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When parents live apart

Children's experiences and wellbeing according to post-separation arrangements and contexts

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Australian Institute of Family Studies

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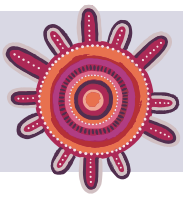

The Australian Institute of Family Studies acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to lands and waters. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

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About this report

This research was completed in 2017 and submitted to the Department of Social Services (DSS) (formerly the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs). This is the first time the research has been published.

The *Growing Up in Australia*: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) is a partnership between the Department of Social Services and the Australian Institute of Family Studies, and is advised by a consortium of leading Australian academics. The Australian Bureau of Statistics were also partners of the study until 2022, with Roy Morgan taking over as our fieldwork provider at this point. This research would not have been possible without the invaluable contributions of the *Growing Up in Australia* children and their families.

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Executive summary

This research report illustrates the complexity of family circumstances faced by children whose parents live apart due to relationship instability or breakdown, using both cohorts and 6 waves of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC). It explores post-separation parenting arrangements, co-parenting and various aspects of family life. Child wellbeing was measured using a broad measure of social-emotional wellbeing, satisfaction with the amount of time the child has with each parent and some perspectives on the parent–child relationship.

Comparisons of socio-demographic characteristics of children with parents living apart confirmed they were from more disadvantaged families, on average, than those who lived with both parents, as measured by the primary carer's household. A focus throughout on differences by ages of children was a particular contribution of this research. Family disadvantage was particularly marked for the youngest children with parents living apart, who also more often had parents who had never lived together.

To describe the post-separation parenting arrangements of children, this report includes analysis of care time arrangements (e.g. how many nights they spend at the home of their parent living elsewhere). If children's parents lived apart, it was most likely that they stayed only or primarily with their mother, with small percentages spending 5–9 days per fortnight with their father, and even smaller percentages in predominantly their father's care. Day-only contact was most likely for the youngest children, and time with fathers increased with the child's age. Other differences were related to proximity (living closer was associated with more time with parents living elsewhere) and parental relationship contexts (care time was greatest when parents had previously been married, and less when children had never lived with both parents together).

One indicator of coparenting that was explored was whether parents consulted each other over child rearing matters. Another indicator of coparenting quality related to conflict between parents. When children had never lived with parents (or parents had never lived together) there was less contact between parents, and so also less consultation and conflict. But if parents had separated in the previous 2 years, it was more likely that parents consulted and had conflict. Coparenting was examined from the perspective of the parent living elsewhere, and findings were broadly comparable to those using the reports of the primary carer.

Financial coparenting was also explored, looking at an indicator of primary carers receiving child support, or the parent living elsewhere contributing informally – for example, through buying clothes or paying for some child-related costs. Child support was least likely in the 2 years after parents' separation, while informal financial contributions were most likely in this time. There were also other variations according to coparenting variables, parents' relationship history and socio-demographic characteristics. Financial coparenting from the perspective of the parent living elsewhere was also explored. These parents more often reported making informal financial contributions compared to the reports of primary carers.

To explore how children's wellbeing varied when they had parents living apart, this research includes analysis of a range of information from LSAC, some parent-reported and some child-reported. Measures of how care arrangements were working included parents' satisfaction with the parent living elsewhere's time or involvement with the study child, children's satisfaction with the time they had with each parent, children's reports of closeness to each parent, and parents' reports of conflict with their child.

We also used measures of what children's moods and behaviours were like as they transitioned between households and children's reports of how they found living in the home of each of their parents. Children's social-emotional wellbeing was also analysed. We were able to compare some of the measures for children with parents living apart to children living with both parents. This was possible for reports of children's closeness with parents, children having enough time with parents and children's conflict with parents, as well as social-emotional wellbeing.

Children generally were reported to have poorer outcomes when they had a parent living apart with whom they had no or little contact. This was evident especially among children who did not stay nights with their parent living elsewhere but was also apparent for some measures for children who stayed one night a fortnight or less with that parent. When children spent a significant number of nights with their parent living elsewhere, depending on which measure was explored, their wellbeing was not necessarily different to that of children who live with both parents together. This was the case in comparing children's reports of closeness to their father, for example, and reports of having enough time with their father.

However, when examining a measure of children's social-emotional difficulties, children had poorer outcomes if they had parents living apart. While the poorest outcomes were found for children with no or little time with

their father, those who spent approximately equal time with each parent had significantly poorer wellbeing than children living with both biological parents, after also taking account of socio-demographic variables.

When it came to exploring children's experiences with their care arrangements (looking at moods and behaviours around transitions and reports of living in each parent's household) there was a lot of variation that was not attributable to care arrangements or other factors explored here. However, there were more positive outcomes for children who shared time between their parents' households more equally.

Children tended to have poorer wellbeing if their parents always or often experienced conflict, while primary carers reporting that they sometimes consulted with the parent living elsewhere was related to positive outcomes, perhaps being an indicator of better functioning post-separation parenting arrangements. Another indicator that quite likely captures positive relationships is that of the parent living elsewhere contributing financially to the children's (and in some cases the primary carer's) costs. This indicator also tended to be associated with better outcomes for children. It seems more likely that this reflects a more collaborative parenting relationship, rather than being a reflection of this parent's financial input. In fact, the child support indicator rarely was statistically significant in predicting children's outcomes.

A range of socio-economic and demographic variables were included in analyses throughout this report. In explaining children's wellbeing these variables were important to varying degrees depending on the outcome explored. These findings highlighted how post-separation parenting arrangements are not the only factors that matter to children's wellbeing, with factors such as family income and family structure also affecting wellbeing. For children's social-emotional wellbeing, parenting and parent mental health also mattered.

While our methods allowed us to examine how wellbeing varied according to a range of characteristics of post-separation parenting, taking account of other family characteristics, this does not mean we can say that particular contexts or arrangements cause different child outcomes. Other factors that are not included in these analyses may contribute to parents making particular post-separation parenting arrangements (or indeed, leading to their separating rather than remaining together) that also explain the observed wellbeing of children. While not informing on the cause, the observed associations nevertheless tell us about which children have poorer or better wellbeing, which is useful for developing appropriate supports for children with parents living apart.

Overall, this research showed that the circumstances of parents who live apart vary greatly, in their own resources, personal attributes, the pathways that led to their living apart, and in the relationships between themselves and their children. Further, these factors can change over time, adding greater complexity to the situation. Gaining an appreciation of the diverse circumstances of these children and their families is important for the design and delivery of services and supports for these families. In particular, the age-related differences that emerged are important to acknowledge in relation to the development of appropriate services or programs, for which different approaches may be needed for separated families involving the youngest children, when there is more evidence of disadvantage compared to families with older children.

To summarise, some of the learnings from this research that may be useful for policy and service provision are:

- Children with parents living apart are more socio-economically disadvantaged compared to other children. Design of policy and services aiming to improve the wellbeing of children in these families needs to take this into account, and/or provide means of addressing the disadvantage.
- Disadvantage is most apparent for the youngest children of parents living apart, with this being less of an issue as children grow older, as the pool of children with parents living elsewhere grows due to parents' separation. The youngest children with parents living apart also have weaker ties to their parent living elsewhere, compared to the older children, given they more often have not lived with that parent.
- The families of children with parents living apart are very diverse in their socio-demographic characteristics as well as their post-separation circumstances, making it important that policies and services are flexible and adaptable to different circumstances. Specific supports for families will be more relevant to some families than others, depending on the characteristics of parents and children, the relationships they have with each other, their relationship history and other factors.
- While there is much diversity in the wellbeing of parents and children when parents live apart, an indicator linked to poorer outcomes was parents experiencing conflict, suggesting this could be a 'flag' for a family having greater need of assistance. On the other hand, positive indicators such as parents often consulting each other over child rearing matters tended to be related to more positive outcomes. Providing supports that encourage or enable such behaviours may be helpful for some families.
- The wellbeing of children was not fully explained by the variables examined in this research. These analyses did not include all relevant information on factors that might contribute to children's wellbeing. It is likely also

that wellbeing is linked in very complex ways to children's circumstances. Being able to provide supports to children in ways that take account of their unique circumstances is especially important, while also noting that findings such as those presented in this report provide some indication of which children are at greatest likelihood of poorer or better outcomes.

An advantage of LSAC is that it contains a wealth of information about children's outcomes at different ages, in addition to the parental and family characteristics, and these data have been drawn on in this research. Exploring associations between children's care arrangements and their wellbeing is challenging, though, because wellbeing may be measured in a vast set of ways and, further, for the LSAC sample, measures vary to be age appropriate as children grow.

This paper covers a number of measures to give some overall insights but further analyses may be needed or warranted to delve further into the findings. LSAC will continue to be useful for expanding our understanding of children who have 2 parents living apart, as future waves of the study will allow us to see how childhood experiences are related to their wellbeing at older ages.

1. Introduction

The aim of this research report is to illustrate the complexity of family circumstances that face children whose parents live apart due to relationship instability or breakdown, and relate that information to children's wellbeing and experiences of those arrangements. The purpose is to identify some of the challenges facing children with parents who live apart, comparing wellbeing and experiences according to the contexts of children's care time arrangements (and other variables).

The need for research in this area has heightened in Australia with reforms to family law and child support and expansion of services in recent years, resulting in a number of studies exploring post-separation parenting (e.g. Kaspiew, et al. 2015; Kaspiew et al., 2009; Qu et al., 2014; Smyth et al., 2014). Demographic trends that continue to see significant proportions of children experiencing their parents' separation (Weston et al., 2013) also adds to the need for research in this area.

The 2 broad research questions examined in this report are:

1. What do the contexts and care arrangements of children look like when they have parents who live apart? How do they vary by child age?
2. Which children are experiencing more difficulties with their post-separation arrangements and overall wellbeing?

The report draws on Waves 1–6 of *Growing Up in Australia*: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC, described in 2.1). Both the B and the K cohort are used, allowing analyses of the circumstances of children from 0–1 year through to 14–15 years. In LSAC, the number of children with parents living apart varied between a low of under 500 children at Wave 1 of the B cohort to almost 900 at Wave 5 of the K cohort. While the LSAC sample of separated families is not as large as studies specifically designed to explore post-separation families, it does have the advantage of being able to explore post-separation arrangements across waves of the study and allow for the inclusion of newly separated families. Other studies, such as those relying on the database of those receiving child support, only focus on a subset of families in which children live apart.[1]

We use these data to analyse arrangements across ages of children, pooling the information across waves and cohorts. These data may also be used to analyse transitions in care arrangements and contexts but the great diversity in such arrangements and, consequently of transitions, made it impossible to incorporate them into this report. See a description of such transitions in Baxter (2016a). Some of the diversity and complexity of transitions in care arrangements has been described elsewhere (e.g. Campo et al., 2012; Lodge & Alexander, 2010; Qu & Weston, 2010; Smyth & Moloney, 2008) but clearly this is a possible future direction for research with these LSAC data.

This report focuses instead on differences by age of child. This is a key factor in exploring children's experiences, in part because parents are likely to put different arrangements in place for children of different ages (Qu et al., 2014). As children grow older, they themselves may begin to contribute to decision making about their living arrangements and the degree to which they spend time with either of their parents. Another factor is that children who are very young who have parents living apart are likely to be from more disadvantaged families, since having separated parents is more common as children grow older (see Baxter, 2016b).

An important strength of LSAC is having information reported by multiple informants – the primary carer, the parent living elsewhere and, at older ages, the children themselves. The 2 parents may have inconsistent views on the characteristics of their post-separation care and coparenting (Baxter et al., 2012; Coley & Morris, 2002; Mikelson, 2008), and a unique characteristic of LSAC is the collection of information from both of the separated parents.

While most of the analysis presented here is based on primary carers' reports, analysis of information collected from parents living elsewhere is included to determine whether their views about wellbeing and children's experiences are consistent with those of primary carers. For these comparisons, we only included those families for which each parent responded to the study, as previous research (Baxter et al., 2012) has shown that the responses of parents living elsewhere are from a somewhat biased sample, toward the more engaged parents.

1 Another study targeted at separated families is the Longitudinal Study of Separated Families (LSSF), which started with around 10,000 newly separated families at Wave 1 (in 2008), with subsequent waves in 2009 and 2012; The Adolescent Study included 623 adolescents of these recently separated families, with one Wave conducted in 2008 and another in 2009 (Lodge & Alexander, 2010). The Child Support Reform Study (CSRS) was based on a sample of over 5,000 separated parents registered with the Child Support Agency (including over-sampling shared care families) with different samples drawn and interviews conducted over 2008 to 2011 (Smyth et al., 2012). The Survey of Recently Separated Parents Study (SRSP) involved 2 cross-sectional studies, one of 6,119 parents who were interviewed in 2012 and one of 6,079 parents interviewed in 2014 (De Maio et al., 2012; Kaspiew, et al., 2015). Samples in all these studies were drawn from the Child Support Program (called Child Support Agency previously). Parents in LSSF Wave 1 and the 2 SRSP had been separated on average 15–16 months.

In this report, the 'parent living elsewhere' (PLE) is the term used to refer to the parent living away from the household in which the main collection of data is undertaken. Used in this context, it is not actually making a reference to which parent the child predominately (or solely) lives with. In some cases the parent who is the parent living elsewhere in LSAC is actually the parent who the child stays with most of the time (see section 2.4). Similarly, the parent referred to here as the primary carer is that parent who is the primary respondent for the main LSAC data collection. They may not be the primary carer, as determined by post-separation care arrangements, although in most cases they are.

We acknowledge the references to 'primary carer' and 'parent living elsewhere' can cause some confusion, given that the allocation of parents to one of these is based on the LSAC study design, rather than reflecting care arrangements. We also acknowledge that some parents may be concerned that this dichotomy suggests one parent is the main, or most important, parent. This is certainly not the intention. There was a need to have some way of referring to each of the parents, and these labels were used to be consistent with other LSAC documentation and research. In particular, this was important given that certain data were only collected from, or about, the primary carer and, likewise, other data were only collected from, or about, the parent living elsewhere.

We have tried to be sensitive to both parents in the presentation of data about these families, and where we have LSAC data from 2 parents, we are especially appreciative of the contribution these families have made to the study. We are not always able to present 'both sides of the story' about the circumstances of families in which children have parents living apart, given that LSAC does not collect every detail about parenting arrangements and related information but there is a great amount of potential in these data to provide new insights on these families, either from one parent's or both parents' perspectives. This research report presents some, but not all, of such analyses.

Children of separated parents may have their own unique experiences or perceptions of their arrangements and of their relationships with each parent, and they may differ to those held by either parent. Children's perspectives are particularly important given that post-separation parenting arrangements made through the courts are required by Australian law to be made in the best interests of the child. A number of studies have specifically focused on children's 'voices' to present this perspective either on its own (e.g. Campo et al., 2012; Haugen, 2010; Lodge & Alexander, 2010) or compared to parents' reports (Campo et al., 2012; Lodge & Alexander, 2010; Parkinson et al., 2005). Children's perspectives are incorporated in this report, relating that to the comprehensive information about care arrangements and family circumstances collected in LSAC.

1.1 Characteristics and contexts of children with parents living apart

Parents living apart are far from an homogenous group, and this report describes some of this variation, including looking at how characteristics vary for children of different ages.

As part of the first research question, we set out to describe the contexts of children who have parents living apart, covering socio-demographic characteristics as well as contexts relating to the relationship pathways that led to parents living apart. The variables examined include those that have been used in analyses of separated parents' involvement and care time arrangements: including information about family structure in the child's primary household, socio-economic status and parents' ethnicity in this household (e.g. Cashmore et al., 2010; Stewart, 2010).

We use information about parents' prior marital status, the timing of parents' separation, taking account also of parents who never lived together, and the proximity of the parents' households. These variables are expected to be important in explaining later involvement by parents living elsewhere (Cashmore et al., 2010; Cooksey & Craig, 1998; Dubas & Petersen, 1996; Kaspiew et al., 2015; Smyth et al., 2004; Stewart, 2010; Waller & Dwyer Emory, 2014).[2]

Socio-economic differences between intact families and those in which children have parents living apart are expected, with more disadvantage expected among the latter (Baxter et al., 2012; Baxter et al., 2011; Lucas et al., 2013; Qu & Weston, 2012b; Smyth et al., 2004). Taking some account of socio-economic status is especially important in considering how care arrangements and coparenting vary and contribute to children's wellbeing

2 While LSAC collects detailed information from responding parents living elsewhere about their own characteristics, we have not made use of this information here, given the need to limit the scope of this research and the complexities involved in taking account of missing information for non-respondents. The personal and family characteristics of the parent who lives in another household to the primary LSAC household are likely to contribute to differences in their involvement with the study child. For example, the family structure of either parent (whether they have a new a partner and/or children) is especially likely to be relevant (Manning et al., 2003).

(Lucas et al., 2013; Stewart, 2010). Given that we know that child wellbeing may also be related to the parenting they receive and to parents' mental health (Baxter et al., 2011; Lucas et al., 2013), we also consider these variables for children's primary carers, and take account of this when exploring how children's social-emotional wellbeing varies for children with parents living apart.

For this report, information about parental and household characteristics is restricted to those of the primary carer household. In future analysis of these data, work could be extended to also analyse the characteristics of the household of the parent living elsewhere, for those who have responded to LSAC.

1.2 Care arrangements and coparenting when parents living apart

There are many varied ways that parents arrange the care and parenting of children when parents live apart. This varies from those children who have no contact at all with their parent living elsewhere to those who are jointly parented by both parents in a shared care arrangement. Most children with parents living apart live predominantly with their mother, with recent Australian research showing that small proportions live predominantly or only with their father or in shared care arrangements (De Maio et al., 2012; Kaspiew et al., 2015; Qu et al., 2014; Renda, 2013; Smyth, 2009). This existing research shows that the likelihood of shared care does appear to increase with child age. This report examines these different circumstances as part of the first research question.

A significant focus of the Australian research on separated parents that has been cited here has been on shared care, exploring the incidence of this and discussing how it works for families and for children. Shared care is included in this report along with other forms of care arrangements. In this research, information about the number of nights children stay with their parent living elsewhere is used to describe such care arrangements (see section 4.1 for details). Some analyses instead use the number of nights children stay with their father, to take account of the fact that in some families the parent living elsewhere is the mother.

Post-separation parenting of children also comprises a degree of sharing of the decision making about child rearing matters. The analysis of LSAC presented here incorporates this, by examining whether the parent living elsewhere is consulted about such matters for the LSAC study child. In exploring coparenting, we also recognise that some parents may manage their post-separation relationships easily and without conflict, while, for others, this relationship may be more challenging. Research indicates that the majority of separated parents have friendly or cooperative relationships rather than high-conflict relationships (Cashmore et al., 2010; Kaspiew et al., 2009; Kaspiew et al., 2015; Qu et al., 2014). However, the degree of conflict between parents is well recognised as a factor that may affect children's wellbeing in this post-separation period (Baxter et al., 2011) and we include this in our analyses of the co-parental relationship.

The financial aspects of post-separation parenting are also expected to vary, with only child support payments being used by some parents and less formal financial exchanges being used by others (Goldberg, 2015). We include analyses of these indicators here, although for more comprehensive research using LSAC, refer to Qu and Weston (2012a). This has also been an important focus in other studies of separated families (Cashmore et al., 2010; Qu et al., 2014).

Children's post-separation care time arrangements and coparenting are expected to vary across families with different demographic characteristics (Cashmore et al., 2010; Cooksey & Craig, 1998). For example, families with shared care arrangements tend to be more advantaged in socio-economic terms (Cashmore et al., 2010). On the other hand, families in which children have no contact with a parent living elsewhere are more often financially disadvantaged compared to those families in which children have more frequent contact with this parent (Baxter et al., 2011).

Focusing on children with lower levels of contact with their father, Baxter et al. (2012) used LSAC to show they were over-represented among those who had never lived with their father or who were born outside of marriage (to a single parent or cohabiting parents). Further, other research, including research with the Longitudinal Study of Separated Families (LSSF) shows that these circumstances are 'linked with complex personal dynamics, conflict or family violence' (Kaspiew et al., 2014, p. 227), including fearful relationships, a history of abuse before separation and mental health problems or substance abuse before separation.

We cannot explore all these aspects of parents' relationships in this analysis of LSAC but we include in the analyses those children who have very little or no contact with their parent living elsewhere to examine the family characteristics that are associated with this situation.

1.3 Wellbeing of children with parents living apart

Children with parents living apart have, on average, poorer wellbeing on a number of outcomes compared to children with parents living together (Amato, 2000; Cherlin et al., 1998; Qu & Weston, 2012b). However, this is to some extent explained by the differences in socio-economic and demographic characteristics of families and parents of those children. This report explores this for a few measures of wellbeing, drawing on parent and child reports.

The child-focused content of LSAC means there is a range of measures collected about children's experiences of the post-separation care arrangements, along with more general measures of wellbeing that can be related to the care arrangements. The general wellbeing measures are also available for children living with 2 biological parents, allowing comparisons to children with parents living apart.

In this report, children's social-emotional wellbeing is examined, using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). In other analyses we explore data collected from older children on their relationship with their parents, and on parents' reports of conflict with children, and parents' and children's satisfaction with the time children have with each parent. The research presented here extends previous analyses of LSAC in which other measures of child wellbeing have been analysed according to children's care arrangements and contextual and demographic characteristics (e.g. Baxter et al., 2011; Cashmore et al., 2010; Lucas et al., 2013). Some analysis of parent–child relationships is included, extending the analysis of parent–child relationships at Wave 4 by Renda (2013).

Information that is not commonly collected in large-scale surveys pertains to children's experiences of living across 2 households and is used here to provide new insights on the ways in which children manage their post-separation living arrangements. This is especially interesting, as a challenge for children in shared care can be more logistic and material, in managing the situation of living across 2 households (Campo et al., 2012).

Children's wellbeing and experiences are explored in relation to care time and coparenting variables, also taking account of family demographic and contextual variables. Existing research generally supports there being more positive outcomes for children who are in shared care situations, even after taking account of other family characteristics (Nielsen, 2014). While we do not claim to have a comprehensive set of outcome variables in this report, a strength is the ability to take account of care arrangements, coparenting and various demographic factors. Taking account of factors other than the care time and coparenting variables is important, as some of the variation in wellbeing according to care time may be attributed to differences in characteristics such as the extent of cooperation between parents and the financial wellbeing of families (Baxter et al., 2011; Lucas et al., 2013; Nielsen, 2014).

1.4 The scope and structure of this report

The following section, section 2, provides an overall description of data and methods. More detail is presented throughout the report, and refer also to the LSAC technical report that covers some of the more complex data issues.

The analytical component of this report is structured as follows:

- Section 3 analyses the demographic characteristics of families and also examines some other characteristics of families that are likely to matter to child wellbeing – that of parent mental health and parenting styles. The child wellbeing differences are introduced here, to show how children with parents living apart have more social-emotional difficulties than those who do not, even after taking account of differences in demographics, parent mental health and parenting. Further, key contextual information is presented for children with parents living elsewhere. This covers information on the time since children had previously lived with both parents, whether parents were previously married, and the proximity of the home of the primary carer to that of the parent living elsewhere. This contextual information is examined by age of child (and cohort).
- Section 4 is an overview of care time arrangements and coparenting. This section provides an overview of children's care time arrangements, focusing on how often children see or stay overnight with their other parent, primarily drawing on the reports of the primary carer but also comparing those reports to those of the parent living elsewhere and the children. Coparenting and relationship quality is then examined. Here this includes analyses of information about parents' input into decision making and consultation with the other parent and reports of conflict between separated parents. Finally, the extent to which parents share the financial costs of raising children is examined through analysis of the parent living elsewhere's financial contributions. This section examines whether the primary carer receives child support, and whether informal financial contributions are made by the parent living elsewhere. Financial support *by* the primary carer (such as when the primary carer pays child support to the parent living elsewhere) is not examined, as this has

not been collected at all waves of LSAC (see section 4.3). A final section puts these pieces of information together to present an overview of combinations of involvement by the parent living elsewhere.

- Section 5 relates the information presented in the previous sections to selected care-related outcomes for children with parents living in 2 households. These analyses cover parent satisfaction with parent living elsewhere's time with children. (We do not have information on the degree to which parents are satisfied with the involvement of the primary carer, as defined for the LSAC study – this is another limitation we acknowledge.) The section also includes new analyses of child moods and behaviours on departure for and arrival from their other parent's household, as reported by each of the parents. Child experiences of living across 2 households, as reported by children at age 14–15 years, are also examined.
- Section 6 broadens the focus to enable some comparisons of wellbeing to the wider sample of children living in intact families. This section includes analyses of aspects of parent–child relationships, including children's reports of how close they are to each parent, children's reports of having enough time with parents, and parents' reports of conflict between themselves and their child. Further, child social-emotional wellbeing, using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire is analysed, returning to the analysis presented in section 3 but building on it to explore differences within children who have parents living apart.

An overall summary and discussion follows (section 7).

This report does not consider issues related to parents' or children's experience of family violence or abuse or of safety concerns. Nor are formal parenting arrangements and service use discussed. For Australian research that explores these important aspects of post-separation parenting refer, for example, to Cashmore et al. (2010); Kaspiew et al. (2015) and Qu et al. (2014). These and other publications (e.g. Smyth, 2009; Smyth et al., 2014) provide more comprehensive discussions of the Australian policy context and references to other Australian and international literature.

2. Data and method

2.1 The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children

This report uses data from LSAC, which follows 2 cohorts of children selected from across Australia. Children in the B cohort were born between March 2003 and February 2004 and children in the K cohort were born between March 1999 and February 2000. An overview of the design of LSAC is provided by Gray and Smart (2009).

This report uses data from the first 6 main waves of the survey, collected every 2 years from 2004 to 2014. The LSAC sample was 10,090 children at Wave 1. Like all longitudinal studies, LSAC experiences sample attrition. At Wave 6, 72% of the original Wave 1 sample was successfully interviewed. Attrition has resulted in some biases being introduced into the sample. For example, single parents and parents with lower levels of educational attainment were more likely to drop out of the study between Waves 1 and 2 (Gray & Smart, 2009). The dataset includes sample weights that are designed to adjust sample estimates to take account of differential rates of attrition for a range of observable characteristics. Estimates presented in this report have been produced using the sample weights, with unweighted data used in the multivariate analyses.

This report is based on complex information about children's families and the relationships they have with parents in 2 households. While a great deal of effort was put into ensuring the accurate classification of these relationships, some inconsistencies and missing data remain.[3]

2.2 Identifying in-scope families

The vast majority of children in LSAC were considered to be in-scope for this report. Indeed, most children across the 6 waves of LSAC live with 2 biological parents, and they are included in section 3 and section 6 of the report as the counterfactual for children who do not live with 2 biological parents. Of the rest, we retain children in the analyses as having parents living apart if they have one biological parent in the LSAC primary household and they have another biological parent living elsewhere. This includes children living with single parents or a biological parent plus a step-parent or another family member. In total, 50,424 cases were used from a possible pooled (across waves and cohorts) sample of 51,630 responding families.

A total of 1,206 cases were excluded, which includes children whose mother or father is deceased, as well as others in which information about where each of the biological parents resided was incomplete or inconsistent with other survey information. These cases were from 499 families including 230 excluded for only one wave, 89 for two waves, 51 for three waves, 40 for four waves, 49 for five waves and 40 for six waves. See Box 1 for detail on the excluded cases.

