified of unemployment because of this. While stressful, she saw the job as a valuable source of stability in her life and was grateful for this.

Eight years after finishing year 12, Caroline was living in a house she had built with her husband and was finally in a secure enough position to think about having a family. However, problems at work were to make this difficult for her and her partner. Caroline’s work continued to cause her high levels of stress and she was overworked. Her attempts to become pregnant were unsuccessful. Eventually her doctor told her that she had to face a choice between her career or having a child. She left the furniture business and took a job at a small family operated retail store in one of Melbourne’s outer suburbs. After two years, Caroline eventually became pregnant through IVF and was happy with her new situation. She said since she had left school she had been operating at an extremely high pace and that it had taken her eleven or twelve years to eventually slow down. She compared herself to her friends, who were still “working like Trojans” to the detriment of their personal lives, and was enjoying the more relaxed pace of her new lifestyle. With her partner as the family’s primary earner, she planned to go back to work after her baby was old enough to be in childcare, and while she did not want to become a stay at home mum for the rest of her life, she did not want this to happen too early, saying that she had not worked this hard to then put her child in paid care. Overall she said that she had much more balance in her life now, and emphasised the importance of this.

Discussing the changes in her life, Caroline said that she had reached the point of “having a nervous breakdown and then moving on.” She described herself as a “very different person” now, but said that life for her generation was becoming more difficult. Discussing the generation that forms the second cohort of the Life Patterns study, Caroline said that it was much more difficult for people starting out now, with rising house prices and a more difficult work situation. She had worked hard to find security, and thought that the younger generation would have to work even

harder. Overall Caroline was happy with the life she had worked to build, but felt that she had needed to work at a frantic pace over a long period to get where she was, and that her life had been hard at times.

This story is like the stories of many of our Life Patterns participants, who have negotiated a changing education system and an uncertain labour market, finding security and stability difficult to achieve.



FAMILY: "HAVING A CHILD CHANGED EVERYTHING"

CASE STUDY COHORT 1: ANTHONY

Anthony is a director and co-owner of a small architectural joinery firm. Unlike many of his peers, Anthony's school-to-work experience was relatively straight forward. Born and raised in Melbourne's northern suburbs, he was educated at a single-sex Catholic secondary college. The educational choices he made during his last years of schooling were determined by very clear goals. Having "always wanted to do cabinet-making", he was keen to complete the relevant subjects to qualify for an apprenticeship, and gained the requisite marks to do so. The apprenticeship was followed by an Associate Diploma in Accounting at a TAFE. Rather than stay on with his employer at the end of his apprenticeship, at age 21 Anthony opted to partner with a friend in their own joinery business.

In the mid-90s, Anthony described himself as "keen" rather than "greedy" for success. He credited his strong work ethic and desire for financial independence to his upbringing. His parents, both recent migrants, had little formal education but "knew how to work hard" and apply themselves to the task at hand - "Do the best you can, but do it properly ... no half-heartedness accepted here". Having drawn on his skills as a concreter to build up a small business, his father's success was for Anthony an affirmation of the value of "putting away for the future". Interestingly, Anthony's father proved somewhat resistant to his son's decision to go out on his own, concerned that he was too young to take on such a risk and responsibility. Anthony was able to counter that the risk was relatively minor as he was still living at home with his parents and had no major commitments (at worst, he assessed, he might lose \$20,000 in the venture). He subsequently acknowledged the strong family support he had been given during the gestation and early growth of the business: "Without them I would not be here."

Interviewed when the firm was in its infancy, Anthony expressed considerable satisfaction at having established himself at such a young age. He expressed impatience that his relative youth often meant that he was not taken seriously in business dealings. Within its first three years, the business grew enough for the partners to be able to hire six additional workers and update machinery and the computer system to attract new contracts. When asked to comment on his level of career satisfaction and progress to

that date (i.e. 1998), he conceded that "I still have a long way to go ... [but] I'm happy with myself ... I have proved myself a success." By the end of 1999, he was still living at home, but bought himself a house and started renovation work the same year.

Interviewed in 2002, a decade after leaving school and taking up his apprenticeship, Anthony described himself as "older and wiser." He was now a home-owner and married (giving him "someone else to think about"). His intention to start a family meant he was looking to work less and delegate more, however he still found himself working very long hours (6 am to 7 pm weekdays and Saturday mornings). As he had done previously, Anthony expressed concerns about his health, noting that he had stopped playing sport because of lack of time. He resolved to resume basketball at least to find time for leisure ("relaxing, appreciating the simpler things in life"), and go on more holidays.

Anthony was next interviewed in 2004 and indicated that his priorities had shifted significantly in the intervening two years. At age 30, and a recent first-time father, he described himself as "more reflective [now], more careful of my time", and thinking about where he wanted to be in 10 years.

"Having a child has changed everything. It has put things into perspective for me. The family has always come first but this has shifted the priorities again. Previously I worked 14-16 hours per day, seven days a week. Now I do 10-12 hours per day and no weekends. I had a plan. Put the hard work in while I'm young so I can be in a better position now, and back off. Now I am in a comfortable position financially. Neither my wife nor I wanted her to go back to work after our child was born. This has worked. She comes in one day a week and helps out with the books ... this helps both us."