Table 1 shows that the majority of in-scope cases were for children living with both their biological parents. Among those living with a biological parent with their other parent living elsewhere, they were generally with their mother in the primary LSAC household and with their father living elsewhere. Note that the 'primary LSAC household' is that defined purely on the basis of where LSAC is enumerated.

In LSAC the sample numbers decline with each wave, due to attrition, and this affects families in which children have parents living apart as well as those who do not. The decline due to attrition in the number of children with parents living apart is offset to some extent by the overall increase in such children, due to their parents' relationship breakdown. There is therefore an increase in the number of children in the sample who have parents living apart (see the first column of Table 2, and for estimated percentages and numbers see Table 3).

Throughout the report we use the pooled data, across cohorts and waves, of children with parents living apart. Pooling these data means we cover ages of children from 0–1 to 14–15 years. However, because the 2 cohorts overlap for ages 4–5 years through to 10–11 years, in the pooled data the sample sizes are greatest for these ages. Within the pooled sample, the average age of LSAC children with parents living apart is 8.5 years, with 9.5% of the parents-living-apart sample being children aged under 3 years. This compares, for example, to a mean age of 7 years for focal children in the 2012 and 2014 SRSP, and a higher proportion aged under 3 years (21%–24%) (Kaspiew et al., 2015). In the LSSF Wave 3 the mean age of focal child was 9 years but few were aged under 5 years (4% of the sample) (Qu et al., 2014).

3 See the LSAC technical report about the parent living elsewhere data that outlines some of the data issues: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children: LSAC Technical paper No. 22, Parent Living Elsewhere data.

Box 1: Out-of-scope cases

Cases that met the following conditions were excluded:

- If one or both of children's parents were deceased, items about care arrangements or shared parenting were not applicable. These children were considered to be out of scope. There were 429 observations (out of the pooled sample across 2 cohorts and 6 waves, total *N* = 51,630) treated as out of scope for this reason.
- If children were reported to have 2 parents living elsewhere, it was difficult to assess relationships and histories. Some of these children were no longer living with a biological parent and were living, for example, with grandparents. In some cases, the primary carer reported that children had 2 parents living elsewhere but the household data indicated children were also living with a biological parent. Overall, 133 cases were excluded because they were said to have 2 parents living elsewhere.
- Other cases were excluded when family relationships were more complex or when information was missing. This included, for example, when the parent living elsewhere was someone other than a biological parent (e.g. a step-parent) and children were not living with 2 biological parents. Cases were also excluded when children were living with only a single parent but with no parent living elsewhere or information missing about whether or not there were parents living apart. Overall, 229 cases were excluded in which relationships could not be resolved and children had parents living apart; another 181 were excluded because relationships could not be resolved and children did *not* have parents living apart; and another 234 were excluded because of complex relationships and missing information about whether or not the child had parents living apart.

Table 1: Children's parental relationships within in-scope cases

Primary (LSAC) household	Parent living elsewhere?	Freq.	Unweighted %
Biological mother and father	**No parent living elsewhere**	**41,942**	**83.2**
Biological mother or father	**Other biological parent**	**8,482**	**16.8**
Biological mother	Biological father	8,015	15.9
Biological father	Biological mother	467	0.9
Total		50,424	100.0

Source: In-scope cases, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

2.3 Reports from different informants

Information about children with parents living apart, their relationships and arrangements, is collected from 3 main informants. One is the child's 'primary carer', the other is the parent living elsewhere, and the other is the study child themselves. Below is a description of some of the types of information, and some data issues, related to the information collected from these different informants.

'Primary carer' ('Parent 1')

The LSAC methodology involves collecting information about the family from the study child's primary carer or the parent who knows most about the child (Parent 1). In couple-parent families, in the vast majority of cases, Parent 1 is the mother, although this may change across waves. In single-parent families, Parent 1 is the parent with whom the child is residing at the time of the data collection; in most cases, again, this is the mother. In referring to this parent as the primary carer, we are not asserting that this parent is always the main or sole parent. The reference is to their being the primary carer for the purpose of the collection of LSAC data.

If children have a parent living in a household other than that of the LSAC primary carer (i.e. they have parents living apart), the LSAC primary carer may not actually be the parent that the child lives with most of the time. As LSAC continues, and care arrangements change, parents may elect to remain the 'LSAC primary carer' even if the child primarily lives with the other parent. It is also possible for the study to 'move' to another household, when children move to live primarily with their other parent. Across Waves 1 to 6, this was observed at some time for 25 families in the B cohort and 69 families in the K cohort. That is, in these families, the primary carer became the parent living elsewhere, and the parent living elsewhere became the primary carer. (See also, the PLE Technical report for more detail.)

Data are collected from the primary carer via face-to-face interviews and self-complete questionnaires, including computer-assisted instruments in more recent waves. Much of the information about the parent-living-elsewhere arrangements and experiences presented in this report is sourced from the primary carer, as we have the most complete information from these parents (see column 2, Table 2). At Waves 3, 5 and 6, however, there are some missing data as parents were able to elect out of answering questions about the parent living elsewhere. This was especially so for Wave 3, when parents were explicitly asked whether they were prepared to answer these questions, leading to a relatively high negative response. In Wave 4, this question was removed but in later waves, if parents expressed unwillingness to answer the questions, after an introductory statement, then they were skipped past them. This resulted in some missing data but less than occurred with the explicit question in Wave 3.

To derive some of the contextual information used in this report, it was necessary to augment the primary carers' reports with other information. This included making reference to data collected at previous waves, and to data stored in the study children's household files for both the primary carer and parent living elsewhere households. This was done for deriving information such as:

- the indicator of whether the child has parents living apart
- the relationship of parent living elsewhere to the child, and to the primary carer
- the sex of the parent living elsewhere
- the amount of time since the child lived with both parents together, if ever.

Parents living elsewhere

Since Wave 2 of LSAC there has been data collected from children's parent living elsewhere; that is, a parent living in a household other than the household in which the main collection of LSAC data is undertaken. This information includes various socio-demographic characteristics, as well as information about involvement with the study child and various aspects of coparenting, child support, parenting and child wellbeing.

- In Wave 2, if children had seen their parent living elsewhere in the previous year, the primary carer was asked if she (or he) would provide contact details for that parent. When contact details were provided, a mail-back questionnaire was sent to that parent. The response rate was quite low (24% for the B cohort and 33% for the K cohort) (LSAC Project Operations Team, 2009), and so these data have not been used in this report.
- From Wave 3 computer-assisted telephone interviewing has been used instead. Primary carers are asked for the contact details of parents living elsewhere, if those parents have had some contact with the child in the last year (see column 3, Table 2, for applicable sample numbers). In Wave 3, it was noted that the parents living elsewhere who were contacted tended to be positive about being asked to be involved in LSAC, and this was reflected in a refusal rate of only 6% of those contacted. Almost 80% of fathers for whom contact details were provided responded to this survey. The remainder of the non-response was due to an inability to make contact with certain fathers (LSAC Project Operations Team, 2009).

Across Waves 3 to 6, for just over half of the children with parents living apart, the parent living elsewhere responded to LSAC. As some of these parents were not invited to participate, it is more relevant to note that there is information from around two-thirds of parents living elsewhere with whom children had contact in the previous year. Analyses of the Wave 3 parent living elsewhere data showed that there is some bias in this sample, toward those who are more engaged with the child and have a more cooperative relationship with the primary carer (Baxter et al., 2012). When analysing these data and comparing to reports of primary carers, the sample is limited to be those for whom there are primary carer and parent living elsewhere reports. This restricted primary carer sample is referred to as the matched primary carer sample.

Table 2: Sample numbers for different informants by age of child

Cohort and age of study child	Child has a parents living apart (1)	Primary carer answers questions about parent living elsewhere (2)	Child had contact with parent living elsewhere in last year (primary carer report) (3)	Parent living elsewhere respondent to LSAC (4)	Child reports about parent living elsewhere (5)
B cohort					
0–1 year	478	478	387		
2–3 years	497	497	447	(not used)	
4–5 years	562	464[a]	441	268	
6–7 years	631	631	510	357	
8–9 years	758	713[b]	606	398	
10–11 years	767	725[b]	611	397	
K cohort					
4–5 years	774	774	697		
6–7 years	724	724	669	(not used)	
8–9 years	794	671[a]	647	394	
10–11 years	828	818	643	464	
12–13 years	872	830[b]	678	449	707
14–15 years	807	770[b]	606	409	654
Total	8,482	8,095	6,942	3,136	1,361

Note: Numbers vary for particular items in LSAC given non-response on specific questions.
a In Wave 3, a new skip meant that parents living elsewhere were explicitly asked whether they were happy to answer questions about the parent living elsewhere, and about 20% of those with parents living apart answered in the negative. This skip was modified in Wave 4 so all parents were asked the parent living elsewhere questions.
b In Waves 5 and 6, parents were not directly asked whether they would prefer not to answer the parent living elsewhere questions but they were able to skip them once that section of questions was introduced.

Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

LSAC study children

As children have grown older, an increasing set of questions is asked of them in LSAC. We draw in this report on questions asked of children at 12–13 and 14–15 years about their relationship with their parent living elsewhere, their experiences of their care arrangements and other measures of parent–child time and relationships. For children with parents living apart, the number responding to these questions is shown in the final column of Table 2, although sample sizes are smaller for some items analysed in this report. For some items there is missing data for some children, which appears to have been due largely to sequencing errors, although in a small number of cases it was due to parents' requesting that children not be asked certain questions.

Missing data

A challenge in analysing these data was that responses were often missing for subsets of the population, and the reasons for the data being missing were not always clear. Where possible, the source of the missingness was identified to determine whether missing data could be sourced from another instrument or wave. In describing the characteristics of families, those with missing information were retained, as missing data on these variables largely reflected those cases in which parents elected to skip the relevant questions, and analyses of these skips in Wave 3 by Baxter et al. (2012) suggested they were biased toward the more distant or difficult parental relationships.

2.4 Who is the parent living elsewhere?

By definition, the parent living elsewhere is either the child's biological mother or father, since we have excluded cases in which the parent living elsewhere had another sort of relationship with the child. Table 3 shows that as children grow, there is a trend upward in the percentage of children for whom the parent living elsewhere is the mother instead of the father. That is, the primary carer for the LSAC study is increasingly the father, although this remains the minority situation. This has been observed in other Australian studies, including the LSSF (Qu et al., 2014).

Note that the predominance of fathers as parents living elsewhere to some extent reflects the LSAC study design, that means children are often enumerated in the household of their mother, even if they spend more of their time in their father's household. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2012–13 Family Characteristics Survey, of all children aged less than 15 years living with a single parent, 87% lived with a single mother and 13% with a single father, suggesting that LSAC may under-represent the situation of fathers as primary carer.[4]

For the purposes of describing children's care arrangements, it is sometimes relevant to set aside reference to primary carers and parents living elsewhere, and instead more simply refer to children's time with their mother or their father. As such, some information on children's care arrangements is presented according to the number of nights children stay with their father. This draws on whether mothers or fathers are the primary LSAC parents, and on the primary carer reports about children's care arrangements.

Table 3: Children with parents living apart, by cohort and age

Cohort and age of study child	% PLE is biological mother	% PLE is biological father	Total with PLE	% with PLE (of total in-scope families)	% living with 2 biological parents
B cohort					
0–1 year	0.4	99.6	100.0	10.5	89.5
2–3 years	2.3	97.7	100.0	13.1	86.9
4–5 years	2.7	97.3	100.0	16.3	83.7
6–7 years	4.2	95.8	100.0	18.9	80.1
8–9 years	5.2	94.8	100.0	21.8	78.2
10–11 years	4.9	95.1	100.0	24.2	75.8
K cohort					
4–5 years	3.5	96.5	100.0	16.9	83.1
6–7 years	4.5	95.5	100.0	18.7	81.3
8–9 years	5.6	94.4	100.0	22.0	78.0
10–11 years	6.3	93.7	100.0	24.2	75.8
12–13 years	9.3	90.7	100.0	24.7	75.3
14–15 years	10.2	89.8	100.0	27.9	72.1

Note: Statistics are weighted.
Source: In-scope cases, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

2.5 Variables and methods

Variables

Throughout this report, child age is a central variable to show how the number of children with parents living apart varies by age, and also to show how the circumstances vary by age. When examining children's relationships and wellbeing, some information is only available for older children. This is noted in those sections later in the report. Child gender is also included in all the multivariate analyses.

There is a set of demographic variables that is used throughout the report. In section 3 we describe how those characteristics vary according to whether or not children have 2 parents living together or living apart. In later sections those variables are used in exploring care arrangements, coparenting and wellbeing. An important

4 Retrieved from www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4442.02012-13? OpenDocument. Derived from Table 7.

point, and a limitation of this research, is that only the characteristics of the primary carer (or primary carer's household) are used for these analyses. The characteristics of the parent living elsewhere are not available for all families, and inclusion of the available information leads to significant challenges for the analyses. Later work with these data could extend some of the research presented here to incorporate the available information on parent living elsewhere characteristics.

The characteristics used:

- Socio-economic position of families. Throughout, an indicator is used of the child's family being in the lowest quintile (20%) distribution of the socio-economic-position variable that is derived for each Wave and cohort of LSAC. This partitioning into quintiles is done separately for each Wave and cohort. For information on this variable, refer to Blakemore et al. (2009). Single parent families are more likely to be in the lowest quintile, given their lower family incomes. This measure of socio-economic position is not adjusted to take account of the number of persons or dependents in the family, and for children with a parent living elsewhere, is based only on the income (and other related variables) of the primary carer, including child support if reported. That is, it does not incorporate information on the socio-economic position of the parent living elsewhere.
- Family characteristics capture whether the primary carer is living with a partner, and whether the family includes full siblings, half siblings or step siblings of the study child.
- Remoteness of residence. This variable identifies families as residing in a 'major city area', 'inner regional area' or, for these analyses, 'other regional or remote area'. Note that LSAC is not representative of families living in the more remote areas of Australia.
- Ethnicity of the primary carer. This is included here as Australian-born Indigenous, Australian-born non-Indigenous, and born overseas.

We include some other measures of the primary carer household when exploring children's social-emotional wellbeing. These are measures of parental mental health (using Kessler-K6) and measures of parenting warmth, angry/hostile parenting and consistent parenting.

The measures of care time, contexts and coparenting, as well as the wellbeing measures, are described in detail in the later sections of this report. For a number of the following variables there were significant issues in deriving these measures, with some missing data remaining. However, this information is, broadly speaking, available for all waves and both cohorts. Some is also available from the reports of parents living elsewhere as well as the primary carer. To summarise, the following measures are explored.

- Contexts of parents living apart covers (a) time since children lived with both parents; (b) parents' previous marital/relationship status and (c) proximity of the home of the parent living elsewhere to the home of the primary carer.
- Care arrangements is a measure of how many nights per fortnight children stay with their parent living elsewhere, allowing also for no or little contact and for day only contact.
- Coparenting covers whether (a) the primary carer consults the other parent about child rearing concerns and (b) whether there is conflict between parents. Financial aspects are also covered by looking at (a) whether the primary carer receives child support and (b) whether the parent living elsewhere makes other informal contributions to the primary carer's financial needs.

The report provides an overview of how these aspects vary across ages of children, particularly to consider that as children grow, they are more likely to face the separation of their parents, and so the population of children with parents living elsewhere increases with age. Also, these variables are analysed in respect to the socio-demographic characteristics, to see which families or which children experience particular circumstances. The analyses also consider how the contexts, care arrangements and coparenting are related. Multivariate analyses are used for this, as described below.

The report includes some analyses of selected outcomes of care arrangements. This is based on specific measures in LSAC, some parent-reported and some child-reported. Most of these measures are available for a subset of ages, although for some we have primary carer and parent living elsewhere reports. The following are explored:

- the primary carer's satisfaction with the involvement of the parent living elsewhere, and the parent living elsewhere's satisfaction with their role
- parent (primary carer and parent living elsewhere) reports of children's moods and behaviours around the transition between households for children aged 4–5 years and up
- children's (at age 14–15) reports of their experiences of living across 2 households.

As well as the descriptive analyses of these data, they are also related to the range of socio-demographic, contextual and coparenting information described above, to explore whether certain children are living in families with more dissatisfaction or more strains than others.

Then, analyses of parent–child relationships and children's social-emotional wellbeing are explored. For this section, the analyses broaden to include children who are living with both of their biological parents, so that comparisons can be made to those children, as well as comparing within the group of children who have parents living apart. The measures analysed here are:

- children's (at age 12–13 and 14–15) reports of how close they are to each of their parents, and whether they have enough time with each of their parents
- parents' (mothers, fathers whether in primary carer household or living elsewhere) reports of conflict with their child at ages 12–13 and 14–15 years
- children's social-emotional wellbeing, analysed using the Strengths and Difficulties total difficulties scales. This is available for children aged 4–5 to 14–15 years. The measure from primary carer reports is used, as well children's own reports from 10–11 to 14–15 years. These data are first introduced earlier in the report to show differences for children with and without parents living apart.

These measures are analysed using multivariate models, to examine how children's relationships and wellbeing vary when they have parents living apart, and to examine for these children how these measures vary according to contexts, care arrangements and coparenting.

Methods

The report includes bivariate and multivariate analyses. All estimated proportions are derived from weighted data. Unweighted data are used in the multivariate analyses.

Multivariate analyses were used to explore associations between multiple explanatory variables and particular outcome variables. These analyses were typically undertaken with the data from both cohorts and all waves pooled together, in order to maximise sample size. When the outcome variable was missing, those cases were excluded from the analyses. If an explanatory variable was missing, for categorical variables another category was included to capture those with missing values. In the models presented in section 6, explanatory variables include continuous measures of parenting style and mental health. Missing values on any of these were substituted with the cohort-wave-specific mean of the variable, and the models included dummy variables to indicate records had mean-substituted values.

With these pooled data, and repeated observations across waves, it was appropriate to use longitudinal models that take account of the variation within individual observations as well as the variation across individuals. Random effects models were used. When the outcome was binary, a logistic regression model was used and, if continuous, ordinary least squares were used. In some cases the outcome variable was categorical, with the categories having an order to them, and for these variables ordered logistic regression was used.

For logistic regression results, findings have been presented as odds ratios. If an odds ratio is less than one and statistically significant, this indicates that the analysed outcome is less likely for those with that characteristic, relative to the reference category that is given. Conversely, if the odds ratio is greater than one and statistically significant, the outcome is more likely. Ordered logistic regression findings, also presented as odds ratios, can be interpreted the same way. For multivariate analyses using continuous measures, the coefficient indicates how much less or more the outcome measure is for those with this characteristic, relative to the reference category identified in the table.

'Fixed effects' approaches could be used with these data to analyse changes in outcomes within individuals only, and not differences across individuals. However, in preparing this publication, preliminary analyses rarely revealed statistically significant fixed effects findings, and so this approach was not pursued.

3. Parent and family characteristics and contexts and child wellbeing

In the first of this report's research questions we asked what are the contexts and care arrangements of children when they have parents who live apart, and how do they vary by age. This section begins to answer this, focusing on the contexts and also the socio-demographic characteristics of these families. The focus on this first research question is continued in section 4, when we explore care arrangements and coparenting.

The section begins with a comparison of the characteristics of families of children with and without parents living apart, to highlight some of the issues of selectivity that are relevant in thinking about the wellbeing of children living in those families. First, socio-demographic characteristics of parents and families are examined. While such characteristics are typically described in studies of separated parents (such as the Australian studies cited in this report), here we compare separated families to intact families (i.e. with 2 biological parents) and also describe characteristics by child age to establish the selective nature of families in which the parents are living apart overall and by child age. This builds on earlier analyses of LSAC by Baxter et al. (2011), who showed differences according to family structure in several family characteristics for children at 6–7 years. Setting out these characteristics in this way and that also recognises the diversity of situations can provide useful background information for those developing programs and services for families in which parents live apart.

As shown in research by Lucas et al. (2013) and Baxter et al. (2011), parent mental health and parenting are important factors in explaining the wellbeing of children with parents living elsewhere, as is the case for all children. These characteristics are explored here and used along with the socio-demographic variables to do an initial examination of children's wellbeing in families with and without parents living apart.

The section finishes with some analyses of contexts specific to families in which children have parents living apart, looking at the time since children lived with both parents, parents' relationship history and the proximity of the 2 parents' households. As discussed in section 1, these factors are especially important in thinking about whether and how the 2 parents may be sharing the parenting (e.g. Cashmore et al., 2010; Kaspiew et al., 2014; Qu et al., 2014; Smyth et al., 2004). For example, we expect that children with no history of having lived with their parent living elsewhere would have less involvement with that parent compared to children who have lived with both parents through their childhood (Waller & Dwyer Emory, 2014). When parents live closer together, this is likely to be associated with an increased likelihood of children being in shared care arrangements (Smyth et al., 2004).

3.1 Socio-demographic characteristics

Here we describe the characteristics of families and primary carers, first to describe how the families differ when the parents are living apart, and then to describe how the nature of the parent-living-elsewhere population changes as children grow. Largely, this analysis highlights the greater concentration of socio-economic disadvantage in families with separated parents, and this is more so when children are young, when it is less likely that children have parents living apart.

The comparison of demographic variables between families that are 'intact' (both biological parents are in the home) and those in which biological parents live apart (Table 4),shows several differences.[5] The detailed information by age of child, for children with parents living apart, is given in Table 5.

- Three in four of the children with parents living apart were living with their primary carer who did not have a partner. Within the parent-living-elsewhere families, it was more common for the primary carer to be partnered as the study child was older, with about one in three of the primary carers of 14–15 year olds with parents living apart partnered.
- It was common for children in all families to have some full siblings living with them but more common (87%) when children lived with both biological parents compared to those whose parents lived apart (65%). Having half siblings in the household of the primary carer, however, was much more common (25%) for children with parents living apart compared to those with parents living together. While percentages were small, having step siblings was also more common in the households of children with parents living apart (3%). Among children with parents living apart, having full siblings in the home of the primary carer became more likely for

5 Typically, we would compare these characteristics using chi-square tests, but this is not possible given the observations are not independent in the pooled data. We instead confirmed statistical significance by fitting regression models, in which the repeated observations are taken into account.

older children, as the pool of the parents-living-apart sample was added to by previously intact families. The proportion with step siblings also increased, albeit with smaller percentages involved. This is likely to reflect re-partnering by the primary carer. The proportion with half siblings remained fairly stable across the waves.

- There were differences in socio-economic status, with children with parents living apart much more likely to be living in families with the lowest socio-economic status relative to the others in the sample. Half of the families of children with parents living elsewhere had the lowest socio-economic status, as measured to be around the bottom 20% of a socio-economic status scale within the sample. This compares to 18% of families with children's 2 biological parents. For the youngest children with parents living apart, there was high representation of low socio-economic status families, as measured in the primary carer's home. Of the 0–1 year olds and 2–3 year olds with parents living apart, 70% of those families had socio-economic status in the lowest 20% of the sample. While at all ages children with parents living elsewhere were in more disadvantaged families than other children, the disparity between the groups diminished as the pool of children with parents living elsewhere grew.
- Differences according to country of birth (aggregated into Australia versus other) and Indigenous status revealed some differences. Indigenous Australians, as well as other Australian-born parents, were more highly represented in the sample of parent living elsewhere households, while overseas-born primary carers were somewhat more highly represented in the 2 biological parent sample. The higher representation of Indigenous primary carers is most apparent in the families of the youngest children with parents living apart.
- Children with parents living apart are somewhat more likely to be living in an inner regional area of Australia than are those living with 2 parents.

Table 4: Family characteristics, primary carer households according to whether both biological parents are present

Characteristics in primary carer home	Category	Children living with 2 biological parents %	Children with a PLE %	distribution in pooled in-scope sample %
Parental relationship status	Single	0.1[a]	75.5	**14.8**
	Partnered	99.9	24.5	**85.2**
Sibling presence in household	Has full siblings	86.5	64.9	**82.3**
	Has half siblings	6.0	24.8	**9.7**
	Has step siblings	0.1	3.2	**0.7**
Socio-economic status of family	Bottom 20% of distribution	17.6	51.5	**24.2**
	Top 80% of distribution	82.4	48.5	**75.8**
Ethnicity of primary carer	Australians, non-Indigenous	72.2	77.2	**73.1**
	Indigenous Australians	1.8	5.6	**2.6**
	Overseas-born	26.0	17.2	**24.3**
Remoteness	Major Cities of Australia	68.5	62.9	**67.4**
	Inner Regional Australia	19.3	23.3	**20.1**
	Outer Regional Australia	12.2	13.8	**12.5**
Number of observations		41,942	8,482	**50,424**

Notes: Differences in distributions according to whether the parents were living apart were significantly different for all variables, after taking account of child age and cohort and repeated observations per child ($p < .001$).
The small number of children reported to live with a single parent in a household with both biological parents includes, for example, parents who remain living in the same home yet no longer consider themselves to be a couple.
Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Table 5: Characteristics of families for children with parents living apart by age of child

Characteristics in primary carer home	0–1	2–3	4–5	6–7	8–9	10–11	12–13	14–15	All with a PLE
	Percentage of parent living elsewhere families								
Primary carer is partnered	2.8	8.6	16.3	23.7	30.0	29.7	31.8	33.6	24.5
Has full siblings	36.2	53.6	59.5	65.4	69.2	70.7	72.2	70.0	64.9
Has half siblings	24.5	19.1	26.6	25.3	26.5	24.4	24.3	23.0	24.8
Has step siblings	-	0.1	1.2	2.5	3.3	4.9	5.0	6.8	3.2
Primary carer household									
Lowest 20% socio-economic status	71.8	68.8	56.3	53.5	49.3	45.6	43.7	41.2	51.6
Primary carer ethnicity									
Australian, non-Indigenous	73.2	74.2	75.1	76.3	78.4	79.3	78.9	78.2	77.2
Indigenous Australian	11.7	9.1	7.6	6.1	4.9	3.7	3.7	3.3	5.6
Overseas-born	15.1	16.8	17.3	17.6	16.7	17.0	17.0	18.5	17.2
Number of observations	478	497	1,336	1,355	1,552	1,585	872	807	8,482

Note: Percentages not shown for balance of variables that are binary (for primary carer is single, child not having co-resident siblings, not being lowest socio-economic status). Differences in distributions by age were significantly different for all variables, after taking account of repeated observations per child ($p < .001$).

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

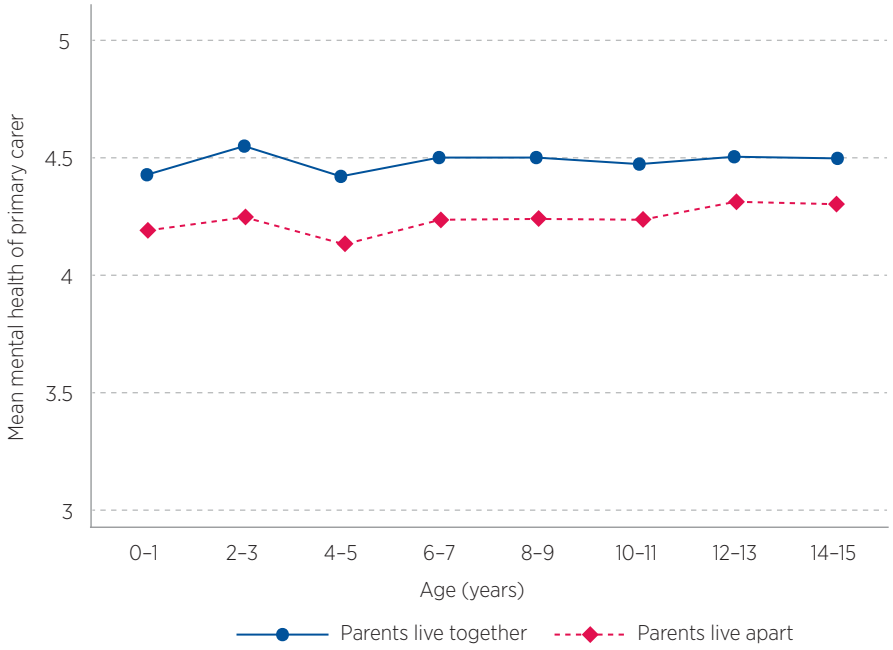
3.2 Parent mental health and parenting

The above analysis highlighted a few family characteristics that might explain variation in care arrangements and coparenting. These associations will be explored in section 4. In thinking about family and child wellbeing within these families, other factors are likely to be important. Most notably, parents' mental health and parenting styles might contribute to the wellbeing of children in families with and without 2 biological parents.

Figure 1 shows the mean mental health of primary carers, by age of child, in families with 2 biological parents and families in which the parents are living apart. Parental mental health was measured using the Kessler-K6 scale, which is a measure of non-specific psychological distress. This measure has been widely used and validated in many epidemiological studies (Kessler et al., 2002). A higher score indicates a lower level of psychological distress, which we refer to as better mental health. Figure 1 shows that at each age, the mental health of the child's primary carer was poorer when parents were living apart.

If these data are analysed using multivariate analyses (using ordinary least squares, with random effects and data pooled across ages and waves), incorporating the demographic characteristics introduced in the previous subsection, then this gap in parental mental health seems to be to some extent associated with primary carers being more often single rather than partnered, when parents are living apart, and having low socio-economic status. Both these factors were significant in predicting the mental health of parents. A significant difference remained, however, between those primary carers in 2 biological parent families and those who are living apart from the other parent. Other significant differences are apparent in these multivariate analyses, presented in the Appendix Table A1.

Figure 1: Mental health of primary carers, according to whether or not parents are living apart, by age of child



Notes: Mental health was measured using the Kessler-K6 scale. A higher score reflects better mental health. At all ages the difference was statistically significant ($p < .001$), as tested by estimating regression models with a dummy variable for having parents living apart, and one to capture cohort differences where data were from 2 cohorts. A model was estimated separately for each age. Families are excluded from a wave if they were non-respondents or not in scope that wave, or if the mental health measure was missing. They were retained in other waves, so this represents an unbalanced panel.

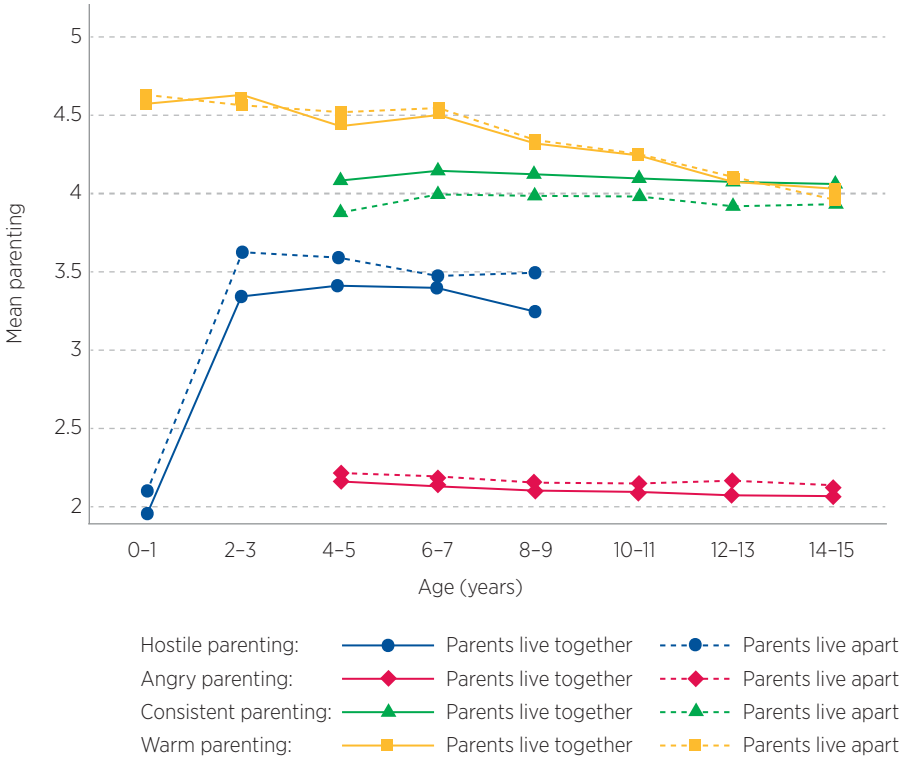
Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

The importance of parenting practices and behaviours on child behavioural and developmental outcomes has been well established (e.g. Baxter & Smart, 2010; Fosco et al., 2012; Hoeve et al., 2009; Steinberg & Silk, 2002; Zubrick et al., 2012). The parenting styles examined are parental warmth, consistency, angry parenting and hostile parenting. For information about these measures see, for example, Zubrick et al. (2012). In later analyses, we do not include the measure of hostile parenting, as that is not available for older ages of children.

Figure 2 compares the parenting styles across ages and family types. While parental warmth is largely invariant to family type, for angry or hostile parenting and consistent parenting, there are some differences at most ages, with parenting a little less positive within families for which there are parents living apart.

If the primary carers' parenting styles are compared in the pooled data, according to whether or not there are parents living apart, overall, angry parenting and hostile parenting are significantly greater when there are parents living apart, and consistent parenting is significantly lower. However, if we explore how parenting styles vary after taking account also of demographic factors (e.g. family structure and socio-economic status), the differences according to whether or not there are parents living apart diminish in size and importance, with a stronger predictor of parenting style being low family socio-economic status. These multivariate analyses are presented in the Appendix Table A2. Only for consistent parenting does the indicator of parent living elsewhere remain statistically significant with the inclusion of these other characteristics.

Figure 2: Mean parenting styles of primary carers, according to whether or not parents were living apart, and age of child



Notes: Families are excluded from a Wave if they were non-respondents or not in scope that wave, or if the parenting measure was missing. They were retained in other waves, so this represents an unbalanced panel. Significance of difference was tested by, for each age, estimating a regression model with a dummy variable for parents living apart, plus a dummy variable for cohort where data were from 2 cohorts. At all ages, differences according to whether parents were living apart were significant for consistent parenting ($p < .001$). For angry parenting, there were also significant differences at all ages ($p < .05$ at 6–7 years, 14–15 years; $p < .01$ at 4–5 and 8–9 years, $p < .001$ at 10–11 and 12–13 years. Hostile parenting was significantly different at ages 0–1 ($p < .05$), 2–3 ($p < .01$) and 8–9 years ($p < .05$) but not at 4–5 and 6–7 years. Warm parenting was only significantly different at 0–1 and 4–5 years (both $p < .01$).[6]

Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

3.3 Child wellbeing

A key concern for children with parents living apart is that their wellbeing is addressed: that they are protected from the difficulties that parents themselves may need to deal with through a time of transition and in the years that follow when they may be faced with hardships in managing post-separation relationships and arrangements. Much research has shown that children who have parents living apart have somewhat lower wellbeing than those who do not (see section 1). To what extent such differences can be attributed to the family living arrangements is difficult to assess, given there are significant selection issues in terms of the characteristics of families who do and do not involve one parent living elsewhere. We saw such differences above. These relate not only to socio-demographic characteristics but also parental mental health and some aspects of parenting.

To do an initial examination of how children's wellbeing may differ if they have parents living apart, this subsection presents some analyses of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) total difficulties score (Goodman, 2001). This is the sum of children's scores on the SDQ subscales of hyperactivity, emotional problems, peer problems and conduct problems. Here, the primary carer reported score is used, and also the score based on the children's own responses to the relevant questions at 10–11, 12–13 and 14–15 years. For more information, see Box 2.

6 Given that a number of significance tests are being examined here for each of the measures of parenting, it may be appropriate to use a Bonferroni correction, which results in more conservative p-values. This correction can be applied by dividing the p-value as reported here, by the number of tests (5 for hostile parenting, 6 for consistent parenting and angry parenting and 8 for warm parenting). If this correction is applied, we find that significant differences remain for consistent parenting but many of the other differences fail to reach significance at the $p < .05$ level.

Box 2: Social-emotional wellbeing – SDQ total difficulties score

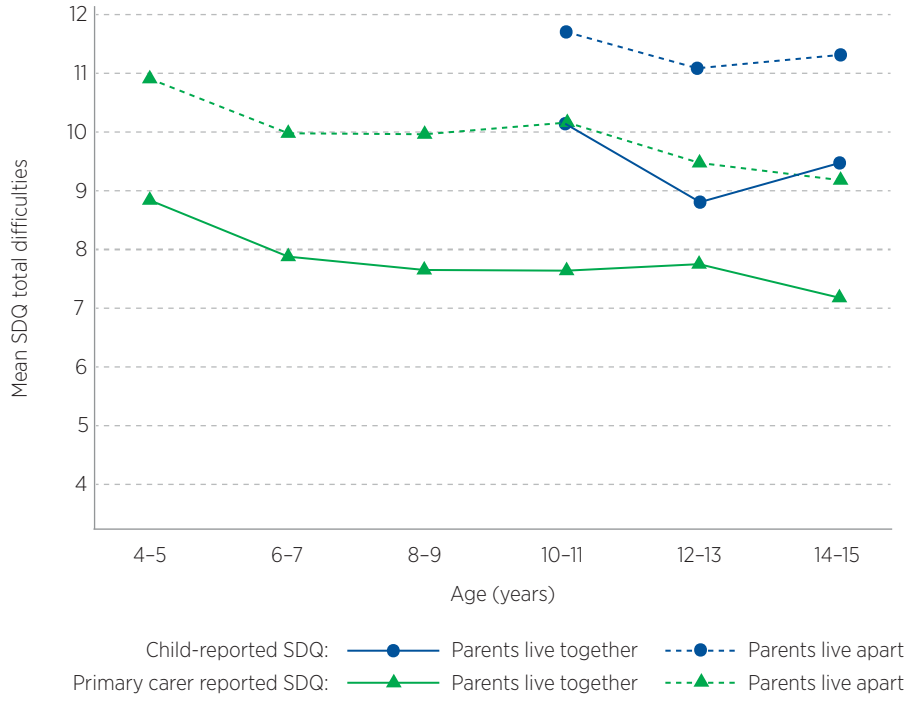
The SDQ is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire designed to measure the psychological adjustment of children aged between 3 and 16 years. The SDQ Problems Subscale consists of 20 items, some positive and others negative, where an item describes an attribute of the child's behavior (Goodman, 1999). The 20 items are divided into 4 scales of 5 items each:

- Hyperactivity/inattention (e.g. is restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long)
- Conduct problems (e.g. often fights with other children or bullies them)
- Emotional symptoms (e.g. has many fears and is easily scared)
- Peer problems (e.g. is rather solitary, tends to play alone).

The primary carer indicates whether each item is: not true, somewhat true or certainly true of the child in question and responses are scored 0, 1 or 2, such that higher scores indicate more problematic behaviour. Each of the 4 subscales therefore has a range of 0 to 10, with higher scores indicating a higher risk of clinically significant problems. Responses across all scales are summed to derive the Total Difficulties Score with a range of 0 to 40, where the scores of 13 or lower are considered to be average, scores of 14 to 16 indicate a slightly raised risk of clinically significant problems and scores of 17 and over indicate a high risk of clinically significant problems.

The mean SDQ total difficulties score is compared for children at different ages according to their parents' living arrangements; that is, whether both biological parents live together or if one lives elsewhere. Figure 3 shows that those children with parents living apart had lower wellbeing at all ages for primary carers' reports and also for the children's own reports at older ages.

Figure 3: Social-emotional difficulties by age for children with one and two biological parents



Notes: A higher value of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) total difficulties indicates poorer social-emotional wellbeing. The SDQ was not assessed at 0–1 and 2–3 years. The items used in the scale were slightly different for 4–5 years. Children are excluded from a wave if they were non-respondents or not in scope that wave or if the wellbeing measure was missing. They were retained in other waves, so this represents an unbalanced panel. Significance of difference was tested by, for each age, estimating a regression model with a dummy variable for having a parent living elsewhere, plus a dummy variable for cohort where data were from 2 cohorts. At all ages, differences according to parent living elsewhere were significant ($p < .001$).

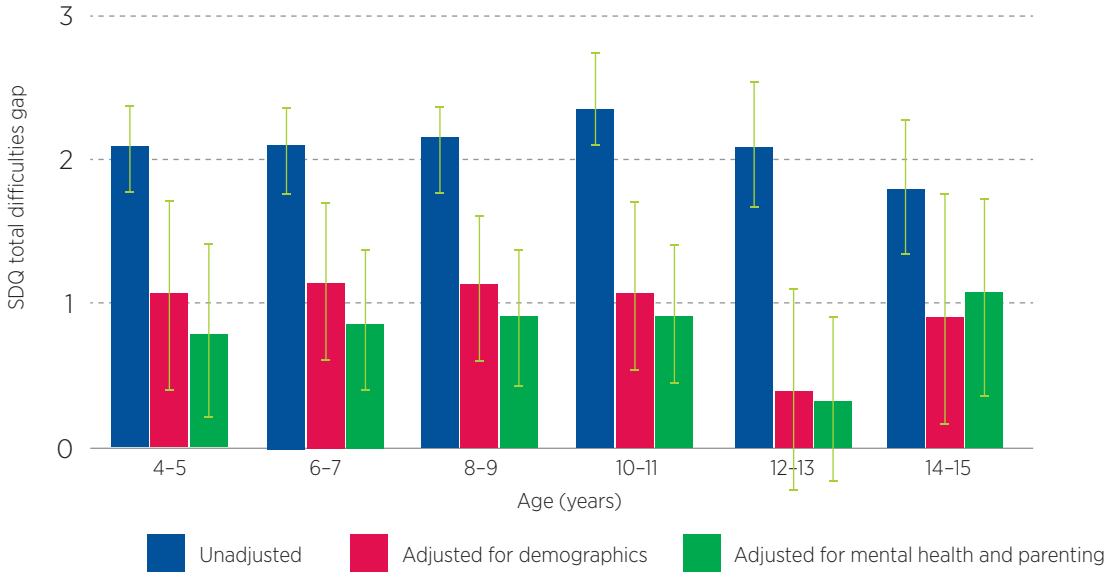
Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 1–6, K cohort, Waves 3–6, B cohort

To demonstrate to what extent the differences in wellbeing might be related to the characteristics of those families, Figure 4 shows how the gap between children living with 2 parents and children living with one parent narrows if multivariate analyses are used to take account of differences other than their parents' living arrangements. At each age, if multivariate analyses take into account the socio-demographic characteristics shown in Table 4, the gap that is attributed to parents living elsewhere narrows considerably. That is, much of this gap is due to other characteristics that are particularly pertinent in families with parents living apart. If parental mental health and parenting styles are added, then the gap narrows further. At most ages, there is still a significant deficit in social-emotional wellbeing for those with parents living apart that may be attributable to some other characteristics of those families that are not considered here.

If we repeat the same analyses on the child-reported SDQ total difficulties score, similar findings arise, with the gap narrowing between children with parents living together and parents living apart when family characteristics are taken into account (not shown).

In subsequent sections of this report, a more nuanced examination of the children with parents living elsewhere is undertaken to help provide some insights on who these children are and what their families look like. After building up this more detailed picture in section 6, we return to this question of children's wellbeing for children with parents living elsewhere, to examine variation within this population of children to see whether particular contexts or care arrangements also explain some of the variation in children's social-emotional wellbeing. Other measures of wellbeing are considered also later in the report.

Figure 4: Parent living elsewhere SDQ gap – unadjusted and adjusted for socio-demographic characteristics, and for parent mental health and parenting by child age



Note: The SDQ total difficulties gap is the difference in the total difficulties score between children who are living with 2 biological parents and those who have a parent iiving elsewhere. These estimates come from regression models on the SDQ total difficulties score, one model for each age. The 'unadjusted' gap is the mean difference between these groups in the sample, so the model only included the indicator of having parents living apart. The 'adjusted for demographics' is the coefficient on the parent living elsewhere indicator, with the model also including socio-economic status, family composition, ethnicity and remoteness. The 'adjusted for mental health and parenting' is the coefficient on the parent living elsewhere indicator, with the model also including the demographic variables and mental health and parenting scales. The parenting measures included were warmth, consistency and angry parenting (Figure 2). The SDQ is not measured at 0-1 or 2-3 years.

Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 1–6, K cohort, Waves 3–6, B cohort.

3.4 Child contexts: parent relationship history and residential proximity

To complete the description of the characteristics that may be relevant in exploring children's experiences of post-separation parenting, this section focuses just on those children with parents living apart, to describe some key measures that are likely to contextualise children's post-separation experiences. This subsection explores how the growing number of children with parents living apart is characterised according to how long ago (if ever) children lived with both parents together, parents' own relationship history and the proximity of the parent living elsewhere's household to that of the primary carer.

For much of this section, this information is presented for the 2 LSAC cohorts, by age of the LSAC study children at each of the waves. Because there is a changing, growing group of children with parents living apart across waves of the study, we present this information as the estimated proportion of all in-scope children at that age (within a cohort) to highlight the changing size of this group. To provide insights on how the average contexts change by ages of children, for children with parents living apart, this information is also presented in Appendix tables as percentages within each age group, pooling the 2 cohorts.

Time since child lived with parents together

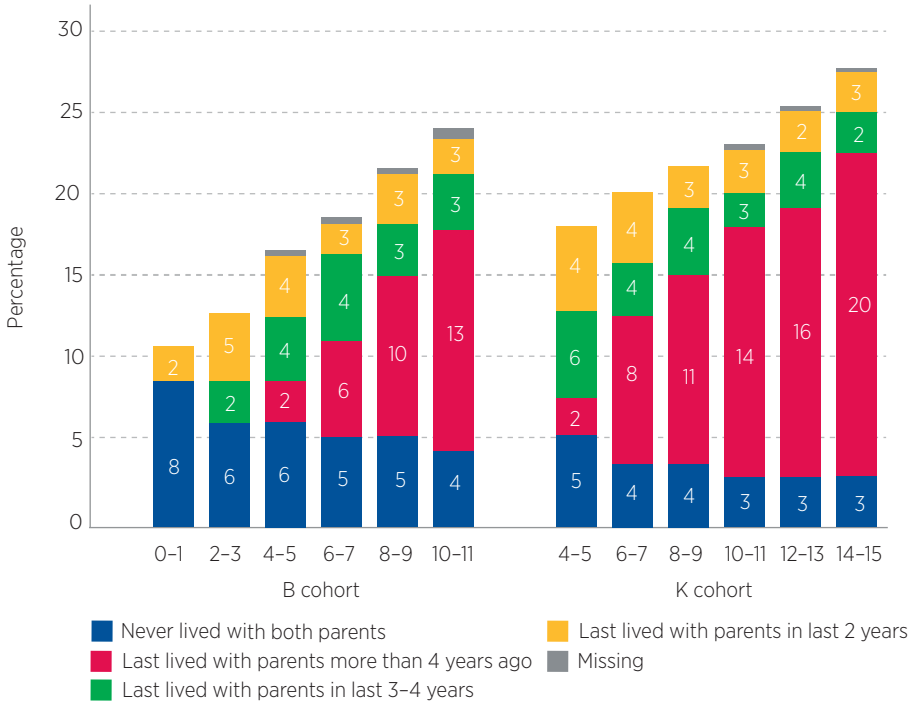
As children grow, the number of children who have parents living apart increases due to more children experiencing the separation of their parents. As such, as children grow, the pool of children with parents living apart becomes more diverse in terms of how long children have had parents living apart. Some children may indeed have never had contact with their other parent. Some will have parents who are newly separated and children may be adjusting to new living arrangements, while others will have lived with the complexities of having parents in 2 households for a longer period of time. These different circumstances are expected to be relevant to children's wellbeing, with the length of time since children have lived with both parents (if ever) potentially also relevant to the coparenting and care arrangements themselves. Here, we provide an overview of how this characteristic – how long since children lived with both parents – changes across ages of children, as the pool of children with parents living apart increases.

Figure 5 shows the percentages of children with parents living apart, by cohort and age, according to the time since children lived with parents together. See also the Appendix, Table A3 in which these figures are shown, by age, as percentages of the total with parents living apart.

As a proportion of children with parents living apart, at the youngest ages (0–1 year olds) a majority had not lived with that parent but by 14–15 years, only a small proportion had never lived with their other parent.[7]

7 Strictly speaking, the percentage who had never lived with their parent living elsewhere (PLE) should remain fairly constant as children grow, from the percentage at the beginning of the study, with some variation due to parents reconciling, even for a short period of time. There was some instability in parents' reports about their prior relationship with the PLE, such that some who initially reported the child not having lived with the parent later reported that they had. This may be true for some, but for others perhaps the recall of timing of separation may have changed. The estimated percentage is also likely affected by attrition, with the weighting perhaps not fully accounting for the declining number in this specific group of parents across waves.

Figure 5: Time since children lived with both parents together, by age and cohort, as percentages of all children (adding to total with parents living apart)



Notes: Sample sizes for each age and cohort are shown in Table 2 (column 1). The total height of the bar is the percentage of in-scope children who have parents living apart.

Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Parents' previous relationship status

For parents who had previously lived together, we also know whether they had been married or in a cohabiting union (see Appendix, Table A5). This may be relevant in that previously married, rather than cohabiting, parents may have been more committed to their relationship with each other, which may flow through to differences in how they negotiate and manage care arrangements post-separation (Waller & Dwyer Emory, 2014). Similarly, parents who had previously been married or cohabited may have different approaches to managing arrangements for children compared to those who had not lived together at all. For this variable, we capture parents' previous relationship status even if children had not lived with both parents; that is, if married parents separated prior to the birth of the study child, this is reported as parents having previously been married.

For the youngest children at 0–1 years, only 13% of parents had been previously married in families with parents living apart. Most had previously cohabited without marriage (46%) or never lived together (41%). Among those with parents living apart, the percentage having never lived together declined by age of child, consistent with the findings in Figure 5. The percentage with previously cohabiting parents peaked at 50% for 2–3 year olds, and declined to around 30% at older ages. There were significant increases in the percentage whose parents had previously been married, by child age, with 63% of the children with parents living apart at 14–15 years having parents who were previously married.

Proximity of the other parent's home

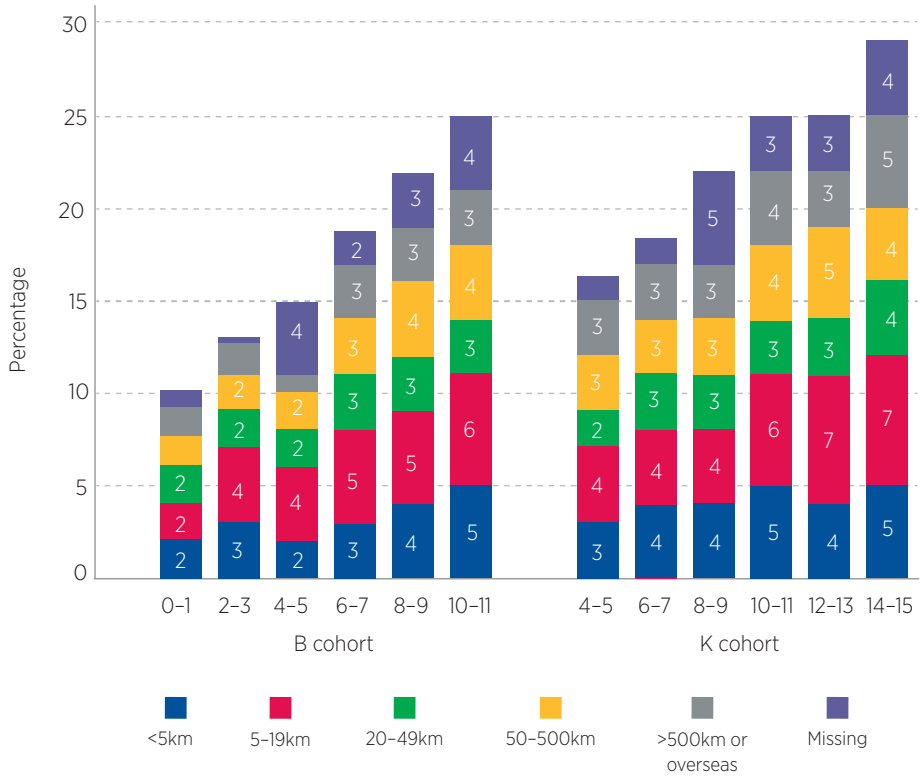
When children's 2 parents live some distance apart, this is likely to place particular challenges on the possibility for children to frequently see or stay with each of their parents. Maintaining routines, friendships, extracurricular and even school engagement may be difficult in such circumstances. On the other hand, when parents live close by, children may be able to easily move between the households, and they may easily be able to maintain all engagements and relationships, regardless of which parent they are staying with at the time. Proximity is therefore expected to be an important contextual variable in thinking about the way in which care arrangements are made, and in parents' and children's experiences of those arrangements.

It may be, of course, that proximity reflects the level of parental involvement. For example, parents may ensure they live close by in order to facilitate greater involvement, while a less-involved parent may have fewer concerns

about moving some distance away from the home of the child's primary residence (Sobolewski & King, 2005). The relocation of children by one parent to a location that is not convenient for the other can pose particular difficulties for the left-behind parent's ability to maintain frequent contact, although some parents manage to maintain relationships in this situation (Saini et al., 2015).

Figure 6 shows the proximity of the households (based on primary carer reports) for children with parents living apart, by cohort and age. There is considerable diversity at all ages, although a substantial percentage of children have parents who live reasonably close to each other, as evident by those whose parents live less than 20 kilometres from each other.

Figure 6: Proximity of other parent's home to the primary carer's home, by age and cohort, as percentages of all children (adding to total with parents living apart)



Notes: Sample sizes for each age and cohort are shown in Table 2 (column 1). The total height of the bar is the percentage of in-scope children who have parents living apart.

Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

3.5 Summary

The key findings from this section:

- There are socio-demographic differences between 2 biological parent families and families with a biological parent living elsewhere. Differences are especially marked among the youngest children, when it is more uncommon for parents to live apart. When this does occur, the families are particularly vulnerable, as was especially apparent in relation to the low socio-economic status of these families. There is also evidence of more family complexity in these families, with half or step siblings more often present when there are parents living apart.
- There are other differences in parental mental health and some aspects of parenting, which together with the socio-economic differences explain some of the gap in children's social-emotional wellbeing that is associated with having parents living apart.
- The contexts of children's post-separation experiences are somewhat different for the youngest children who, compared to older children, more often had not lived with both parents together, with parents themselves frequently not having lived together or having cohabited but not married. Older children with parents living apart were more likely to have spent some time living with both parents together. There was considerable diversity across all children in how far apart parents lived.