Anthony expressed some regret at the fact the business had "consumed my 20s." He compared his position to that of his younger brother who, at 26, had travelled overseas, changed jobs and "experienced more of life than I have." At the same time, he felt satisfaction that he had "something to show for the hard work I have put in... The financial rewards are there and I like to think I have set the foundation stones for rewards in 5-10 years' time."

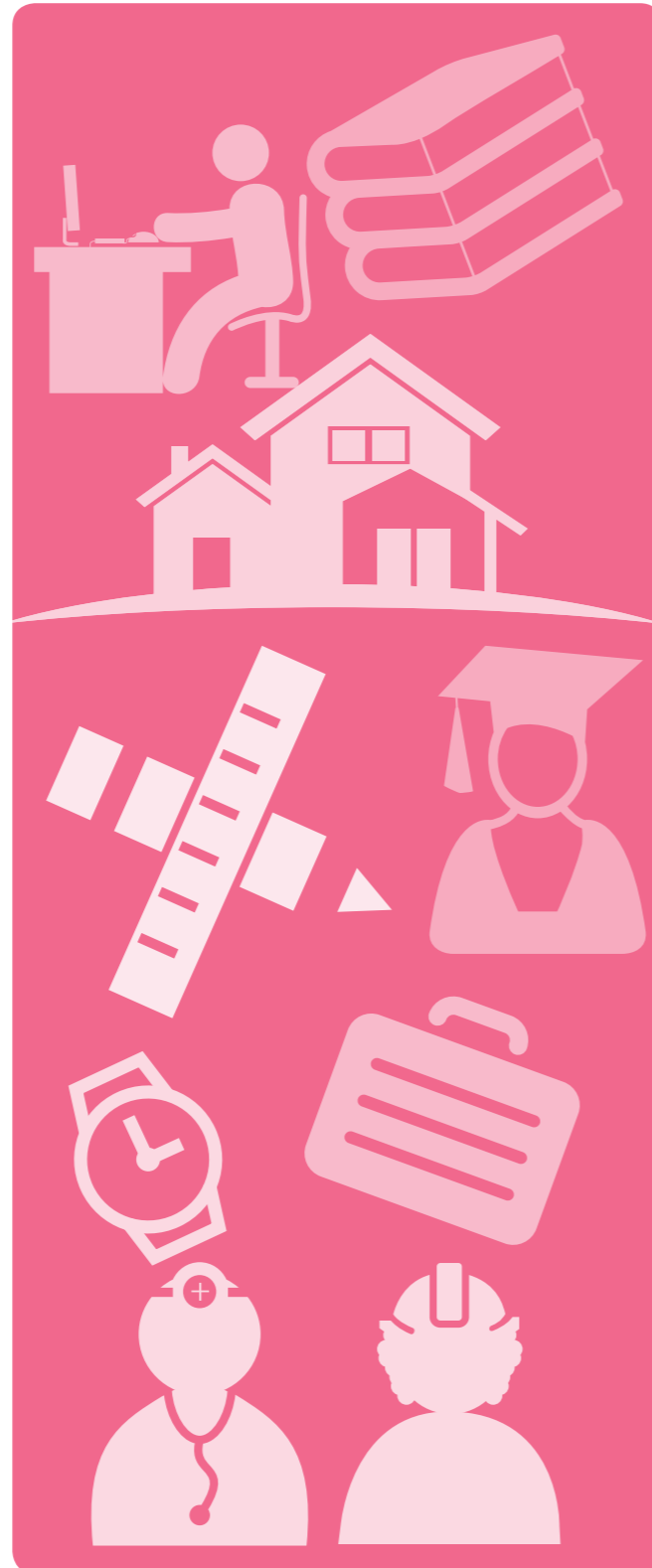
Anthony's story reflects some of the important patterns demonstrated by the project. He moved from school into the workforce but worked hard and sacrificed his personal life and health for success and stability at work. His success (both in terms of his business and buying a house) was supported by his family, whom he was able to live with well into his 20s. The importance of family remained in Anthony's life as had his own family and began to cut back his hours to spend time with them. Again, the support of his wife meant he could continue running a successful business that provided them with financial security.



CONCLUSION

Throughout our research we have considered prevailing social conditions, exploring the extent to which changes in education, employment and social relations have affected both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 young people. We are able to ask whether patterns formed by Cohort 1 are continued or changed for the younger generation of Australians. Regarding attitudes, goals and priorities there are many ways in which these two cohorts have more similarities than differences.

This study found that the participants in both cohorts have worked hard to balance the competing areas of their lives, negotiating multiple demands. Both groups place a high emphasis on job security and full-time work and both assert the importance of family and personal relationships. A key difference between the groups can be seen regarding employment, with Cohort 2 anticipating a longer and more instable road through the job market and as such are weary of planning their work or family lives too far into the future.



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