The findings here elaborate on earlier research using LSAC (Baxter et al., 2011; Qu & Weston, 2012b), by demonstrating that there are also differences within separated families according to child age. This is important information for the development of appropriate services or programs, for which different approaches may be needed for separated families involving young children, when there is more evidence of vulnerability compared to families with older children.

There is more to be learned about these families than can be covered here; specifically, we are focusing our analyses of family and parental characteristics on those of the LSAC primary carer. This is mostly because these characteristics are not known for a large proportion of parents living elsewhere. In future analyses of the LSAC parent living elsewhere data, incorporating the information that is available would be useful.

4. Children with parents living apart: care arrangements and coparenting

This section of the report focuses on children who have parents living apart, describing their care arrangements and coparenting, and relating those circumstances to the demographic and contextual information presented in section 3. This information continues the focus on the first of the research questions addressed in this report, aiming to describe children's contexts and care arrangements.

Section 4.1 focuses on children's care time arrangements for those children with parents living apart, drawing on information about how often children stay overnight with their other parent. Overnight stays are viewed as providing distinct opportunities for parents to take on the everyday parenting activities that might not be the case for daytime-only visits (Cashmore et al., 2008). Reports of primary carers and the parents living elsewhere are used, and also children's reports of who they live with (at older ages) are compared. More detailed analyses of primary carer reports of the number of nights children stay with their parent living elsewhere is undertaken to see how the demographic and contextual information presented in section 3 relates to different care arrangements.

There is a significant body of Australian research that describes the care arrangements of children post-separation (see section 1, for example, and Cashmore et al., 2010; Qu & Weston, 2010; Qu et al., 2014). The analysis presented here extends this work by including a detailed examination by child age, and by undertaking multivariate analyses to establish how care time arrangements vary for families with different characteristics. We also analyse these data from the perspective of both parents.

Section 4.2 explores aspects of the primary carer and parent-living-elsewhere co-parental relationship. This analysis includes examination of primary carers' reports on the extent to which the parent living elsewhere is consulted or has input into decision-making about aspects of children's lives. This is an important aspect of shared parenting post-separation (Qu & Weston, 2010; Renda, 2013; Smyth, 2009). This information is only collected from the primary carer interview.

Reports about the degree of conflict between parents are also examined, for which reports of primary carers and parents living elsewhere are available. Other research has shown that most separated parents do not indicate they have highly conflicted relationships (Kaspiew et al., 2009; Kaspiew et al., 2015; Qu et al., 2014), and this is expected to be the case also for this sample.

We extend other research by using multivariate analyses to examine these indicators of coparenting, to consider in which families the co-parental relationship is characterised by some consultation, and in which the co-parental relationship involves conflict. We also consider, overall, in which families the primary carer has some contact with the parent living elsewhere.

Section 4.3 explores financial contributions of the parent living elsewhere, including information about child support and the extent to which informal financial help is provided. Primary carer and parent living elsewhere reports are presented, with more detailed analyses of the primary carer reports. LSAC cannot be used to study financial transactions comprehensively as there is incomplete information about the payment of child support or other financial help from the primary carer to the parent living elsewhere. For more detailed analyses of child support using LSAC, refer to Qu and Weston (2012a). As with the coparenting data, the information about financial support is related here to the family characteristics and contexts, also taking account of children's care arrangements, to see how these financial arrangements vary.

For all analyses, where information was missing for some part of the sample, we have retained them in the analyses with a 'missing' category, as they are likely to be a non-random subset of the population.

The section concludes by compiling a summary measure of parent living elsewhere involvement; that is, compared by age and some key context measures as a means of highlighting the diversity of post-separation arrangements and circumstances.

4.1 Care time – number of nights with PLE

In this subsection an overview of children's care time arrangements is provided, in terms of the number of nights they stay with parents living apart. The number of nights children spend with their parent living elsewhere is an often-used classification of children's care arrangements, and here care time is reported in categories of 'no overnight stays', 'stay one night per fortnight or month', '2–4 nights a fortnight', '5–9 nights a fortnight' or '10–14 nights a fortnight'.[8] The category '5–9 nights a fortnight' is sometimes referred to here as 'shared care'. The category with no overnight stays is further separated into those who have at least monthly daytime contact, compared to those with less or no contact.

The household of the primary carer is the household in which children are enumerated in the main LSAC interview but children with parents living apart may actually spend more nights in a year living with that other parent, rather than with the (LSAC) primary carer, as indicated by the category of 10–14 nights a fortnight with a parent living elsewhere.[9]

In section 2.4 we saw that the majority of parents living elsewhere are fathers, with primary carers in LSAC largely mothers. However, there are some families in which these relationships are reversed, with primary carer fathers reporting on time children spend with a mother living elsewhere. To present the information on number of nights with a parent living elsewhere, we have also taken into account the gender of the parent in each situation to enable reporting on the number of nights children spend with *their father*. That is, most of this is based on mothers' reports of children's time spent with the child's father. It is supplemented with information from primary carer fathers' reports, from which the amount of time they themselves spent with the study child was derived as the balance of the time they report the child spending with the mother living elsewhere.

Information about care time arrangements is collected from children's primary carers, and also from the parents living elsewhere. As this information is more complete for primary carer reports in LSAC, that is the main focus here. However, we include a comparison of these reports to those of the parent living elsewhere (in aggregate) to show the similarity of the distributions. A comparison to children's reports of which parent they live with, at 12–13 years and 14–15 years, is also included.

Care time as reported by primary carer

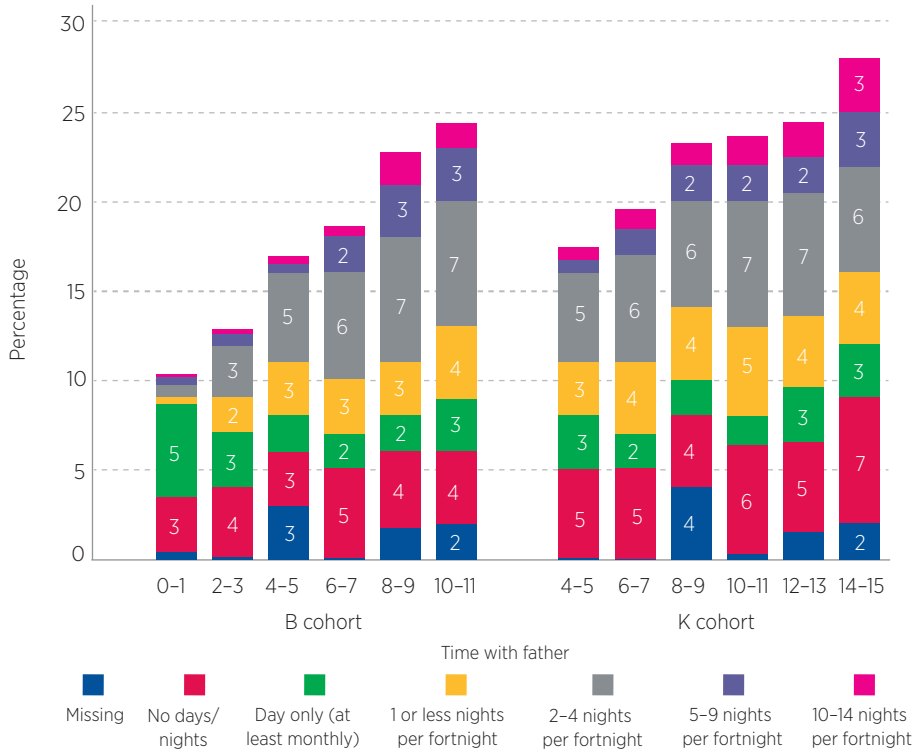
As in the previous section, care time arrangements are shown by cohort and age, with statistics presented being the percentage of children experiencing each of the care time arrangements, summing to the percentage of children with parents living apart. A 'missing' category is also included, which largely represents those parents who did not want to answer questions about the parent living elsewhere. They are kept in as a separate category as they are quite likely parents with more distant or difficult relationships with the parent living elsewhere.

Figure 7 shows that as children grow, and the pool of children with parents living apart increases, the care arrangements of those children continue to be quite diverse, including those who have no contact or only daytime contact with their parent living elsewhere through to those who spend a majority of nights with that parent. A relatively large percentage, however, fall in between these extremes.

8 At the time of writing, these categories aligned with those used in the calculation of child support payments, as reported by the Department of Human Services (www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/enablers/child-support/child-support-assessment/working-out-child-support-using-the-basic-formula#care-cost-table).

9 If parents separate, the collection of information about the LSAC study child generally stays with the household of the parent who was identified at Wave 1 of LSAC as the child's primary carer. If post-separation care arrangements mean this primary carer is not the parent the child stays most nights with, the study may still remain with that LSAC-defined primary carer. This is why a small number of children are reported to spend more nights in the household of their other parent than they do in the LSAC primary household.

Figure 7: Number of nights with father, by age and cohort, as percentages of all children (adding to total with parents living apart)



Notes: Sample sizes for each age and cohort are shown in Table 2 (column 1). The total height of the bar is the percentage of in-scope children who have parents living apart.

Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Appendix Table A7 presents these data as percentages of children with parents living apart by child age. These data show also the diversity of care time arrangements at all ages, although some variation by age. The likelihood of children with parents living apart spending more time with their father increases with age, evident in the slight increase in the percentage staying with their father 10–14 nights per fortnight, and the increase in the percentage staying with him 5–9 nights per fortnight.

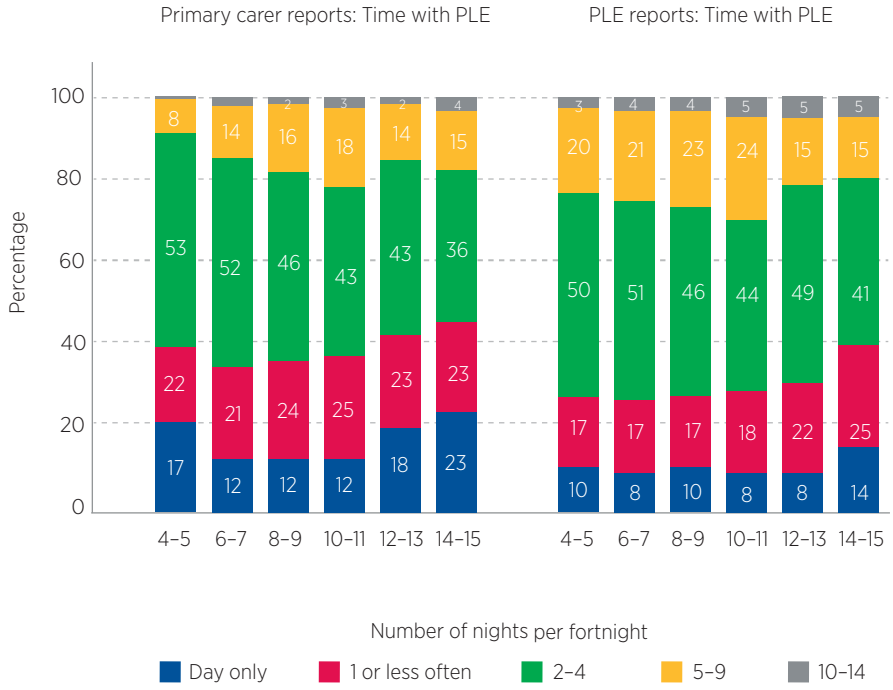
Other changes are more complex. Table A7 shows that among children with a parent living elsewhere, the percentage having no contact with their father is highest at 0–1 and 2–3 years. Daytime-only contact is very likely at 0–1 years – much more so than at other ages. These changes are consistent with those reported for the LSSF, for which across the 3 waves of the study, the proportion in daytime-only contact declined, and the proportion spending some nights with their father increased, with small increases in the percentage in shared care (Qu et al., 2014).

Care time according to parents living elsewhere

While the number of nights children stay with their parent living elsewhere should be an objective measure of care time arrangements, it is possible that each parent may have a different perspective on how many nights they care for the child. This may especially be so when arrangements are new or changeable. Parents living elsewhere who responded to LSAC are asked about care time arrangements, and so the measure of care time arrangements based on their reports can be compared to that of the primary carers. To do this, it is necessary to just compare the primary carer reports for those families, and those waves, for which the parent living elsewhere responded to the survey. These analyses use time with *parent living elsewhere*, rather than time with *father*, as this is more relevant for comparisons of primary carer and parent living elsewhere reports.

Figure 8 shows the aggregate comparisons, by child age, of primary carer and parent living elsewhere reports of the number of nights children stay with their parent living elsewhere. Some differences are apparent, with parents living elsewhere tending to report children spending more time with them than do the primary carers.

Figure 8: Each parents' reports of care time arrangements, children with parents living apart by age



Note: Sample sizes for each age and cohort are shown in Table 2 (column 4).

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart and both parents' reports, LSAC Waves 3–6, B and K cohorts

Table 6 compares the primary carer and parent living elsewhere reports within families to see how consistent the reports are at this family level. There is generally some degree of concordance between the reports of primary carers and the other parent but there are many families in which the reports do not exactly correspond. Parents were most likely to give consistent reports when (according to the primary carer) children stayed 2–4 nights per fortnight with the parent living elsewhere. In these families, 78% of the parents living elsewhere similarly reported this was the children's care arrangements. However, within this group 18% of the parents living elsewhere reported that the child spends more time with them (5–9 or 10–14 nights per fortnight). It was not common for the parents living elsewhere to report lower levels of overnight stays, relative to the reports of the primary carer.

Table 6: Within family comparison of parent living elsewhere and primary carer reports of nights the study child stays with their father

Primary carer report	Parent living elsewhere report						
	Day only (%)	1 day per fortnight or less often (%)	2–4 nights/ fortnight (%)	5–9 nights/ fortnight (%)	10–14 nights/ fortnight(%)	Total	*N*
Day only	52.0	27.7	16.4	3.7	0.2	100.0	417
1 day per fortnight or less often	6.7	55.8	34.2	2.4	0.9	100.0	709
2–4 nights/fortnight	0.6	3.9	77.9	15.7	1.9	100.0	1,392
5–9 nights/fortnight	0.7	1.1	7.2	74.6	16.4	100.0	535
10–14 nights/fortnight	0.0	0.0	0.0	54.8	45.2	100.0	68
Total	9.4	18.9	46.4	20.7	4.5	100.0	3,121

Note: Excludes those with missing data on this question.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart and both parents' reports, LSAC Waves 3–6, B and K cohorts

Child reports

At 12–13 and 14–15 years, the children with parents living apart were asked who they usually live with: mostly their mother, mostly their father or equally with both parents.[10]

- At 12–13 years 57% said they lived mostly or only with their mother, 7% mostly or only with their father and 15% lived equally with both.
- At 14–15 years 58% said they lived mostly or only with their mother, 8% mostly or only with their father and 13% lived equally with both.

These child responses matched the information presented by the primary carers on the number of nights children spend with their father, although the correspondence was not perfect:

- Of children reported by the primary carer to spend up to 4 nights per fortnight with their father (including those who spend no nights with him), 91% of children said they live mostly or only with their mother and 8% said they live equally with both.
- Of children spending 5–9 nights per fortnight with their father according to the primary carer, 76% said they live equally with both parents, 16% said they live mostly or only with their mother and 7% mostly or only with their father.
- Of children reported by primary carers to spend 10–14 nights per fortnight with their fathers, 76% said they live mostly or only with their father, 20% said they live equally with both parents and 3% said they live mostly or only with their mother.

Inconsistencies may indicate that some children judge their living arrangements in terms of details other than the number of nights per fortnight they stay with each parent. It is possible also, that children's care arrangements are not fixed, such that recent care patterns as reported by parents may not reflect the care patterns children experience at the time of the survey.

Shared or joint parenting

The above parent-reported information about care time arrangements is based only on the number of nights children spend with each of their parents. This fairly objective measure may not fully capture ways in which parents share or negotiate their children's care arrangements. It is possible, for example, for parents to consider their parenting responsibilities to be joint or shared, even if children stay a majority of nights with one of the parents. For example, in LSAC the primary carers are asked, 'Do you have a shared or joint parenting arrangement with [study child's other parent living elsewhere] or do you have main care of [study child]?', and from Wave 4 parents could say they have main care, they have shared or joint parenting, or the other parent has main care of the child (also with another 'other' category).

Overall, from Waves 4 to 6 combined, 82% of primary carers said they had main care, 17% said they had shared or joint parenting and less than 1% said the other parent had main care, plus another 1% said 'other'. Primary carers of children who stayed 5–9 nights per fortnight with their parent living elsewhere were very likely (84%) to say they had shared or joint arrangements, and this was even more so (88%) for those families where children spent 10–14 nights per fortnight with their parent living elsewhere. This was much less likely for all other families. These data are shown in Appendix Table A8. While this information would be valuable to explore further, it has not been used elsewhere in this report.

Contexts and care time

To explore care time in more detail we initially return to primary carers' reports, since there is more complete data for them. Figure 7 shows that there is much diversity in care arrangement at all ages of children, although less variation at the youngest ages. Multivariate analysis is used to examine how the number of nights children stay with their parent living elsewhere varies with child age as well as the demographic and contextual variables described in section 3. As the parent living elsewhere is sometimes the mother, this was repeated to examine the number of nights children stay with their father, whether or not he is the parent living elsewhere. Ordinary least squares are used, with the dependent variables being the number of nights per year children stay overnight with

10 About one in five children with parents living apart were not asked these questions, with most having skipped past them in error. These cases have been excluded from this subsection. See sample sizes for children responding to these and other PLE questions in Table 2 (column 5). Among those asked who they lived with, fewer than 1% responded 'other' to the question about their living arrangements.

their parent living elsewhere or their father.[11] Full estimation results are shown in Appendix Table A9, with findings for the contextual variables shown in Table 7. Key findings are:

- The closer the other parent's home is to the primary carer's home, the more nights the child stays with the parent living elsewhere. This was evident also in the analyses of nights staying with fathers.
- Children spend the least number of nights with parents living elsewhere, or in total with fathers, when the child never lived with both parents together. Otherwise, differences according to the time of parents' separation are quite small.
- Children spend more nights with their parent living elsewhere, and in total with their father, when their parents were previously married, rather than previously cohabiting or never having lived together.
- There were some age differences, with the number of nights children stay with their other *parent* being least for 0–1 year olds and greatest for 8–9 and 10–11 year olds. However, when this was explored for nights spent with *fathers*, the age differences were more apparent, with the number of nights with fathers generally increasing with age. Differences for child gender were very small.

Table 7: Number of nights per year children stay with their parent living elsewhere or with their father, children with parents living apart, OLS regression results

Variable	Category	Nights with parent living elsewhere	Nights with father living elsewhere
		Coefficient	
Who is the parent living elsewhere (reference = Father)	Mother	4	N.A.
Proximity (reference = <5 km)	5–19 km	-6***	-4***
	20–49 km	-13***	-9***
	50–500 km	-29***	-17***
	>500 km or overseas	-42***	-31***
When child lived with 2 parents last (reference = Up to 2 years)	never	-14***	-27***
	>2 up to 4 years	2	1
	>4 years	-3*	-3
Parents' previous relationship status (reference = Married)	Never lived together	-17***	-19**
	Cohabited	-12***	-7*
Child gender (reference = girls)	Boy	4	7*
Child age (years) (reference = 0–1)	2–3	9**	9*
	4–5	13***	15***
	6–7	17***	21***
	8–9	22***	28***
	10–11	23***	27***
	12–13	17***	32***
	14–15	21***	37***
Plus demographics			
Constant		55***	70***
Number of observations		7,964	7,964
From number of children		2,694	2,694

Notes: This model was estimated using random effects analyses, given multiple records per family. Model also includes demographic characteristics. See Appendix Table A9. Excludes those with missing information on the dependent variable. Categories for missing contexts were included but results not shown. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

11 Random effects estimations were used throughout this report, unless otherwise specified, to take account of the repeated observations per child or family.

These analyses were repeated using the reports of the parents living elsewhere on number of nights children stay with them. As these respondents are a subset of all LSAC children with parents living elsewhere, to compare to primary carer findings, the analyses of primary carer reports were repeated just for those same cases for which there were parent living elsewhere reports. Findings are shown in Appendix Table A10. The findings are broadly consistent with those derived from primary carer responses.

4.2 Coparenting

To capture aspects of the co-parental relationship, 2 measures are explored. One is the degree of contact and consultation that primary carers have with the parent living elsewhere. The other is the degree of conflict between parents. In section 4.3, the financial aspect of coparenting is explored.

Contact and consultation according to primary carers

This analysis is of information collected from LSAC primary carers about whether they consult with the parent living elsewhere when making decisions about their child. This information was not captured from the parent living elsewhere. Families were classified according to whether or not the primary carer had contact with the parent living elsewhere, and whether or not he/she sometimes consulted with the other parent about childrearing matters. Refer to Box 3 for information about the variable used.

The variable capturing contact and consultation is shown by child age and cohort in Figure 9. As the number of children with parents living apart grows, the category that grows the most is that of 'some consultation', although the 'no or little consultation' and 'no or little contact' groups remain significant in size. See also this variable, by age, in percentages in Appendix Table A11.

Box 3: Derivation of measures of contact and consultation

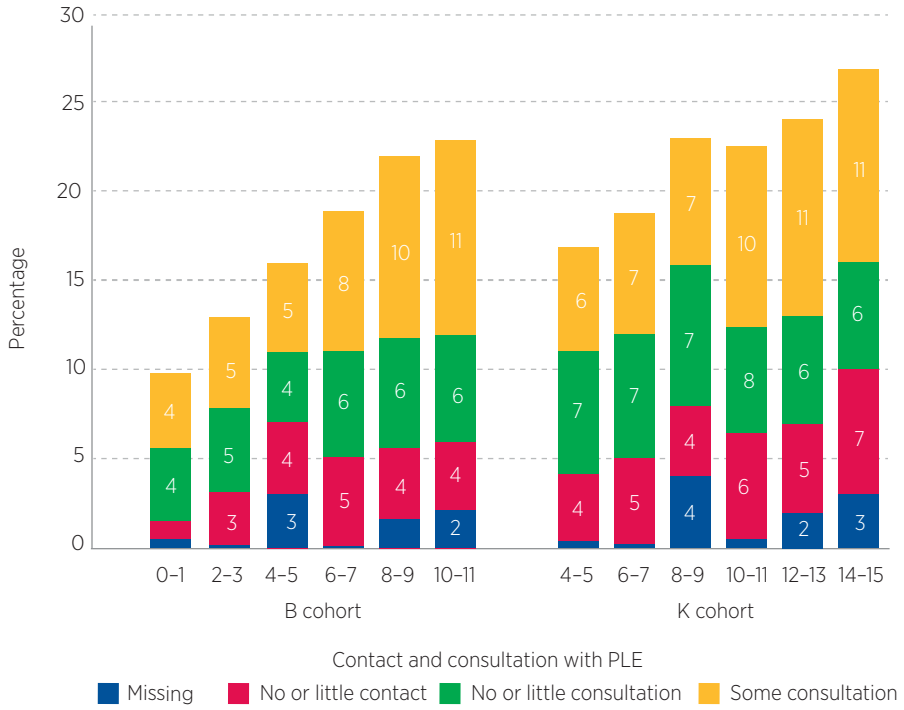
In Waves 1 to 3 of LSAC, the degree of consultation was captured through a question asking the primary carer how often they consulted with the parent living elsewhere when making decisions about the child. Responses were captured on a five-point scale from 'never/almost never' through to 'always/almost always'. This was collapsed into 3 categories, such that, of those that answered this question at Waves 1 to 3, 61% said they rarely or never consulted, 11% sometimes consulted, and 28% often or always consulted. However, some parents were not asked this question as they had no or virtually no contact with that parent. For this analysis, consultation is classified as being 'some consultation' (parents sometimes, often or always consulted), 'no or little consultation' (parents rarely or never consulted), and 'no or little contact' or 'missing' (parents for which this information could not be derived).

The questions about consultation were expanded for Waves 4 onwards, to ask about consultation in respect to decisions about education, decisions about health, and also about sport or social life and about religious or cultural activities. Here, responses on the questions about health and education are used. Parents were initially asked who made those decisions, with response categories of 'mainly me', 'mainly child's other parent', 'both of us equally', 'whichever parent child is with at the time', 'someone else', and 'mainly child'. For decisions about education, 80% of parents said 'mainly me', and 17% said 'both of us equally', with small percentages in the other categories.

When parents answered 'mainly me', they were then asked whether they consulted the parent living elsewhere about those decisions. The 80% answering 'mainly me' for education included 46% who said they never/almost never or rarely consulted the other parent, 15% who sometimes consulted and 19% who often or always/almost always consulted. The responses regarding health matters were similar.

This information was used to create a classification of coparenting that is consistent with that used for Waves 1 to 3. We considered that there was 'some consultation' if for either education or health parents said decision making was done by 'both of us equally' or 'mainly me' with consultation with the other parents sometimes to always. Those with 'no consultation' were those who said they mainly made decisions and rarely to never consulted the other parent. The small numbers who reported decisions primarily being made by others (the other parent, someone else or the child) were included in the 'missing category' along with others with missing data. Those who had little or no contact with the parent living elsewhere were classified as 'no or little contact'.

Figure 9: Contact and consultation between parents, by age and cohort, as percentages of all children (adding to total with parents living apart)



Notes: Sample sizes for each age and cohort are shown in Table 2 (column 1). The total height of the bar is the percentage of in-scope children who have parents living apart.

Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Parent reports of inter-parent conflict

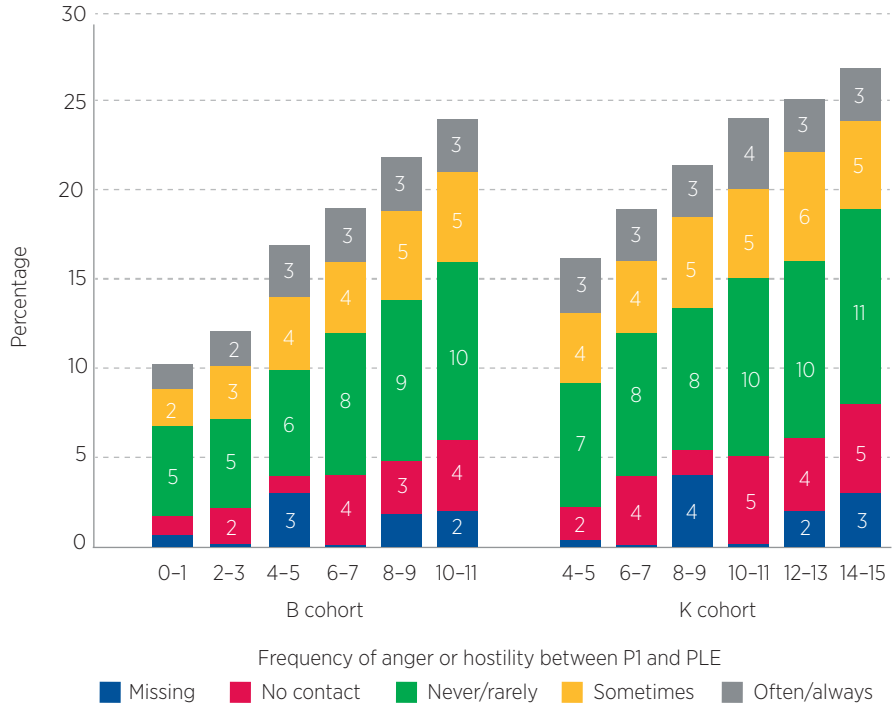
At all waves, the primary carer has been asked how often there is anger or hostility with the parent living elsewhere (with 5 categories of always to never). This is not asked of parents who have no or little contact with the parent living elsewhere. The parent living elsewhere is also asked about how often there is anger or hostility with the primary carer.

Overall, Figure 10 shows that the percentage of children with the most hostile/angry parents stays fairly steady across ages of children, although with relatively few described as such for the youngest children. It was much more common at all ages for parents to report rarely or never having conflict with the parent living elsewhere. See also Appendix Table A12.

Figure 11 compares the responses of primary carer and parents living elsewhere by child age on reports of inter-parent conflict, using a matched sample of families with conflict information from both the primary carer and the parent living elsewhere. This comparison involves examining primary carers' reports as a *whole* and those of parents living elsewhere *as a whole* within this matched sample. Overall, the different respondents' reports are similar, with some tendency for the primary carers to report a little more conflict than the parents living elsewhere.

If reports of each parent are compared within families (see Appendix Table A13), the perceptions about conflict vary quite a lot between parents. Those most likely to have similar reports were families in which the primary carer reported that there was never or rarely conflict, with about three-quarters of the parents living elsewhere in these families saying the same thing. There was much more variation between parents when the primary carer reported that there was more conflict.

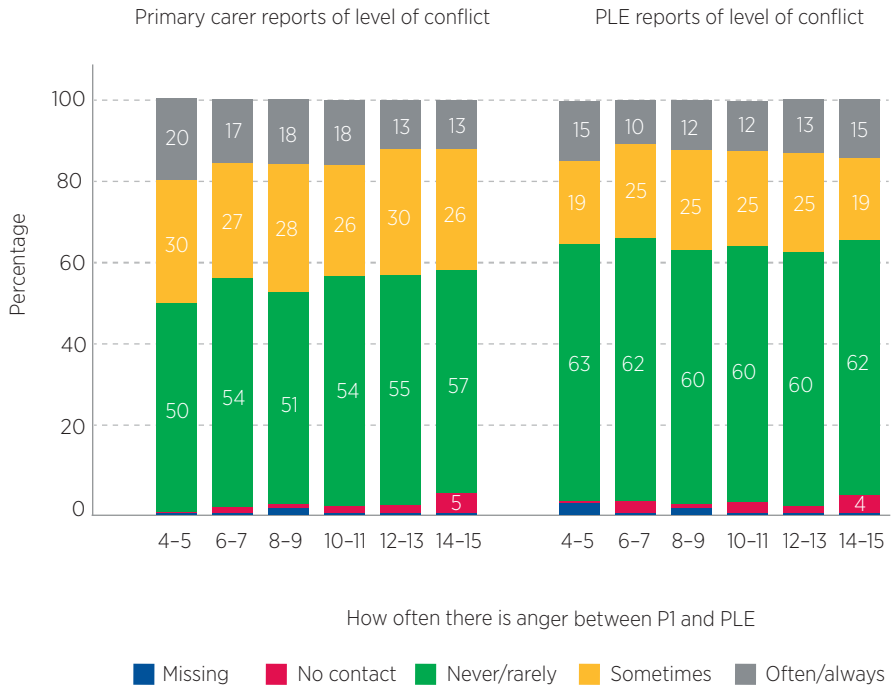
Figure 10: Conflict according to primary carer, by age and cohort, as percentages of all children (adding to total with parents living apart)



Notes: Sample sizes for each age and cohort are shown in Table 2 (column 1). The total height of the bar is the percentage of in-scope children who have parents living apart.

Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Figure 11: Primary carer and parent living elsewhere reports of conflict, children with parent living elsewhere by age



Note: Sample sizes for each age and cohort are shown in Table 2 (column 4).

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart and both parents' reports, LSAC Waves 3–6, B and K cohorts

Coparenting, contexts and care time

To analyse which children may be exposed to different types of coparenting, multivariate analyses were used. Three models were initially estimated based on the primary carers' reports, each with dependent variables being binary outcomes, and so logistic regression was used (estimated using random effects, given the multiple observations per family). One model predicts the likelihood that primary carers have some contact with the parent living elsewhere. Another model predicts the likelihood that parents say they 'sometimes consult' with the parent living elsewhere (as described in Box 3). For these analyses we compare those in the 'sometimes consult' group to any who were 'no or little consultation' or 'no or little contact', with the 'missing' cases excluded. The other model predicts that parents report 'always or often' having conflict with the other parent, rather than sometimes, never or rarely having conflict, or having no contact.

These models include as explanatory variables the same set of variables used to analyse care time arrangements (see Table 7).[12] Table 8 shows the key findings, with the full results in Appendix Table A14. For these analyses, care time arrangements have not been included in the models, as it may be that such arrangements are a consequence of the coparenting quality, or that coparenting and care time are jointly explained by contexts and other characteristics. If the conflict and consultation models are re-estimated to include care time arrangements, then we find that the likelihood of consultation increases with more nights with the parent living elsewhere, up to shared care time (5–9 nights/fortnight). There was, however, no evidence of the likelihood of inter-parent conflict being related to the number of nights children spend with their parent living elsewhere.

Key findings from the analyses presented in Table 8 are:

- Parents are more likely to have some contact with the parent living elsewhere and to consult with them when their households are closer to each other. Conflict between parents is more likely when parents live more than 20 to less than 500 km apart.
- A more recent parental separation was associated with a higher likelihood of consultation by primary carers, but also of experiencing inter-parental conflict. The lowest likelihood of consultation and conflict was reported for families in which children never lived with both parents. In these families, contact with the parent living elsewhere was least likely, which is relevant to these findings.
- Parents are more likely to have some contact with the parent living elsewhere when they had previously been married, rather than having never lived together or having cohabited but not formally married. There was also a significantly lower likelihood of consultation when parents had previously cohabited and not married. However, parents' prior relationship status did not have a significant association with the indicator of conflict.
- By child age, parents sometimes consulting over childrearing matters was more likely for 0–1 year olds than older ages. Between other ages there was some variation, with the lowest likelihood of sometimes consulting being for 14–15 year olds. Parents often or always experiencing conflict appears to be more likely for the youngest children, with lower probabilities of conflict when children were 12–13 and 14–15 years.

Analyses of the parental conflict items were also repeated for parents living elsewhere and the matched sample of primary carers. See Appendix Table A15.

- If the mother was the parent living elsewhere, she was more likely to say there was always or often conflict, compared to fathers who were the parent living elsewhere.
- The distance between households was also statistically significant in these analyses, with the highest likelihood of conflict reported by each parent when they lived 50 km–500 km apart. A higher likelihood of conflict was also reported by each parent when they lived 20 km–49 km apart, compared to when they lived very close, at less than 5 km apart.
- As with the broader analyses above, conflict was more often reported by each of the parents when the separation was more recent (in the last 2 years).

12 Also, because the 'sometimes consult' is derived from different items at Waves 1 to 3 compared to 4 to 6, an additional dummy variable was included in this model for Waves 4 to 6 to capture possible variation associated with these differences.

Table 8: Primary carer indicators of coparenting, logistic regression results

Variable	Category	Some contact	Some consultation	Often/Always conflict
			Odds ratios	
Who is the PLE (reference = Father)	Mother	0.86	1.15	0.74
Proximity (reference = <5 km)	5–19 km	0.79	0.86	1.24
	20–49 km	0.50***	0.52***	1.38*
	50–500 km	0.34***	0.36***	1.53**
	>500 km or overseas	0.15***	0.16***	1.19
When child lived with 2 parents last (reference = Up to 2 years)	Never	0.11***	0.20***	0.31***
	>2 up to 4 years	0.56***	0.60***	0.75*
	>4 years	0.33***	0.46***	0.62***
Parents' previous relationship status (reference = Married)	Never lived together	0.42**	0.62	0.80
	Cohabited	0.51***	0.66**	0.99
Child gender (reference = Girls)	Boy	0.97	1.10	1.01
Child age (years) (reference = 0–1)	2–3	0.21***	0.55**	1.02
	4–5	0.13***	0.44***	1.06
	6–7	0.16***	0.44***	0.70
	8–9	0.18***	0.56**	0.69
	10–11	0.16***	0.44***	0.66
	12–13	0.13***	0.41***	0.48**
	14–15	0.07***	0.34***	0.41**
Plus demographic variables				
Number of observations		7,921	7,895	7,891
From number of children		2,668	2,670	2,667

Notes: Models were estimated using random effects analyses, given multiple records per family. See Appendix Table A14 for the full regression models including the demographic variables not shown here. The consultation model includes an indicator for Waves 1–3 versus 4–6. The models also included 'missing' categories as appropriate for each of the contextual variables but these coefficients are not reported. Excludes those with missing information on the dependent variable.*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

4.3 Child support and informal financial support of children

When 2 parents live apart, one way that these parents may both contribute to the upbringing of their child is through making arrangements to share in the financial costs of raising their child. This may be done through a formal child support agreement or through more informal arrangements, whereby parents may help each other out to cover different costs (Baxter et al., 2012; Goldberg, 2015). Here, both child support payments and informal arrangements are explored. Informal arrangements include in-kind contributions (e.g. buying clothes for children) as well as exchanges of money. This information is explored only in relation to financial support provided *by* the parent living elsewhere, as equivalent information is not available for the financial support *to* the parent living elsewhere.[13]

The derivation of the items is described in Box 4, with the result being 2 indicators: one for the primary carer receiving child support payments and one for the parent living elsewhere contributing to costs informally.

13 Since Wave 4, information is collected from the primary carer on whether their child support agreement involves their receiving or paying child support (and parents living elsewhere are similarly asked about receipt of child support). At Wave 4, for example, of the primary carers who reported that they did not receive child support (the derived variable used in this analysis), 5% said they had a child support agreement that required them to pay child support. Another 26% said they had an agreement that meant they were to receive child support, for 11% the child support agreement was such that no money was to be exchanged and another 58% did not have a child support agreement. We have not analysed these data here, given it was only introduced in Wave 4.

Box 4: Derivation of financial support variables

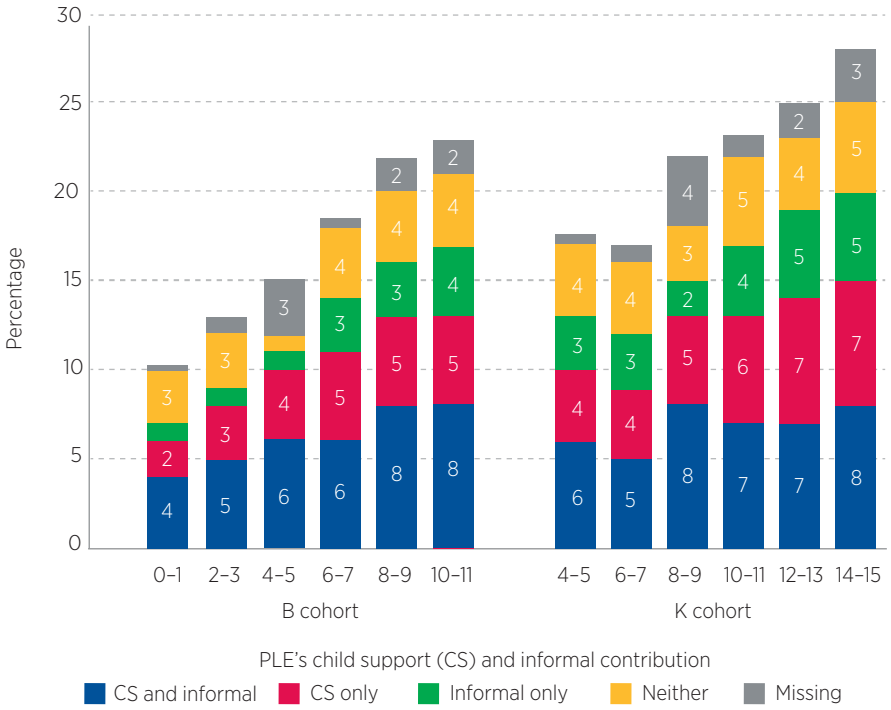
We classify families according to whether child support is paid *by the parent living elsewhere to the primary carer*. Primary carers report on whether they have a child support agreement (although this was not asked in Wave 2), how much they expect to receive and how much they actually receive. Those who have a child support agreement but have not had a payment in the last month (or ever) are counted as not receiving child support, as are those without a child support agreement. Also, those who make child support payments to the other parent are not counted as receiving child support. There are too few of them in LSAC (as primary carers) to analyse this subset separately.

The parents living elsewhere were also asked about child support arrangements, and payment of child support to the primary carer. That is, from the perspective of the parent living elsewhere, we have information on whether they pay child support to the primary carer. As with primary carer responses, if the parent living elsewhere was a recipient of child support, they are included in 'no child support', meaning no child support was paid to the primary carer.

In addition to or instead of a formally arranged or agreed child support payment, in some families the parent living elsewhere may make 'informal' financial contributions to the child's upbringing. In LSAC, primary carers are asked to what extent the parent living elsewhere does any of the following: buys clothes, toys or presents for the child; pays the child's medical or dental bills, health insurance or medicines; gives extra money for child care [or school] expenses; gives extra money to help out, like pay the rent, household bills or car repairs. Responses were captured as 'never', 'rarely', 'sometimes' or 'often', with another category of 'not needed'. This question has been asked at all waves of LSAC in the same way. For this report, the parent living elsewhere is said to make informal financial contributions if they 'sometimes' or 'often' do any of the above. This question is also asked of the parents living elsewhere, allowing comparisons to the primary carer's responses.

To show the range of financial contributions from the parent living elsewhere to the primary carer, the child support and informal contributions items are combined in Figure 12. The most common scenarios were for primary carers to receive child support as well as informal financial help, or to receive only child support. However, there is variation across all ages of children, and these data, presented as percentages by age in Appendix Table A16, do not indicate particular trends toward certain financial arrangements as children grow. Note that those who are receiving no financial assistance at all will include those who are *providing* financial assistance to the parent living elsewhere, particularly since some of the 'primary' (LSAC) carers do not have the majority care of children (see Figure 7 and footnote 13).

Figure 12: Financial coparenting, by age and cohort, as percentages of all children (adding to total with parents living apart)



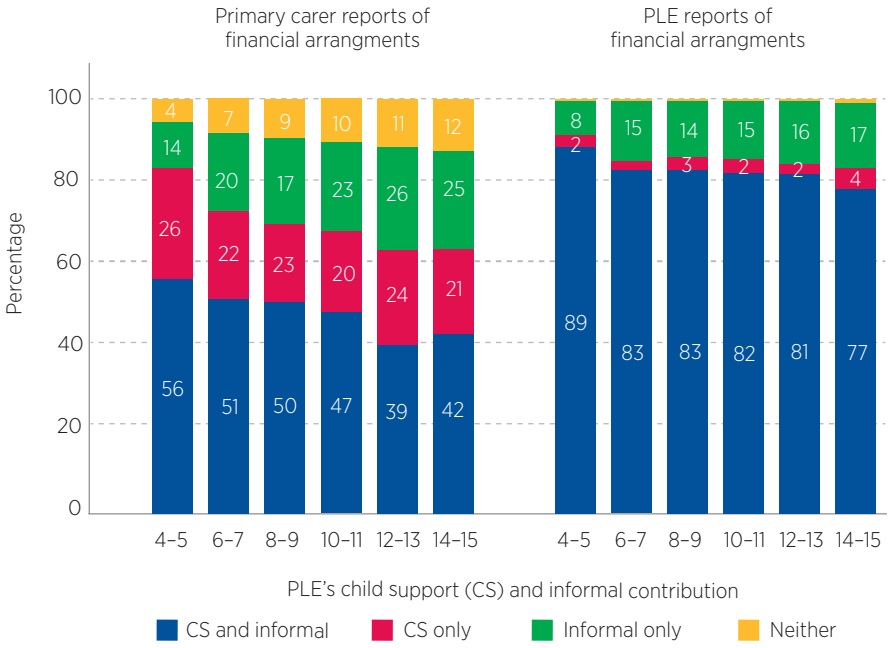
Note: Sample sizes for each age and cohort are shown in Table 2 (column 1). The total height of the bar is the percentage of in-scope children who have parents living apart.

Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

For the matched sample of parents living elsewhere and primary carers, these same financial data are shown as percentages by child age in Figure 13. Whereas previous comparisons of primary carer and parent living elsewhere reports have been somewhat similar, there was some divergence. This largely corresponds to parents living elsewhere being much more likely than the primary carers to report providing informal financial assistance. (This was also observed in analysing the Wave 3 data in Baxter et al. (2012); see that report for more detailed analyses). As explained in the earlier analyses of these data, the higher incidence of reporting of informal contributions by the parent living elsewhere is not surprising, as some contributions such as buying the child clothes or toys may be done without the knowledge of the primary carer.

There was also a higher incidence of parents living elsewhere saying that they paid child support compared to the reports of the primary carers.

Figure 13: Comparison of reports of financial coparenting, children with parents living apart by age



Notes: Sample sizes for each age and cohort are shown in Table 2 (column 4).
Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart and both parents' reports, LSAC Waves 3–6, B and K cohorts

Given these divergent reports about financial coparenting, it is not surprising that when within family comparisons are made (see Appendix Table A17), there is considerable disagreement between parents on the reports of child support and informal contributions.

Financial support, contexts and care time

As with the previous analyses of coparenting and conflict, here we used multivariate analyses to explore the likelihood of primary carers receiving child support and of the parents living elsewhere contributing informally according to a range of demographic and contextual variables. As well as the variables included in previous analyses, we include a categorical variable for the number of nights children stay with their parent living elsewhere, as this may be relevant; in particular, in determining the sharing of financial aspects of coparenting.

The full regression results are given in Appendix Table A18 with findings for the contextual variables in Table 9. Key findings are:

- Child support receipt is least likely when children have very little or no contact with their parent living elsewhere, or at the other end of the scale, they spend 5–14 nights per fortnight with their parent living elsewhere. Receipt of child support is most likely when children stay 2–4 nights per fortnight with their parent living elsewhere. The likelihood that the parent living elsewhere contributes informally follows a different pattern, increasing with the number of nights the child stays overnight with their other parent.
- There is not a statistically significant association between the proximity of parents' households and the payment of child support. However, provision of informal financial assistance is least likely when parents live 20 km–49 km apart, followed by those parents living 50 km–500km apart.
- Primary carer fathers (the parent living elsewhere is the mother) are less likely to receive child support than primary carer mothers.
- Receipt of child support is least likely in the 2 years since the child lived with both parents. However, informal financial support of children is most likely at this time.
- Child support is more likely to be paid to primary carers for children whose parents had previously been married, rather than parents who had not lived together or who had been cohabiting without marriage. Child support was least likely to be received by the primary carer when parents had not lived together. Informal financial support did not vary significantly according to parents' prior relationship status.

Table 9: Child support and informal financial contributions, logistic regression results

Variable	Category	PLE pays child support	PLE contributes informally
		Odds ratios	
Who is the primary carer (reference = Father)	Mother	0.08***	1.22
Nights with PLE (reference = Less often than monthly or never)	Day only (up to monthly)	3.14***	19.14***
	1 night/fortnight	3.24***	15.38***
	2–4 nights/fortnight	4.44***	38.26***
	5–9 nights/fortnight	0.83	106.26***
	10–14 nights/fortnight	0.58	145.70***
Proximity (reference = <5 km)	5–19 km	1.00	1.02
	20–49 km	1.08	0.54***
	50–500 km	0.80	0.75*
	>500 km or overseas	0.85	1.09
When child lived with 2 parents last (reference = Up to 2 years)	Never	2.47***	0.72*
	>2 up to 4 years	1.55***	0.72**
	>4 years	1.75***	0.87
Parents' previous relationship status (reference = Married)	Never lived together	0.27***	0.87
	Cohabited	0.57***	0.82
Plus demographics			
Number of observations		7,845	7,874
From number of children		2,680	2,667

Note: Models were estimated using random effects analyses, given multiple records per family. See Appendix Table 18 for the full regression models including the demographic variables not shown here. The models also included 'missing' categories as appropriate for each of the contextual variables but these coefficients are not reported. Excludes those with missing information on the dependent variable. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

These findings are based on the financial support responses given by the primary carer. We saw in Figure 13 that the parent living elsewhere gives quite different reports, and so it is worth analysing these data to see whether the associations between contexts and parent living elsewhere reports differ to those for primary carers. See the model results for the matched sample in Appendix Table A19. Key findings from these analyses are:

- Primary carer and parent living elsewhere reports are consistent concerning fathers as primary carers being less likely to receive child support. According to primary carers, among parents living elsewhere, mothers are more likely than fathers to make informal financial contributions. This is not supported by the parents living elsewhere's reports.
- The strong association between number of nights with the parent living elsewhere and informal financial contributions are apparent for primary carer and parent living elsewhere reports in the matched sample. The association between number of overnight stays and primary carer reports of child support receipt is similar to that of all primary carers but is not reflected so clearly in the reports of parents living elsewhere.
- There are inconsistencies in associations between proximity and financial support depending on who is the reporter. For example, according to parents living elsewhere, those who live further away from the primary carer are the most likely to say they contribute financially through informal means. This is not apparent for primary carers' reports or for all respondents' reports about child support.
- As above, receipt of child support is least likely in recently separated families. There is some indication of informal payments being more likely at this time.
- When parents were previously married rather than cohabiting, child support receipt was more likely, as reported by each of the parents. Prior relationship status did not contribute significantly to the likelihood of contributing informally, according to these respondents.

4.4 Composite grouping of care arrangements and contexts

The overwhelming evidence from this section is of the heterogeneity within the group of children who have parents living elsewhere. To illustrate just how varied the circumstances are, we put together 5 binary indicators that capture aspects of parenting arrangements for those living apart.[14] This excludes cases that had missing information on any of the indicators. This combines information on:

- children staying with their parent living elsewhere 2 or more nights per fortnight ('frequent stays' = yes)
- primary carers sometimes consulting on childrearing ('consultation' = yes)
- primary carers reporting there is often or always interparent conflict ('conflict'= yes)
- primary carers receiving child support ('child support' = yes)
- parents living elsewhere informally contributing financially ('informal financial' = yes).

A similar approach was used to describe the heterogeneity of post-separation care arrangement in the USA, by King and Heard (1999), although using a smaller and different set of variables. Box 5 explains how this composite variable has been presented in this report.

Box 5: Presentation of composite classification of care contexts and coparenting

To present information on the composite classification, details are presented for the top 11 combinations of the indicators of (a) frequent stays, (b) consultation, (c) child support, (d) informal financial contributions and (e) conflict. Beyond the top 11, the numbers in the composite category started to become very small, given the very many combinations that are possible with 5 variables. In addition to these top 11 categories, the remainder of the possible combinations were split into those that involved conflict and those that did not, giving a total of 13 categories. In presenting findings related to this classification, Table 10 shows the shorthand labels that are used to refer to each of the groups. To simplify presentation of these data, in Figure 13, Figure 14 and Figure 15 only the first 6 of the combinations are shown, with all others combined. In later analyses, though, the full 13 categories shown in Table 10 are used.

Table 10: Explanation of composite variable labels

Combinations of involvement (in order of most to least common combinations)	Frequent stays	Consult-ation	Child support	Informal financial	Conflict
Frequent stays, consultation, child support and informal contributions	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Only child support	N	N	Y	N	N
Little or no involvement	N	N	N	N	N
Consultation, child support and informal contributions	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Frequent stays, some consultation and informal financial contributions	Y	Y	N	Y	N
Child support and informal financial contributions	N	N	Y	Y	N
Frequent stays, child support and informal contributions	Y	N	Y	Y	N
Consultation and informal financial contributions	N	Y	N	Y	N
Frequent stays, consultation and child support	Y	Y	Y	N	N
Some conflict and child support	N	N	Y	N	Y
Frequent stays and child support	Y	N	Y	N	N
All other combinations, with conflict	-	-	-	-	Y
All other combinations, no or less conflict	-	-	-	-	N

Notes: 'Frequent stays' is 2 or more nights per fortnight. The overall distribution of this categorical variable in the pooled sample is shown in Table 11. To simplify presentation of these data, in Figure 13, Figure 14 and Figure 15 only the first 6 of these are shown, with all others combined.

14 In further analyses of these data it may be possible to instead using latent class analyses to identify and analyse different 'classes' of fathers' involvement (see Modecki et al., 2015).

Table 11 shows the 13 categories, including the top 11 combinations plus the rest divided into those with and without conflict. The top 11 categories cover about 3 in 4 of the children with parents living apart. Even within these 11 categories, there is a lot of variation, from those who report there being no or little involvement by the parent living elsewhere (number 3 on the list) or only having receipt of child support (number 2 on the list) to those families in which the child frequently stays with the parent living elsewhere, and that parent is consulted and contributes financially through child support and informal financial contributions (number 1 on the list).

If this composite variable is compared by child age, Figure 14 shows there are some patterns (with detail only shown for the top 6 categories, to keep the chart more easily read), with the youngest children being the most likely to have involvement that is characterised by consultation and financial input but without frequent stays with the parent living elsewhere. They are also most likely to have no involvement by the parent living elsewhere.

There are also differences according to when children lived with both parents (Figure 15). The involvement by the parent living elsewhere is quite different if children never lived with both parents, with more children having no involvement by the parent living elsewhere or having them involved only through the payment of child support. Also, the proportion who had no involvement by the parent living elsewhere, or only child support, was higher among children who had not lived with both parents in the past 4 years, compared to those who had lived with them more recently. Those who last lived with their parents in the previous 2 years, or 2 to under 4 years had very varied circumstances.

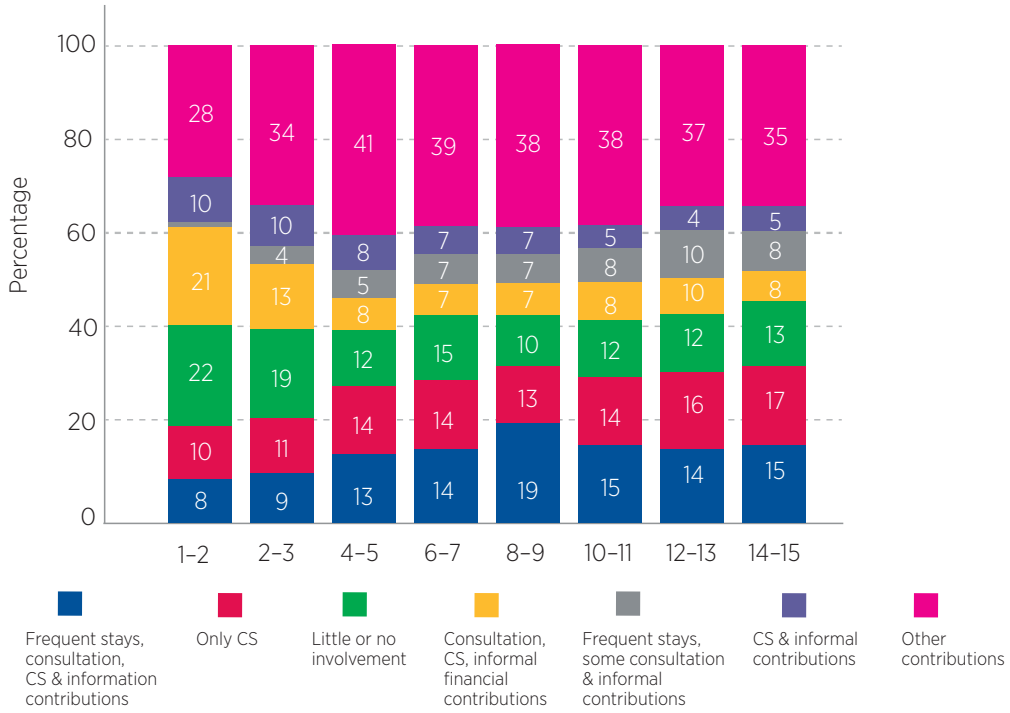
Table 11: Summary of parental arrangements – top combinations of overnight stays, conflict, consultation, child support and informal financial contributions

Combinations of involvement	% within pooled sample
Frequent stays, consultation, child support and informal contributions	13.7
Only child support	13.5
Little or no involvement	12.9
Consultation, child support and informal contributions	7.8
Frequent stays, some consultation and informal financial contributions	6.5
Child support and informal financial contributions	6.3
Frequent stays, child support and informal contributions	4.5
Consultation and informal financial contributions	3.2
Frequent stays, consultation and child support	2.8
Some conflict and child support	2.7
Frequent stays and child support	2.7
All other combinations, with conflict	13.2
All other combinations, no or less conflict	10.2
Total	100.0
Number of observations	7,696

Note: 'Frequent stays' is 2 or more nights per fortnight. This is based on observations with non-missing responses on all items. Note that these pooled data over-represent children at particular ages (see discussion on page 8) so caution should be used in generalising findings to the wider population of children with a parent living elsewhere.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

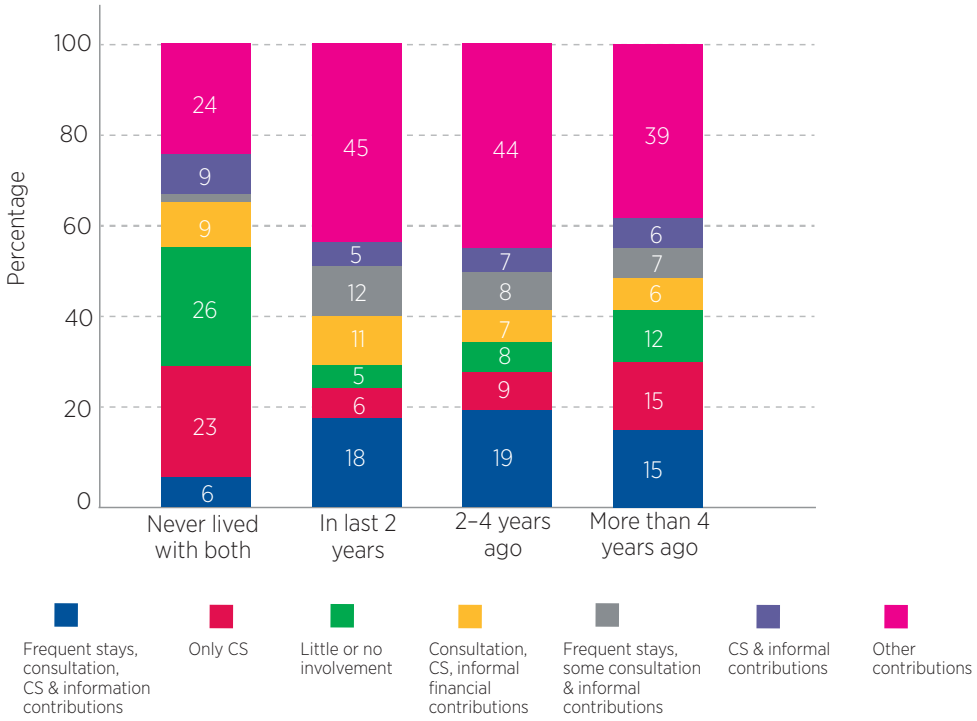
Figure 14: Composite measure of PLE involvement, by child age



Note: See Table 11 for each of the categories shown in this figure. Only the top 6 are shown here with all others included in 'other combinations'. Anyone with missing information on one of the indicators (care time arrangements, consultation, conflict, child support or informal payment) is excluded.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Figure 15: Composite measure of PLE involvement, by when children last lived with both parents



Note: See Table 11 for each of the categories shown in this figure. Only the top 6 are shown here with all others included in 'other combinations'. Anyone with missing information on one of the indicators (care time arrangements, consultation, conflict, child support or informal payment) is excluded. Note that these pooled data over-represent children at particular ages (see discussion on page 8) so caution should be used in generalising findings to the wider population of children with a parent living elsewhere.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

4.5 Summary

Where the findings from this research can be compared to other Australian research, the findings are broadly consistent. New insights emerge, however, with the additional multivariate analyses, descriptions by child age and presentation of the composite measure of parent living elsewhere involvement.

While there is much diversity in contexts, coparenting and care arrangements across children with parents living apart, there are a few threads that weave through these findings in terms of how children experience their parent living elsewhere. For example:

- The pathways that led to children having 2 parents living apart is relevant to the likely arrangements parents have in place as children grow. In particular, as seen above, children who never lived with both parents have the lowest levels of involvement with their parent living elsewhere. There is no particular pattern that emerges for more recently separated parents. In fact, as shown above, there is much diversity at that time. There is some research that points to shared care being more likely soon after parents' separation (Cashmore et al., 2010), which is not apparent here. However, differences by child age were apparent, in arrangements tending to less often involve overnight stays when children were very young, and then increasingly involving more overnight stays with the father as children grow older. This is consistent with other Australian research (Qu & Weston, 2010; Qu et al., 2014).
- Remembering that these pathways differ significantly by child age is important, with the youngest children who have parents living apart likely to have never lived with those parents together, while for the oldest children whose parents live apart, this is much less often the case. These older children have quite often grown up with both parents living together, experiencing their parents' separation at different points in their childhood.
- When parents were married prior to living apart, there was a greater level of involvement by the parent living elsewhere, in terms of the number of overnight stays, the payment of child support and informal payment and, to a lesser extent, the degree to which the parent living elsewhere is consulted on childrearing matters. Differences in post-separation parenting arrangements and characteristics between previously married and previously cohabiting parents have similarly been reported elsewhere (Waller & Dwyer Emory, 2014).
- The proximity of parents' homes to each other seems relevant also, with the clearest (and least surprising) finding being that of children spending more time with their parent living elsewhere when the parents live closer together, as has been observed elsewhere (Smyth et al., 2014). There was some indication of more challenges for families when parents lived approximately 20 km–500 km apart, with more conflict and less consultation in these families, while this was not the case when parents lived a greater distance apart or the other parent lived overseas. In these families, when parents lived 20 km–500 km apart, there was the lowest likelihood of parents living elsewhere making informal financial contributions, although child support payments were not related to proximity.

In the sections that follow we will explore how these findings flow through to differences in children's experiences of having parents live apart (in section 5) and differences in parent–child relationships and social-emotional wellbeing (section 6).

5. Selected care-related outcomes in families with parents living elsewhere

In the previous sections, the 6 waves of LSAC have been used to describe the contexts, care arrangements and coparenting in families when children have parents living apart. There is clearly considerable variation in all of these variables, such that children are exposed to a very diverse set of family and post-separation arrangements and relationships. In this section, we start addressing the second research question, to explore whether there is any evidence that particular arrangements or circumstances are related to different outcomes for families.

By 'outcomes' we are exploring a discrete set of variables that tell us something about parents' and children's experiences of their arrangements. However, these outcomes are only a selection of those that might be examined to provide an overall assessment of which circumstances are optimal for families. As such, we do not intend to use these findings to identify which circumstances provide the 'best' outcomes. We refer to the most positive outcomes on selected measures but feel that these data do not allow such an assessment to be made overall.

This section explores 3 sets of outcomes that directly relate to the situation for children and families with parents living elsewhere. These are:

- parents' satisfaction with parent living elsewhere time/involvement
- children's moods and wellbeing around the transitions between households
- children's experiences of living across 2 households.

These data are not available for all children at all waves, some being only collected for older children at more recent waves, for example. The scope of each set of analysis is described below.

For the USA, King and Heard (1999) undertook analyses that presented information about the range of post-separation care arrangements and contexts, and related that to mothers' satisfaction of those arrangements. They found, for example, that mothers' satisfaction increased in families in which fathers had more contact with children, except that satisfaction was also relatively high in families in which fathers had no contact with children. Conflict between parents was relevant also, with the most satisfied mothers being those with more frequent contact and lower conflict.

Smyth (2005) also showed for Australia that satisfaction varied by care time arrangements, incorporating views of mothers and fathers, with satisfaction levels tending to be higher for mothers (see also Parkinson & Smyth, 2004). Consistent with the US research, in Smyth's research, from the perspective of mothers, about half of those whose children had no or little contact with their father living elsewhere expressed satisfaction with those arrangements. We also have satisfaction from the perspective of parents living elsewhere, which are analysed here along with those of primary carers, to present variation in satisfaction by the contextual and socio-demographic variables.

While there is an extensive body of research examining associations between parenting arrangements and children's wellbeing, there is less that focuses on children's experiences of their post-separation arrangements, as articulated by the children themselves. This is generally done through qualitative research (e.g. Birnbaum & Saini, 2015; Campo et al., 2012; Haugen, 2010). The research presented here includes aspects of how children feel when they move from household to household, and how children's daily lives are played out when they share time in different households. As discussed by Smyth (2005) and others, understanding these experiences, and how time is spent when parents and children spend time together, give insights on post-separation arrangements and their implications for children. The information presented here adds a quantitative examination of some elements of children's experiences.

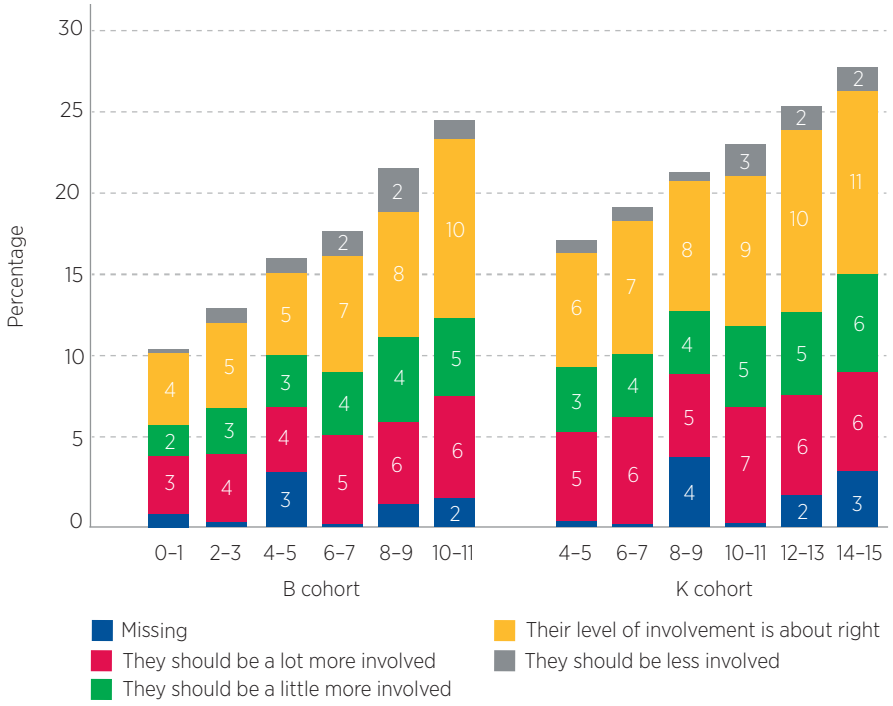
5.1 Parent satisfaction with parent living elsewhere time

We begin by considering to what extent the parents themselves thought that they had the right balance in the amount of time or the amount of involvement each parent had, given the care arrangements they had in place. Reports of primary carers and parents living elsewhere are examined; however, this is only asked in LSAC in relation to satisfaction with the involvement of parents living elsewhere. While we might assume that reporting the parent living elsewhere has 'too much' involvement, for example, means the primary carer does not have enough time, we cannot confirm that with these data.

At all waves of LSAC the primary carer has been asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the level of the involvement of the parent living elsewhere with their child. Most parents were asked how involved did they think the parent living elsewhere should be in their child's life. Response categories were 'a lot more involved', 'a little more involved', 'involvement is about right' and 'much less involved'. There are some missing data, which are primarily a small number not asked (with more not asked at Wave 3, see section 2.3). See also Appendix Table A20 for percentages by age.

Figure 16 shows that at all ages of children, there are diverse views about the level of the parent living elsewhere's involvement. Of course, we expect this to be more a function of the actual care time arrangements than child age, and the multivariate analyses of these responses confirm this, with the likelihood of saying that the parent living elsewhere's involvement was about right increasing with the number of nights the child stays with that parent (see Table 12). This is shown also for the pooled ages and cohorts in Figure 17. In this figure, among those whose children do not stay overnight with the parent living elsewhere, those whose children have some day-only contact with the parent living elsewhere are more likely to say the level of involvement is 'about right', compared to those who do not have day-only contact. These differences were not statistically significant, though, in the multivariate analyses with other characteristics taken into account.

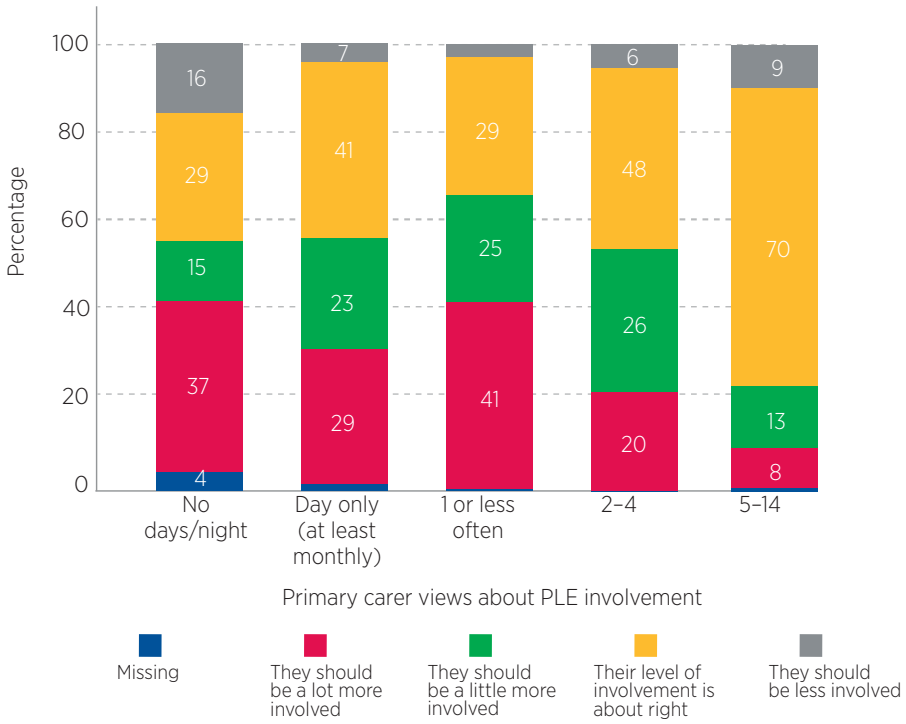
Figure 16: Primary carer satisfaction with involvement of parent living elsewhere, by age and cohort, as percentages of all children (adding to total with parents living apart)



Notes: Sample sizes for each age and cohort are shown in Table 2 (column 1). The total height of the bar is the percentage of in-scope children who have parents living apart.

Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Figure 17: Primary carer satisfaction with involvement of parent living elsewhere, by number of nights with PLE



Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Table 12: Multivariate analyses of primary carer being satisfied with PLE involvement (logistic regression)

Variable	Category	Odds ratio
Who is the PLE (reference = Father)	Mother	0.75
Nights with PLE (Reference = Less often than monthly or never)	Day only (up to monthly)	1.10
	1 night/fortnight	0.79
	2–4 nights/fortnight	1.61***
	5–9 nights/fortnight	4.66***
	10–14 nights/fortnight	3.61***
Proximity (reference = <5 km)	5–19 km	0.83
	20–49 km	0.74**
	50–500 km	0.61***
	>500 km or overseas	0.59***
When child lived with 2 parents last (reference = Up to 2 years)	never	1.46*
	>2 up to 4 years	0.93
	>4 years	1.08
Parents' previous relationship status (reference = Married)	Never lived together	0.70
	cohabited	0.98
Coparenting	Some consultation	1.21*
	Often/Always conflict	0.52***
	Child support	1.11
	Informal financial contributions	2.23***
Plus Demographic variables		
Constant		0.30***
Number of observations		7,709
From number of children		2,646

Notes: The model was estimated using random effects analyses, given there can be multiple records per family. See Appendix Table A20 for the full regression models including the demographic variables not shown here. The models also included 'missing' categories as appropriate for each of the contextual variables but these coefficients are not reported. Excludes those with missing information on the dependent variable.*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

The multivariate analyses, like previous analyses, include contextual and demographic variables. In this model, we also include indicators for coparenting (consultation and conflict) and for financial support (child support and informal financial support). Those with no consultation and no conflict with the parent living elsewhere include those who have no contact with that parent. The dependent variable is equal to one if the primary carer has said the involvement of the parent living elsewhere is about right.[15] Otherwise it is zero, and so includes those who thought the other parent should be more involved as well as those who thought they should be less involved. Those with missing responses are excluded. As well as the significant findings for care time arrangements, other key findings from this analysis of primary carer reports are:

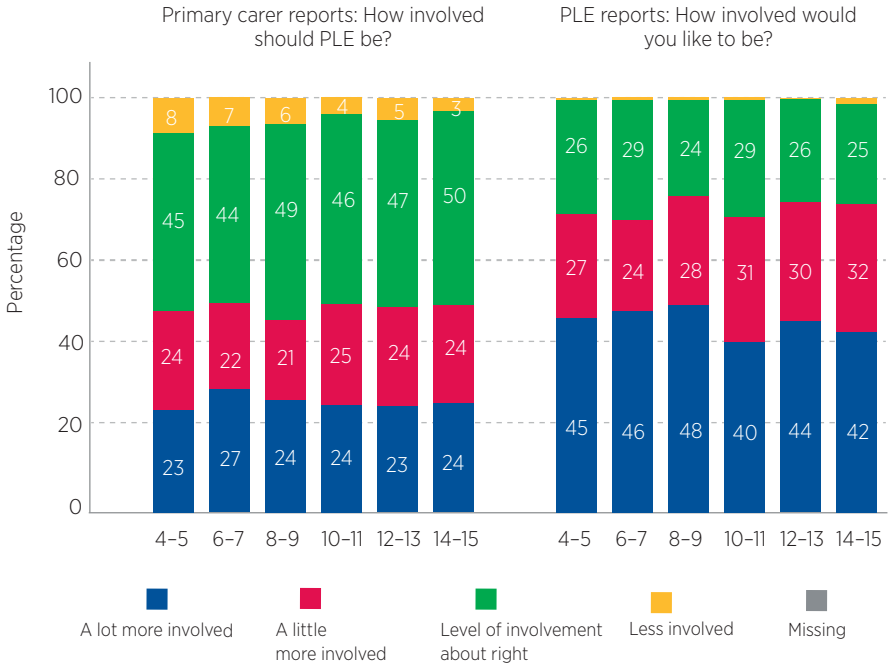
- Satisfaction is less likely, the further away the other parent lives.
- The timing of the separation does not seem to be significantly associated with parents' satisfaction, except that parents of children who never lived with both parents together were the *most* likely to be satisfied with the parent living elsewhere's involvement.
- Satisfaction is somewhat more likely when primary carers sometimes consult with the parent living elsewhere on childrearing matters.
- Satisfaction is less likely when there is often or always conflict between parents.

15 An alternative model was estimated in which an ordered logistic regression model was estimated on 3 categories: a lot more involved, a little more involved, and about right, to capture increasing levels of satisfaction. The findings are similar to those of the logistic regression shown in Table 11 and so have not been presented.

- Satisfaction is more likely when the parent living elsewhere makes informal financial contributions but satisfaction does not vary with receipt of child support payments.

From Waves 3 to 5 the parent living elsewhere has also been asked a question about their satisfaction. This question asks them, thinking about their role in their child's life, how involved they would like to be. Response categories ranged from 'a lot more involved' to 'much less involved', with a middle category of 'level of involvement is about right'.[16]

Figure 18: Primary carer and PLE reports of satisfaction with PLE involvement, by child age



Note: Sample sizes for each age and cohort are shown in Table 2 (column 4).

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart and both parents' reports, LSAC Waves 3–6, B and K cohorts

Figure 18 shows that primary carers (in the matched sample to those with parent living elsewhere responses) and parents living elsewhere do not necessarily have the same views about the level of the parent living elsewhere's involvement, with satisfaction being greater among primary carers than the parent living elsewhere. In fact, close to half of the responding parents living elsewhere, at all ages of children, would prefer that they were a lot more involved in their child's life. If comparisons are made at the family level (in Appendix Table A21), this also shows that a high proportion of the parents living elsewhere would like to be more involved even in families in which the primary carer also preferred that the other parent be more involved. There was not much agreement between parents in terms of their preferred level of involvement of the parent living elsewhere.

The multivariate analysis of the parent living elsewhere's satisfaction reveals similar findings to those obtained for the primary carers, as reported above, in terms of the factors that explain being satisfied with the level of involvement by the parent living elsewhere. See Appendix Table A23 for analyses of parents living elsewhere and matched sample of primary carers.

Returning to the reports of satisfaction from all primary carers, the analysis was repeated but the care time and coparenting explanatory variables were replaced with the composite measure of parent living elsewhere's involvement that was presented in section 4.4, that includes information about frequent stays, consultation, conflict and financial support. (A similar approach was used by King and Heard (1999), for the USA.) From these analyses, we can see which combinations of involvement are related to the least and greatest satisfaction.

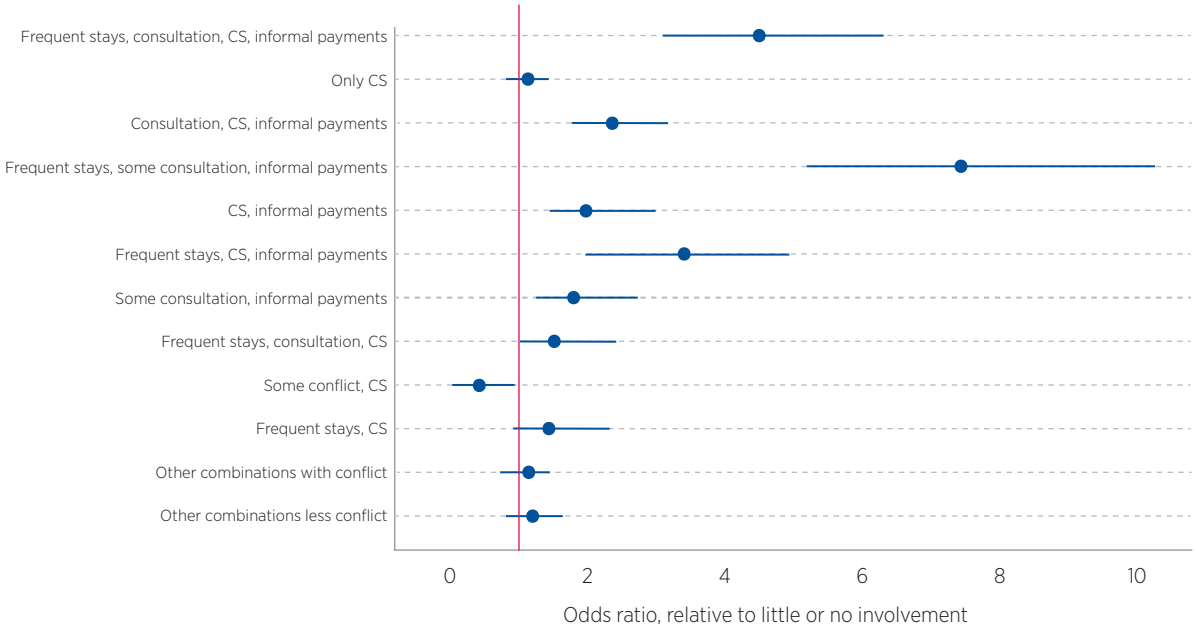
Rather than presenting the full analyses, the odds ratios from these analyses are presented in Figure 19, below, which compares each of the most common combinations of involvement to those who said the parent living elsewhere had little or no involvement. If the odds ratio is less than one (to the left of the line) then these parents

16 The PLE is asked about their 'role that you have' and level of involvement – so not specifically referring to amount of time.

are less satisfied than that base scenario. If the odds ratio is greater than one (to the right of the line) these parents are more satisfied, increasingly so the further away from one. Key findings are:

- Parents were least satisfied when the parent living elsewhere's involvement is only through payment of some child support and there is conflict between the parents.
- Parents only receiving child support were no more or less satisfied with the other parents' involvement than were those with the other parent having little or no involvement.
- Parents were most satisfied when the child stays frequently with the other parent and that parent makes informal financial contributions, is consulted about childrearing, and there is no or little conflict and no child support payments. Also highly satisfied were those who satisfied these same conditions but received child support. The next most satisfied were those who received informal contributions and child support, whose child frequently stayed with the parent living elsewhere but there was little or no consultation or conflict.

Figure 19: Odds ratios of primary carer satisfaction based on combinations of parent living elsewhere's involvement



Notes: See Table 10 for derivation of the specific groupings. Odds ratios compare to the base case of parents not being involved, based on a random effects logit model that included demographic and contextual variables. *N* = 7,683 observations from 2,659 children. 95% confidence intervals are shown.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 3–6, B and K cohorts

In section 6.2 the children's views about whether they have enough time with each of their parents are examined.

5.2 Child moods and behaviours

This subsection explores some of the information provided by parents on the moods and behaviours of children as they transition between primary carer and parent living elsewhere households. Relevant information has been collected from the primary carer for children at different ages – starting with age 4–5 years (for the B cohort) – but the nature of this information has changed across waves. Two measures are explored: a measure of children's over-excitement versus withdrawal and a measure of children's sadness.

Primary carers report on children's over-excitement/withdrawal *upon return from* spending time with their parent living elsewhere, and on children's sadness when children *are leaving* to spend time with that parent. Parents living elsewhere report on children's over-excitement/withdrawal *upon arrival* in their home, and on children's sadness at the time of *departure* from their home.

First we look at over-excitement/withdrawal. The derivation of this measure is described in Box 6. The derived variable analysed here has categories of 'over-excited', 'relaxed and comfortable' and 'withdrawn'.

Box 6: Derivation of over-excitement versus withdrawal

Primary carers of children at ages 4–5 and 6–7 years (B cohort only) and 8–9 and 10–11 years (both cohorts)[17] were asked: 'Some children have trouble adjusting when they move from one parent to another. When [child] first returns from contact with [parent living elsewhere], which of the following best describes how [child] typically behaves.' A prompt card is shown that has the categories 'over-excited and hard to settle for a long period (more than a few hours),' 'over-excited and hard to settle for a short period,' 'relaxed and comfortable,' 'withdrawn, sad or restless for a short period,' and 'withdrawn, sad or restless for a long period (more than a few hours).' For analyses here, the top 2 and bottom 2 categories were combined. This question was not asked of children who do not see their parent living elsewhere.

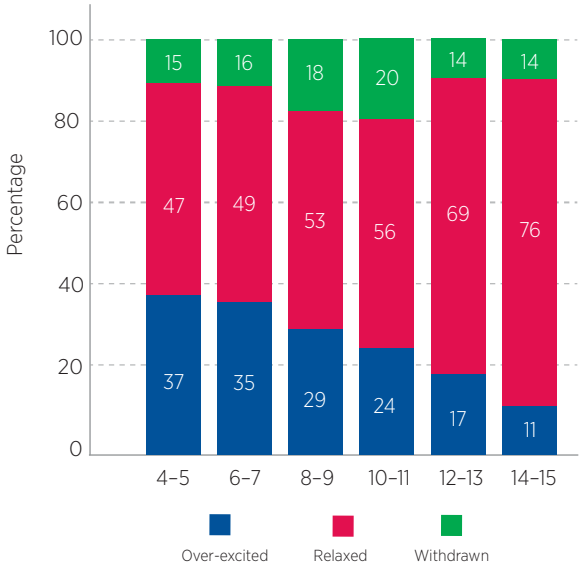
In Waves 4 and 5 of the K cohort the questions were changed to ask parents whether they agreed (5 categories, strongly agree through to strongly disagree) about a few statements concerning children's moods on return from seeing their parent living elsewhere. These questions gathered views about the extent to which children were seen to 'have difficulty settling after contact with PLE,' to be 'withdrawn and unhappy after contact with PLE' and to be 'the same as usual after contact with PLE'. Responses to these items were used to create a categorical variable that matched the information collected for the younger children, described above. If parents agreed or strongly agreed that children had difficulty settling but did not agree that they were 'withdrawn and unhappy,' they were coded to 'over-excited,' even if parents also agreed they were the 'same as usual'. If parents agreed or strongly agreed children were 'withdrawn and unhappy' they were classified as 'withdrawn', even if they were also classified as 'same as usual' or had 'difficulty settling'. All others were coded as 'relaxed and comfortable'.

With the data on over-excitement/withdrawal combined for the B cohort children aged 4–5 years through to 10–11 years and the K cohort from 8–9 years to 14–15 years, about 6 in 10 children with parents living apart were classified by parents as relaxed and comfortable after spending time with their other parent. This was more likely at older than younger ages, as shown in Figure 20. The percentage classified as withdrawn varied a little over the ages of children but it was more apparent that the percentage classified as over-excited declined with age.

Similar questions about children's moods were asked of parents living elsewhere but, in these questions, parents were asked about children's moods *on arrival* in their household. The methods described in Box 6 were used to create a categorical variable across ages using these data. These data are shown in the second panel of Figure 21. As with the primary carer reports, children were less likely to be reported to be over-excited the older they were. Few, however, were reported by parents living elsewhere to be withdrawn upon arrival, with the majority said to be relaxed and comfortable, especially at older ages. The first panel shows the primary carers' responses for the sample matched to the parent-living-elsewhere sample. It is not very different to that of the whole primary carer sample.

17 That is, these data were collected from Waves 3 to 6 for the B cohort and 3 and 4 for the K cohort.

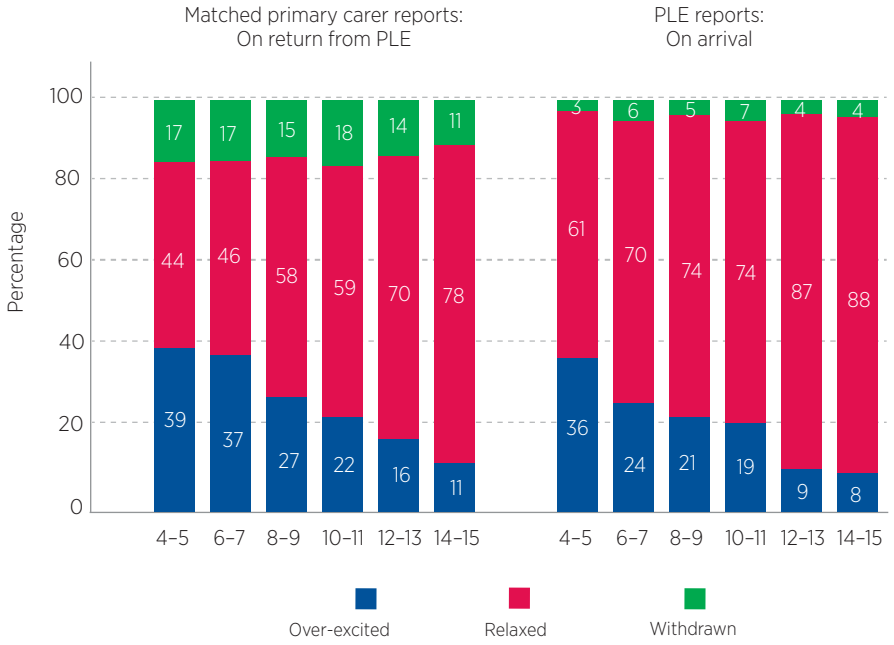
Figure 20: Whether over-excited, relaxed or withdrawn after time with parent living elsewhere according to primary carers



Note: Sample sizes for each age and cohort are shown in Table 2. There was a break in series between ages 10–11 and 12–13 years – data for younger and older children are not strictly comparable. Refer to Box 6 for information about this classification and the derivation of this information for Waves 5 and 6 of the K cohort.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 3–6, B and K cohorts

Figure 21: Whether over-excited, relaxed or withdrawn after time with parent living elsewhere according to primary carers and parents living elsewhere



Note: Sample sizes for each age and cohort are shown in Table 2. There was a break in series between ages 10–11 and 12–13 years – data for younger and older children are not strictly comparable. Refer to Box 6 for information about this classification and the derivation of this information for Waves 5 and 6 of the K cohort.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart with both parents' reports, LSAC Waves 3–6, B and K cohorts.

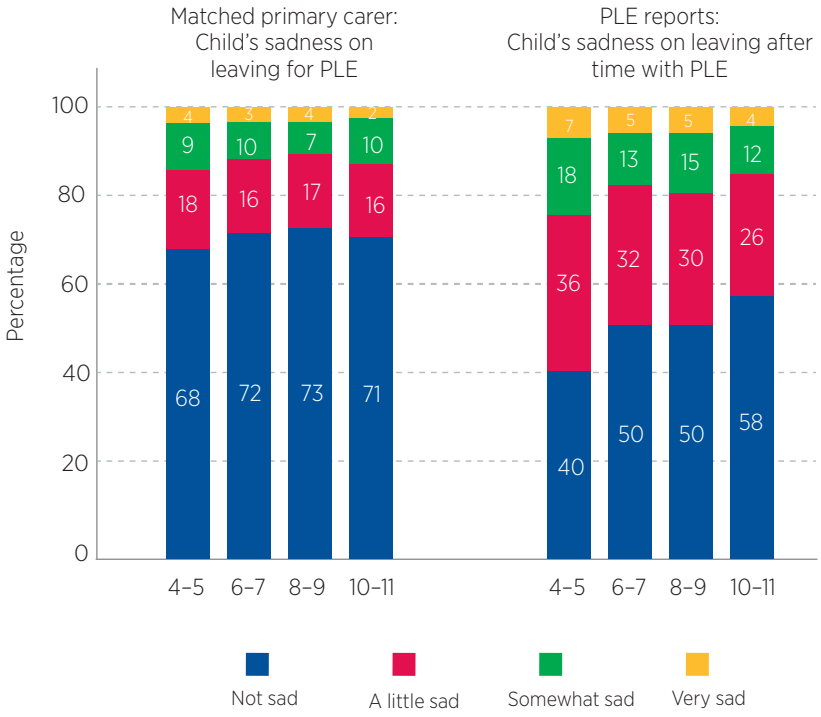
These data were analysed in respect to children's care arrangements and contexts, and those analyses and findings are described below, after presenting another measure of children's moods around the transition between households, looking at children's sadness.

Parents were also asked to report on how sad or distressed children were around the transitions between households. This was only asked for children up to 10–11 years. From the perspective of the primary carer this

was asked in relation to children's sadness when they are *about to leave* to spend time with their parent living elsewhere. From the perspective of parents living elsewhere, this was asked in respect to children's sadness *at the end of their contact time*. The responses are shown for both sets of respondents in Figure 22. Note that the findings have only been presented for primary carers who also have parent living elsewhere paired data as the findings for all responding primary carers were virtually the same as in this matched sample.

Figure 22 shows some differences in primary carer and parent living elsewhere reports of sadness. Children are typically not sad or a little sad on leaving their primary carer for their other parent's household, according to their primary carer. There is little change, by age, in primary carer's reports of children's sadness. Parents living elsewhere often report that children are somewhat sad when they are ending their time together, mostly reported as 'a little sad'. As children grow it is more likely that children are said to be not sad, with a reduction largely in the percentage reported to be a little sad.

Figure 22: Children's sadness around transition time, primary carer and parent living elsewhere report



Note: Sample sizes for each age and cohort are shown in Table 2.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart with both parents' reports, LSAC Waves 3–6 B cohort and Waves 3–4 K cohort

As noted above, these data on moods and behaviours were also analysed according to children's care arrangements and contexts, using multivariate analyses. However, these methods were a little more complex than the previously presented multivariate analyses. For the measure of over-excitement versus withdrawal, a multinomial logit model was used, to take account of the 3 categories. As these results can be difficult to interpret, the findings are presented in Appendix Table A24. There is one model for primary carer reports and one for parent living elsewhere reports.

With regard to the sadness measure, an ordered logistic regression was used, which allows for the dependent variable to have more than one response category, as long as it is ordered, as is the case for this variable, from least to most sadness. The ordered logistic regression results are shown in Appendix Table A25, with one model for primary carer reports and one for parents living elsewhere. We highlight some of the findings below.

Looking at care time arrangements, for over-excitement–withdrawal there were some significant relationships:

- Overall, children who stay 1 or 2–4 nights per fortnight were the most likely to be reported by primary carers to be over-excited upon returning from their parent living elsewhere's home.

- Compared to staying with a parent living elsewhere 2–4 nights a fortnight, staying with that parent 5–9 nights per fortnight was associated with children being more likely to be reported (by the primary carer) to be 'relaxed and comfortable' upon return from time with their parent living elsewhere, rather than over-excited or withdrawn.
- According to primary carer reports, being over-excited upon returning from time with parents living apart was less likely for those with infrequent contact (stays overnight less often than monthly or has daytime-only stays) with the parent living elsewhere, compared to those staying with their parent living elsewhere 2–4 nights per fortnight. According to parents living elsewhere, children are more likely to be over-excited and more likely to be withdrawn upon arrival at the parent living elsewhere's home if they have little contact with that parent, compared to staying 2–4 nights per fortnight with that parent. That is, they are less likely to be relaxed and comfortable upon arrival, compared to children who stay 2–4 nights per fortnight with that parent.
- Staying 1 night a fortnight only, rather than 2–4 nights, was associated with an increased likelihood of being withdrawn on return from time with parents living apart (according to the primary carer) and also an increased likelihood of being withdrawn upon arrival at the home of the parent living elsewhere (according to those parents). These differences were not large, though.

There were some significant differences in the multivariate analyses of moods according to the primary carer's report of inter-parent conflict:

- When there was some conflict between parents, children were more likely to be over-excited and more likely to be withdrawn upon returning from their other parent's home, according to primary carers, rather than to be relaxed. According to the parents living elsewhere, children were more likely to be over-excited in these families.
- Children's sadness on leaving for the home of the parent living elsewhere was greater when there was some conflict, according to primary carers. Also according to parents living elsewhere, children were more likely to be sad at the end of their time together if parents experienced some conflict.

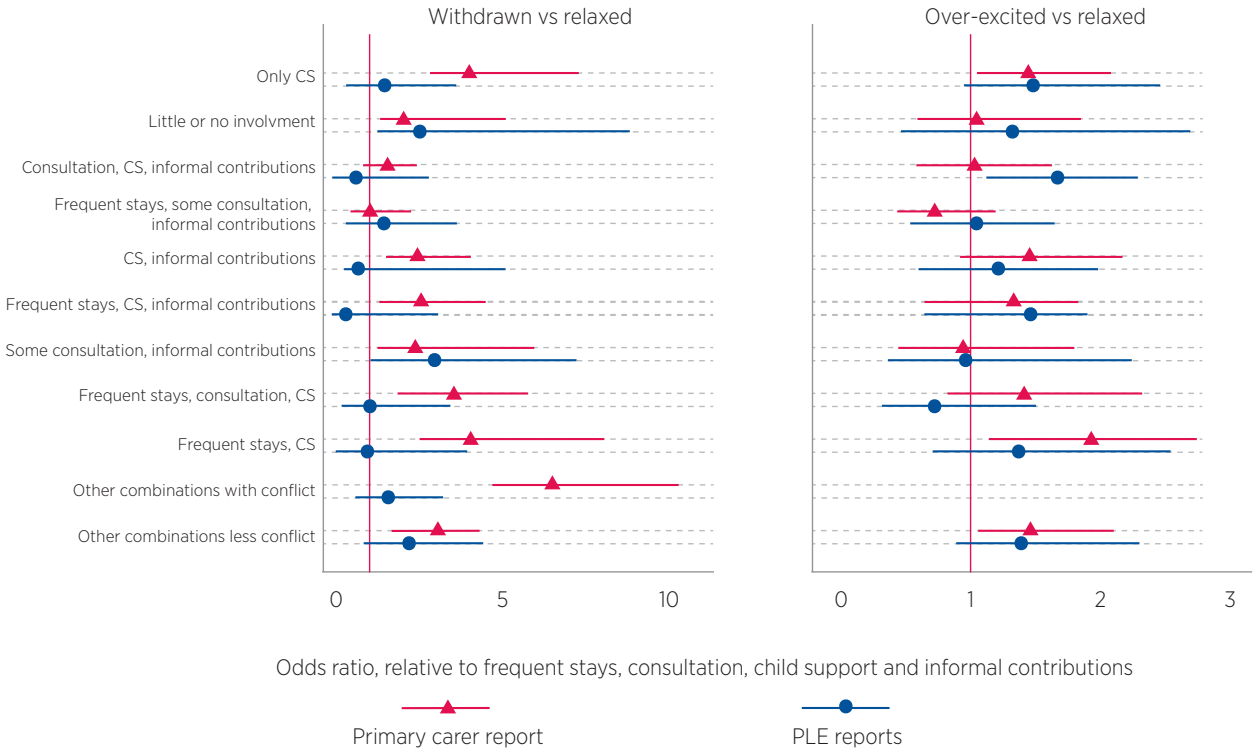
The multivariate analyses also showed some other findings:

- Children were more likely to be 'relaxed and comfortable' upon return home when the parent living elsewhere made informal financial contributions, according to primary carer reports. Also according to these reports, children's sadness was less when leaving for their other parent's home if that other parent contributed financially.
- According to parents living elsewhere, children were less often over-excited or withdrawn upon arrival if the separation had occurred more than 4 years ago.
- Children's sadness was less on leaving for their parent living elsewhere's home and upon end of time with their parent living elsewhere when parents consulted over childrearing.
- Children's sadness at the end of time with parents living apart was greater, the further apart the parents lived.

If these data on moods are analysed with multivariate analyses using the composite measure of parent living elsewhere involvement (see Table 10) and the demographic and contextual variables, the results for the composite involvement measure are shown in Figure 23 for over-excitement versus withdrawal (based on multinomial logistic regression) and for sadness in Figure 24 (using ordered logistic regression). The wide confidence intervals mean that most differences are not statistically significant when comparing to most positive involvement (frequent stays, consultation, child support and informal financial contributions). However, the following differences are apparent:

- If children do not stay frequently with their other parent, that parent pays child support but not informal contributions, is not consulted about childrearing and has some conflict, those children are more likely to be withdrawn rather than relaxed when returning from their other parent's home (according to primary carers) and when arriving in that home (according to parents living elsewhere). They are also more likely to be over-excited rather than relaxed at these times, according to each of the reporters. The model for sadness also finds that children in these families are more likely to report sadness around the transitions. (See Figure footnotes for these findings.)

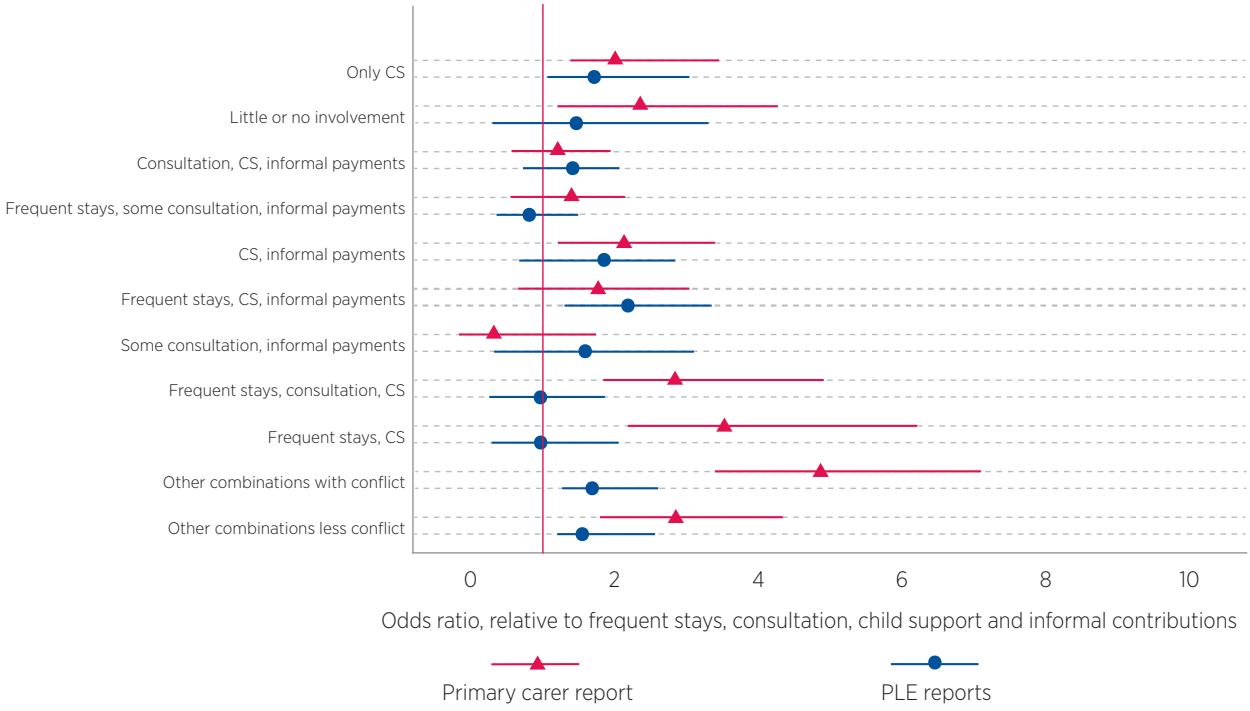
Figure 23: Moods and behaviours around transitions, by composite measures of parent living elsewhere's involvement



Notes: See Table 10 for derivation of the specific groupings. Odds ratios compare to the base case of children staying frequently with other parent, and parents paying child support and informal financial contributions, and being consulted. This is indicated as the vertical lines, at an odds ratio of 1, on each graph. These are based on a multinomial logistic regression including demographic and contextual variables. The category 'some conflict and child support' has not been shown as the confidence interval was very wide for withdrawn vs relaxed. For this category the odds ratios for primary carer reports were for 11.4 (5.7, 23.0) for withdrawn vs relaxed and 3.0 (1.7, 5.6) for over-excited vs relaxed; for parent living elsewhere reports, they were 3.7 (1.3, 10.2) for withdrawn vs relaxed and 2.3 (1.1, 5.0) for over-excited vs relaxed. *N* = 3,390 observations from 1,607 children. 95% confidence intervals are shown.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 3–6, B and K cohorts

Figure 24: Sadness around transitions, by composite measures of parent living elsewhere's involvement



Notes: See Table 10 for derivation of the specific groupings. Odds ratios compare to the base case of children staying frequently with other parent, and parents paying child support and informal financial contributions, and being consulted. This is indicated as the vertical lines, at an odds ratio of 1, on each graph. Based on random effects ordered logistic regressions with the outcome variables indicating more sadness, and including demographic and contextual variables. The category 'some conflict and child support' has not been shown as the confidence interval was very wide. For this category the odds ratio for primary carer reports was 8.2 (4.2, 15.9) and for parent living elsewhere reports 2.6 (1.2, 6.1). *N* = 3,293 observations from 1,662 children. 95% confidence intervals are shown.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart. Waves 3–6, B cohort and Wave 3–4 K cohort

- If parents have some conflict but are not represented in the most common types of involvement shown in the graph, they are similarly more likely to be over-excited at these transition times rather than relaxed, according to each of the parents. This includes, for example, families in which there is little or no involvement by the parent living elsewhere but there is conflict, through to there being conflict along with all types of involvement listed (frequent stays, consultation, child support and informal contributions). According to the primary carers only, they are more likely to be withdrawn after time with their parent living elsewhere. These children are more likely to be sad around the times of transition, according to each of the parents.
- Compared to those with most involvement, those who have some involvement but without informal financial contributions have children reported by the primary carer to be more sad at the time of departure for their other parent's house. This is evident for children whose parent living elsewhere's involvement is classified as 'frequent stays and child support' (i.e. no consultation, no informal financial contributions, no conflict) and 'frequent stays, consultation and child support (i.e. no informal financial contributions, no conflict). Some other smaller differences are apparent also.

This analysis is based on fairly limited data, being a single item about moods on return/arrival (albeit derived from multiple items at later waves) and a single item on sadness. These are unlikely to capture the nuances of the moods that children may experience around their transitions between households, for which much more detailed data collection or interviews may be required. Nevertheless, it provides some new insights that are helpful in contributing to our understanding of children's experiences at this time.

5.3 Child experiences of living across 2 households

For children with parents in 2 households, there are practical aspects of how their personal space, possessions and activities are managed when they spend time living in each of those households. Also, children may feel a greater sense of belonging to one household or the other. Their whole experience of parenting and family may indeed be different in each household, and the characteristics (in socio-demographic terms) may vary. We limit this analysis,

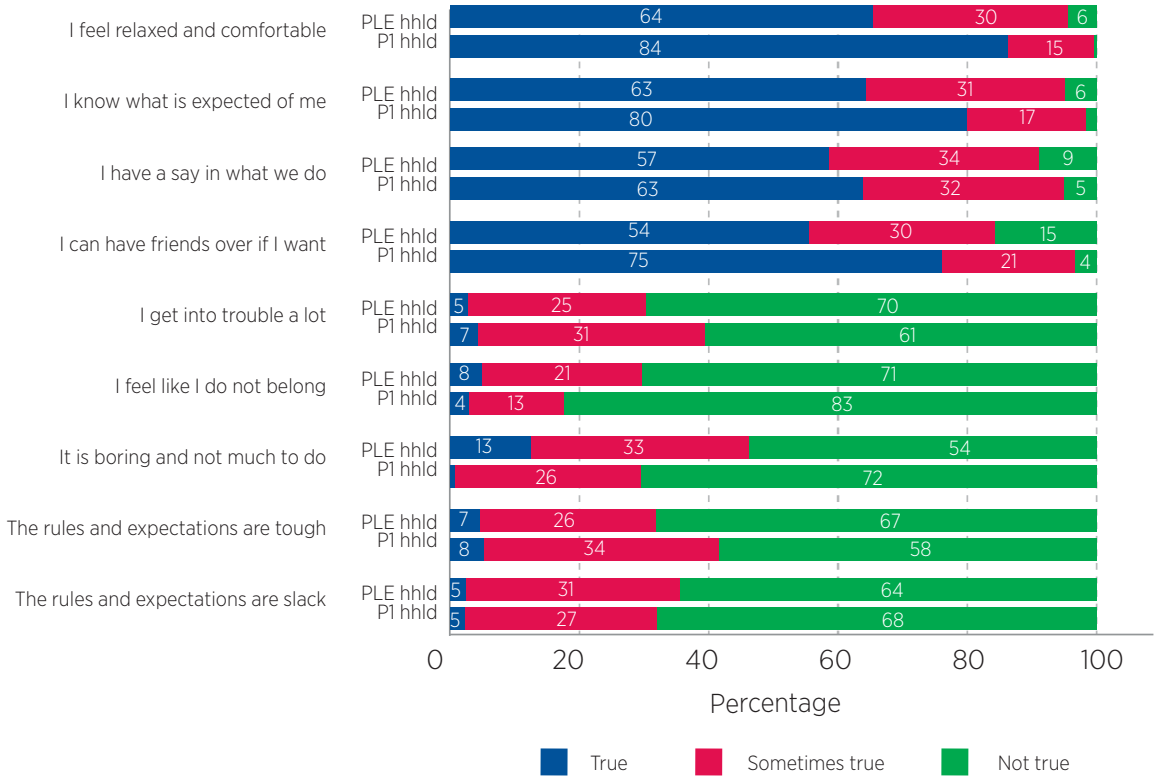
however, to look at some of the children's reports of living in 2 households. This subsection is based on the reports of 494 children at age 14–15 years, and excludes children who never or rarely see their parent living elsewhere.[18]

- Overall, 67% of children answering these questions reported themselves that they mostly or only lived with their mother (41% staying with their father living elsewhere at least once a fortnight, and 25% staying with their father living elsewhere less than once a fortnight).
- Another 11% said they mostly or only lived with their father (6% staying with their mother living elsewhere at least once a fortnight, and 4% staying with their mother living elsewhere less than once a fortnight).
- Another 22% reported that they lived equally with both parents.

There were 2 sets of questions used here. In one set, children were asked how they felt, on a list of items, about living in the household of their parent living elsewhere, and these items have a theme of capturing aspects of 'belonging and discipline' and feeling comfortable in that household. Each of these questions were also asked in respect to the home of their primary carer. The response categories for all of these questions were 'True', 'Sometimes true' and 'Not true'. See the full list of items and responses in Figure 25, with responses shown separately for the primary carer and parent living elsewhere households. Children's responses did tend to differ in respect to which household they were describing, with a somewhat greater sense of belonging reported for the primary carer's household. For example:

- 84% of children said 'true' to 'I feel relaxed and comfortable' in respect to their primary carer's home, compared to 64% for the home of the parent living elsewhere.
- 75% said they could have friends over in the home of their primary carer, compared to 54% who said it was 'true' for their parent living elsewhere.

Figure 25: Children's 'belonging and discipline' in each household when parents live apart



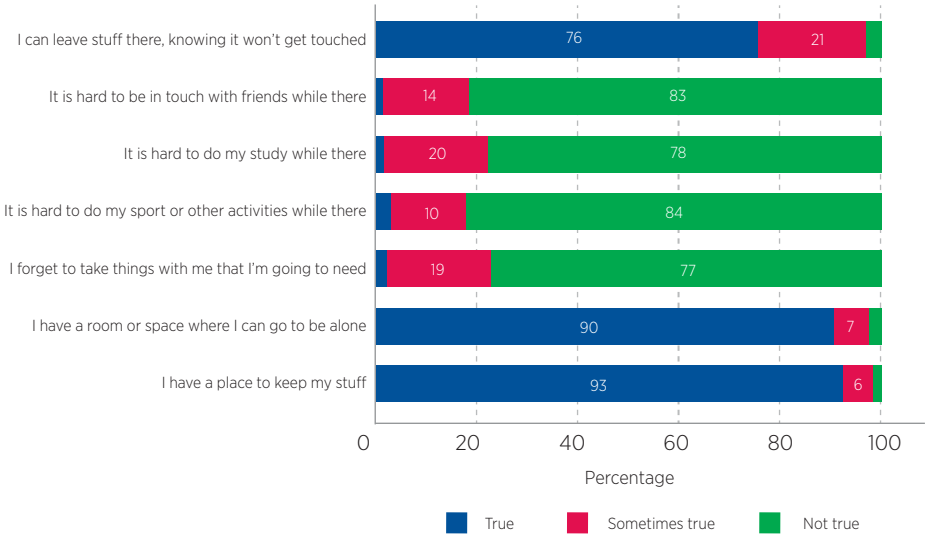
Notes: Responses about PLE and P1 households were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) for all except: 'The rules and expectations are tough' $p < 0.05$; 'I get into trouble a lot' $p < 0.01$;. 'The rules and expectations are slack' (ns);

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Wave 6, K cohort

18 While there were 807 children in the sample with a PLE at Wave 6, several exclusions led to the smaller number answering these questions. Overall, 762 were present for the interview and granted permission by the parent to answer questions about the parent living elsewhere (just 5 were refused permission). Children were not asked these questions if they never saw their parent, or (according to children) saw them less than once a year (excludes a total of 169 children). This left 593 who were potential respondents. However, another 99 children were not asked these questions, being sequenced past them at a point in the survey when interviewers were to check where each of the children's parents lived. Multivariate analysis of the sample to explore what factors explained responses to these questions among those who should have answered them revealed no biases in the responding sample.

The second set of questions analysed relates only to children's experiences of living in their parent living elsewhere household, and these items refer more to place-based concerns relating to children's personal spaces, possessions and activities.[19] The response categories for all of these questions were 'True', 'Sometimes true' and 'Not true'. These items are shown in Figure 26. While responses were generally positive, around 1 in 5 reported that it was at least sometimes true that there were some challenges, such as finding it hard to do study there, finding it hard to be in touch with friends and forgetting to take things with them that they are going to need.

Figure 26: Children's place-based concerns in their parent living elsewhere household



Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Wave 6, K cohort

To analyse these responses in relation to children's care arrangements and contexts, scales were created that averaged children's responses across the items, reversing items as appropriate, to create scales with higher scores reflecting a more positive 'belonging' experience in either their parent living elsewhere or primary carer household, or more positive experiences with their personal spaces, possessions and activities in the home of their parent living elsewhere. The average scores were multiplied by 10 to give the scales a range of 10 to 30. The distribution of these scales was highly skewed, since most children were quite positive about their experiences. Overall, the average score for belonging in the primary carer household was 26.7 and for the parent living elsewhere household was 25.5 and, for personal spaces, possessions and activities in the parent living elsewhere household was 24.1.

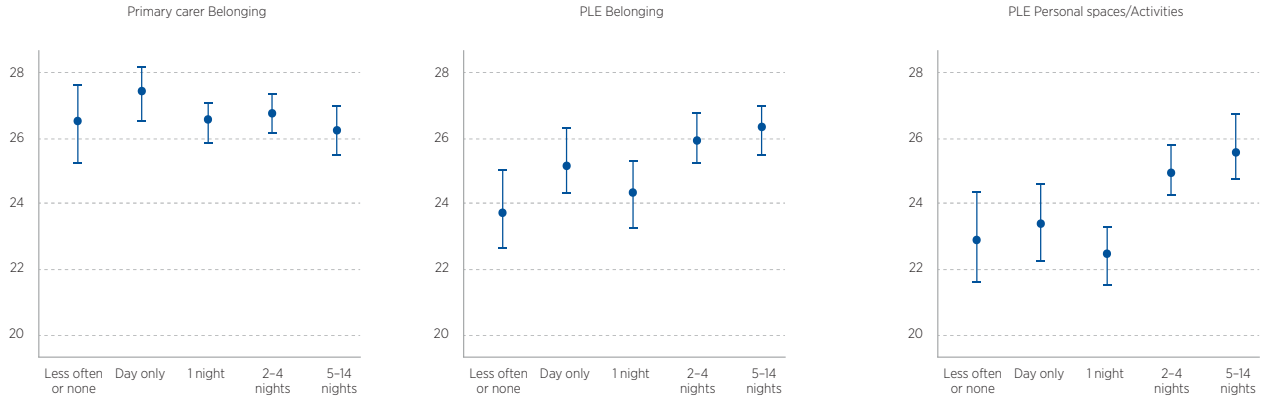
The means of these scales are shown in Figure 27 according to children's care time arrangements. Children's reports about their primary carer household did not vary according to this variable. For the measures relating to children's experiences of their parent living elsewhere household, however, more positive experiences were reported by those who spent at least 2 nights per fortnight with that parent.

To analyse the above 3 scales, the multivariate analyses included the explanatory variables previously used.[20] The full estimation results are shown in Appendix Table A26, with one model for each of the scales. Overall, there was actually little that was statistically significant, although the differences according to children's care time arrangements seen in the Figure were also evident after taking account of other characteristics.

19 These questions were actually asked of some children about their primary carer household. However, children were not asked about their primary carer household if they stayed with their parent living elsewhere less than once a fortnight OR they lived equally with both parents. We decided therefore not to use these data, as they are only for one subset of children.

20 Although the scales were skewed, ordinary least squares findings have been presented, as different results were not achieved if alternate specifications (e.g. analysing the log of the scale) were used. Cronbach's alpha for the 'belonging' scale in the primary carer household was 0.74, and the belonging scale in the PLE household was 0.78. The Cronbach's alpha for the PLE personal spaces/possessions/activities scale was 0.72. These are in the 'acceptable' range for internal reliability

Figure 27: Child experiences in their primary carer and parent living elsewhere household, means of each scale by care time



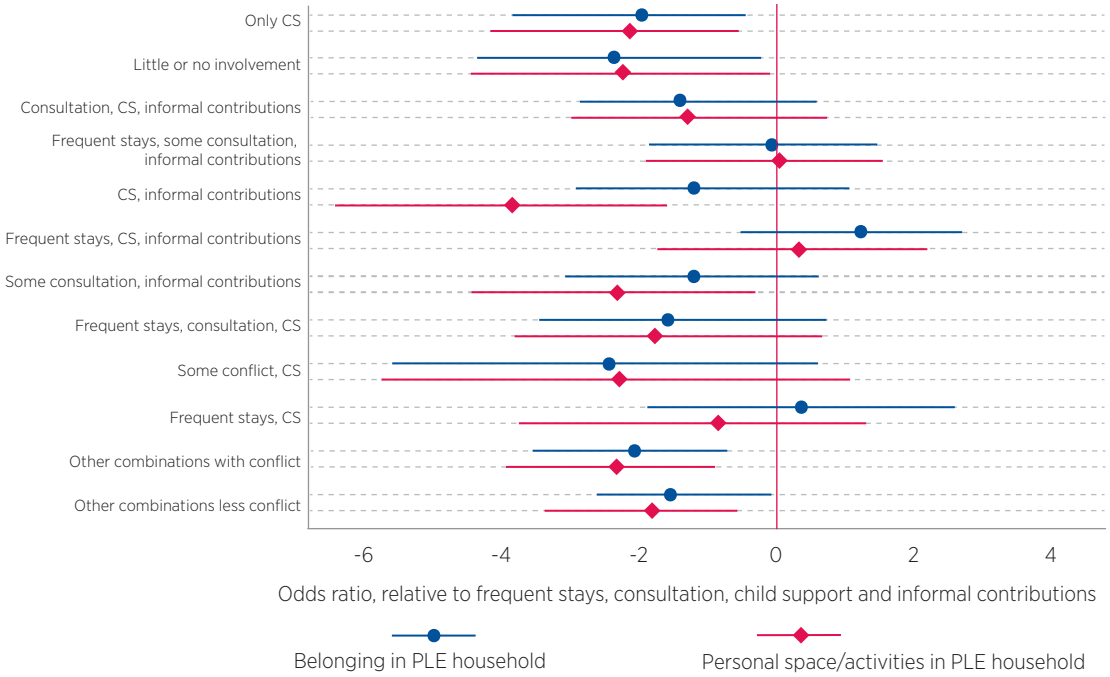
Note 'Belonging' is derived from items in Figure 25; 'Personal spaces/activities' is derived from items in Figure 26. 95% confidence intervals shown.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Wave 6, K cohort

We repeated the multivariate analyses using the composite parent living elsewhere measure instead of separate variables for care time and contexts. No statistically significant differences were found with respect to children's experiences in their primary carer household and so findings for that measure are not shown. There were some differences according to the 2 measures of children's experiences in their parent living elsewhere household. As this is analysed as a continuous measure, regression coefficients are presented.

Coefficients for each of the models are shown in Figure 28, relative to the category reflecting the higher involved parent living elsewhere (children staying frequently with other parent, and parents paying child support and informal financial contributions, and being consulted), which is represented at the reference value of zero. There is much overlap between these combinations of parent living elsewhere's involvement, and so it is not possible to identify the 'best' combinations. However, the poorer experiences tended to reflect the children not having frequent stays with their parent living elsewhere, with some evidence also of poorer experiences when the parents were in conflict.

Figure 28: Children's experiences of living in the parent living elsewhere household, by composite measures of parent living elsewhere's involvement



Notes: See Table 10 for derivation of the specific groupings. Coefficients compare to the base case of children staying frequently with other parent, and parents paying child support and informal financial contributions, and being consulted. This is indicated as the vertical lines, at a value of 0, on each graph. Based on ordinary least squares models with the outcome variables indicating more positive outcomes, and including demographic and contextual variables. *N* = 469 observations. 95% confidence intervals are shown.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Wave 6, K cohort

Overall, the lack of statistical significance for many of the variables in these models may indicate that there are other factors more important than the demographic and contextual ones that explain variation in children's experiences of living across 2 households. Children's own temperament may be important, for example. The nature of the relationship between children and each parent is also likely to make a difference. It may also be that these measures do not adequately differentiate between those who are having more or less difficulty in living across 2 households, and the relatively small sample size would contribute also to the lack of significant findings.

5.4 Summary

Findings from this section reveal considerable diversity across families in how the care arrangements and contexts for parents living apart are experienced or viewed by the parents and the children. This section examined parents' satisfaction with arrangements or involvement, children's moods and behaviours around the transitions between households, and children's experiences of living in their parent living elsewhere and primary carer households.

There were associations between the amount of care time and such outcomes, with more positive outcomes when children spent more time with their parent living elsewhere. This was evident in higher levels of satisfaction about parent living elsewhere's involvement, by primary carers and the parents living elsewhere. It was also evident in children's moods and behaviours around their transitions between households, with those children who spent 5–14 nights per fortnight with their parent living elsewhere being the most likely to be the 'same as usual' around these transition times, rather than withdrawn or over-excited. Further, children who spent at least 2 days per fortnight with their parent living elsewhere had more positive experiences in that parent's household, rather than those who stayed there less frequently. These findings add to other research on parents' and children's experiences according to their care time arrangements (Smyth, 2005).

From the perspective of parents in the primary LSAC household it was common also for satisfaction to be relatively high when children had no or very little contact with their other parent, consistent with other research (King & Heard, 1999; Smyth, 2005).

The quality of children's time with each of their parents living apart is especially important in thinking about how children experience their parents' separation (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Dunn et al., 2004). The coparenting indicators give some indication of this, although are clearly not direct measures of this quality. These measures (but not the one for child support) were also associated with different outcome measures. Having some consultation between parents, lower conflict and parents living elsewhere making informal financial contributions were positively associated with primary carers' satisfaction with parent living elsewhere's involvement, and with children's moods around the household transitions.

As with the rest of this report, there were some limitations in this section. Importantly, this section did not present analysis of a comprehensive set of outcomes, making use of just a few measures to gain some new insights. Further, some of this analysis was hampered by small sample size and by limited measures, and the exclusion of information on the characteristics of the parents living elsewhere and their households. In the following section, some other outcome measures are considered, with a broader approach that also compares children to those living with 2 biological parents.

6. Relationships and wellbeing in 2 parent and parent living elsewhere families

Continuing the focus on the second research question and children's wellbeing when they have parents living apart, this section presents some additional analyses relating to children in these families but also broadens the analyses to compare children who have parents living apart to those children who do not. As these analyses are based on longitudinal data, some children will transition between these states across waves, so in the multivariate analyses, changes in children's situations as they grow is taken into account.

This analysis covers relationships and social-emotional wellbeing of children. The selection of wellbeing measures is not meant to be comprehensive but, nevertheless, can provide some insights on family life and wellbeing of children. The goal is to not only compare these wellbeing measures for children who do and do not have parents living apart but to also consider whether differences are apparent within the group of children with parents living apart, according to the various demographic, contextual and coparenting variables examined in this report. The scope of each analysis is described in the subsections below.

The first 3 subsections focus on parent–child relationships, using the following:

- child reports of how close they feel to their mother and their father, including when their mother and father do not live together
- child reports of having enough time with each parent
- parent reports of conflict between themselves and the study child, as reported by parents in the primary carer or parent living elsewhere household.

There is some evidence that the quality of father–child relationships for fathers who are not living full-time with their children is an important factor in explaining children's wellbeing when they have separated parents. It is the quality of the relationship and nature of shared parent–child time that is thought to matter more in regard to children's wellbeing than a measure of the amount of shared time (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; King & Sobolewski, 2006). The quality of relationships between parents and children may be challenged when parents themselves are facing difficulties in their relationship, or negotiating new living arrangements post-separation. This may be true for each parent, regardless of children's living arrangements.

The inclusion of non-separated families is an important contribution to the research that generally only focuses on relationships within families with separated parents (e.g. Kalmijn, 2015). This allows us to explore, for example, whether the quality of relationships between mothers and children is different for children who live with both parents and those who only live with their mother in the primary household.[21] Here, we examine these relationships from different perspectives, to see whether there are any situations in which there appear to be difficulties – from parents' or children's perspectives – in particular aspects of these parent–child relationships. This information is available for children at ages 12–13 and 14–15 years.

We also return to examine children's social-emotional wellbeing as measured with the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), for children at ages 4–5 years through to 14–15 years. This extends the analyses presented in section 3.3. The research that explores children's social-emotional measuring is vast, and includes studies that compares children with and without separated parents, and those that focus only on families in which children's parents are living apart. This analysis contributes to this literature through the inclusion of longitudinal data, and the rich set of covariates.

6.1 Children's reports of closeness to parents

First we examine some child-reported information on how close they are to their mother and father. Having a close relationship with either or both parents, whether they are living together or apart, is likely to be an indicator of a positive relationship between parents and children. This may help to provide a secure base for children who have parents living apart. Cross-country research has shown that most children rate the quality of their relationship with a parent living elsewhere (with whom they have some contact) quite positively (Kalmijn, 2015). There are mixed findings regarding the predictors of relationship quality, although a positive association between the amount of contact time with fathers living elsewhere and relationship quality has been observed

21 For related research and discussion see, for example, analyses by Dunn et al. (2004), who explored associations between children's relationships with each parent, as well as step-parents if present.

(Cashmore et al., 2008; Dunn et al., 2004; Fabricius, 2003; Kalmijn, 2015; King & Sobolewski, 2006). This analysis explores this but also includes comparisons to reports about closeness to parents in intact (2 biological parent) families and, for those who have parents living apart, explores differences according to the contexts and care arrangements within their families.

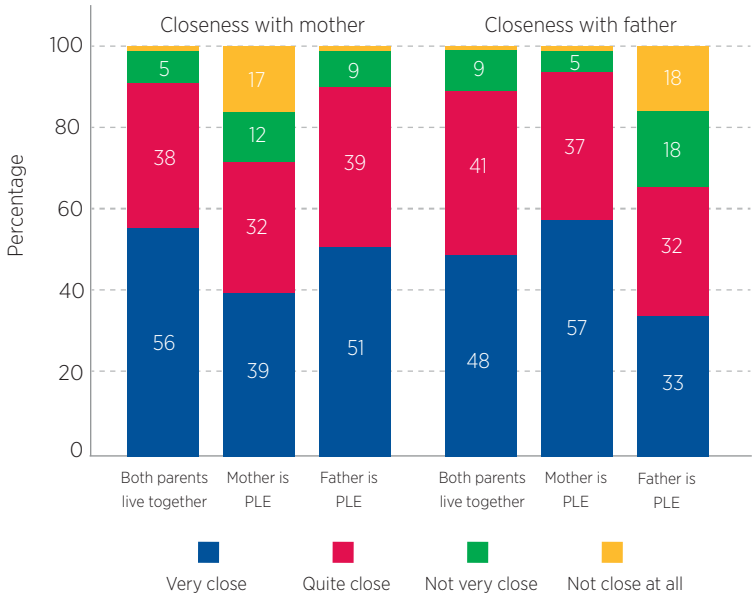
Children at age 12–13 and 14–15 years were asked how close they are to their mother and their father. They were asked about their mother and father in the primary LSAC household and, if they have parents living apart, they were asked how close they are to their parent who lives elsewhere.[22] Response categories were 'very close', 'quite close', 'not very close' and 'not close at all'.

Figure 29 shows how these responses varied according to whether children live with both biological parents or if they have a mother or father who is living elsewhere.

In reporting on how close children feel to their mother, children are most likely to say they are 'very close' if living with both biological parents but with half of those with a father living elsewhere also saying they are very close to their mother. In contrast, those whose primary carer is their father, with their mother living elsewhere, are the group who are most likely to report being not close at all to their mother, even though about 4 in 10 of these children said they were very close to her.

In reporting on how close children are to their father, children who have a father as their primary carer, with their mother living elsewhere, are the most likely to say they are very close to their father. This is followed by those living with both their mother and father. As was the case on reporting on closeness with mothers, those who have a father living elsewhere are the most likely to say they are not close to him, although a significant proportion of children with a father living elsewhere say they are very close to him.

Figure 29: Children's closeness to mother and father by living arrangements



Notes: Includes children who live with 2 biological parents ('Parents live together'). The sample sizes for 'Mother is PLE' are much smaller than those for 'Father is PLE' and so it is expected that the confidence intervals will be relatively large on the estimates for 'Mother is PLE'.

Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 5–6, K cohort

22 If there was a step-parent present in the home (a small number of families), some assumptions had to made concerning which parent children were reporting on when reporting on closeness with each of their parents living apart. See Table 2, column 5 for relevant sample sizes. As noted in the data section, some children were not asked questions about their parent living elsewhere, some due to a sequencing error, some because parents requested they not be asked questions about the parent living elsewhere. However, children with very little contact with their parent living elsewhere may be asked these questions.

Multivariate analyses were used to compare children's responses about closeness according to a more detailed set of variables. For children with parents living apart, comparisons were made according to how many nights they stayed with their father, comparing all groups back to children living with both biological parents. For these analyses, ordered logistic regression analyses were again used, to take account of the ordered nature of the dependent variable. The models for closeness to mothers and closeness to fathers incorporated the care time variable along with the family and child demographic variables (see Table 13). From these analyses:

- Closeness to their **mother** was not significantly different for those who lived with 2 biological parents, who had only daytime contact with their father, or who had shared care arrangements (stayed with their father 5–9 nights per fortnight). Other children with parents living apart reported lower levels of closeness with their mother. Children who were least close to their mother were those who spent 10–14 nights per fortnight with their father but, also, others who never saw their father, or who stayed one night or 2–4 nights with him also had somewhat lower closeness to their mother.
- For closeness to **fathers**, the closeness reported by children was not significantly different for those who lived with both biological parents and those who stayed with their father 5–9 or 10–14 nights per fortnight. But for other children with a father living elsewhere, the fewer nights children stayed with him, the less close children felt they were to him. These differences were quite marked.

Table 13: Multivariate analyses of closeness when parents live apart or together

		Close to mother (resident or elsewhere)	Close to father (resident or elsewhere)
Nights **with father when parents live apart** (reference = biological parents live together)	Less often or never	0.54*	0.00***
	Day only (up to monthly)	1.09	0.16***
	1 night/fortnight	0.58*	0.15***
	2–4 nights/fortnight	0.60*	0.42***
	5–9 nights/fortnight	0.80	1.10
	10–14 nights/fortnight	0.12***	1.64
Parent relationship status (reference = single)	Partnered	0.85	0.76
Indicators of sibling presence *(For each indicator, reference = none of that sibling type)*	Has full siblings	0.66**	0.76
	Has half siblings	1.15	0.89
	Has step siblings	0.59	2.36*
Family socio-economic status (reference = top 80%)	Bottom 20%	0.74**	0.67***
Child gender (reference = girl)	Boy	1.41***	2.19***
Child age (reference = 12–13 years)	14–15 years	0.44***	0.44***
Number of observations		6,834	6,654
From number of children		3,772	3,724

Note: These models were estimated using (random effects) ordered logistic regression, with closeness being greater the higher the number. Constants for cut-points not shown. Models also included ethnicity and region and categories for missing information about care arrangements (not shown). *p <.05; **p <.01; ***p < .001

Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 5–6, K cohort.

The closeness reports were then examined separately for children with parents living apart who reported on how close they felt to that parent. These analyses incorporated care time arrangements and coparenting as well as the demographic variables. As shown in Table 14:

- Consistent with Table 13, spending less time with their parent living elsewhere was associated with a lesser feeling of closeness to that parent.
- Proximity did not make a significant difference in this model.
- Parent consultation and informal financial contributions are associated with children feeling closer to the parent living elsewhere. This likely reflects that a more positive, collaborative coparenting relationship flows through to children's experiences and relationships with parents. In contrast, when parental relationships were conflicted, children reported lower closeness to the parent living elsewhere.

Table 14: Multivariate analyses of closeness: ordered logistic regression

		Close to parent living elsewhere (mother or father)
		Odds ratio
Who is parent living elsewhere (reference = father)	Mother	1.05
Nights **with parent living elsewhere** (Reference = 5–9 nights/fortnights)	Less often or never	0.02***
	Day only (up to monthly)	0.19***
	1 night/fortnight	0.28***
	2–4 nights/fortnight	0.49*
	10–14 nights/fortnight	0.92
Proximity (reference = <5 km)	5–19 km	0.68
	20–49 km	0.72
	50–500 km	0.82
	>500 km or overseas	0.76
When child lived with 2 parents last (reference = up to 2 years)	never	0.68
	>2 to <4 years	0.84
	>4 years	0.97
Parents' previous relationship status (reference = married)	Never lived together	0.72
	cohabited	1.16
Coparenting	Some consultation	1.54*
	Often/Always conflict	0.64*
	Child support	0.90
	Informal financial contributions	2.35***
Child gender (reference = girl)	Boy	1.66**
Child age (reference = 12–13 years)	14–15 years	0.65**
+ Demographic variables		
Number of observations		1,353
From number of children		888

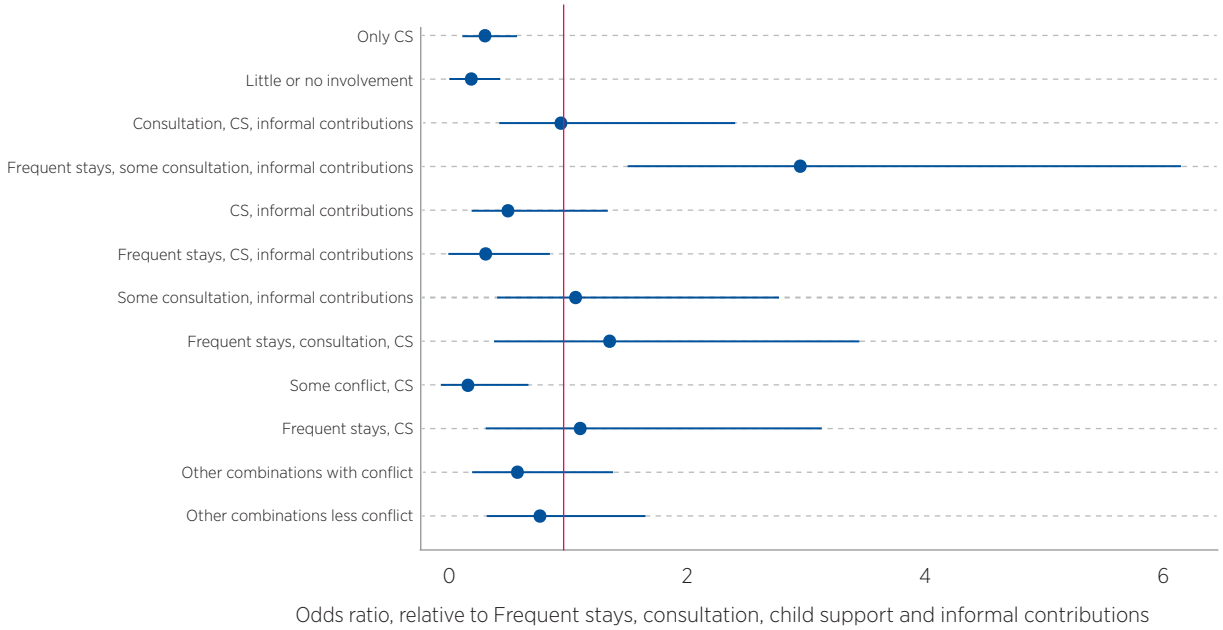
Note: These models were estimated using (random effects) ordered logistic regress. Constants for cut-points not shown. Models also included demographic variables as in Table 13 and categories for missing information about care arrangements and contexts (not shown). *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC K cohort, Waves 5-6.

An alternative model was estimated with the composite indicator of parent living elsewhere's involvement. The odds ratios for this variable are shown in Figure 30. They highlight the differences for children whose parent living elsewhere is involved primarily through payment of child support, and those without even that involvement. These children's reported closeness to that parent is markedly lower than for other children. Beyond that, however, there is considerable variation. The highest levels of closeness are for children who frequently stay with that parent, whose parent contributes financially through informal financial contributions and then various combinations of being consulted or not and paying child support or not. However, the mean levels of closeness in these groups were not all significantly higher than those with other combinations of involvement.

In future analyses with these data it would be interesting to explore these relationships further, to encompass more information about the parenting and characteristics of each of the parents, and to also include information about parent–child relationships from earlier waves of LSAC.

Figure 30: Children's closeness to parent living elsewhere by parent living elsewhere's involvement



Note: See Table 10 for derivation of the specific groupings. Based on model estimated using ordered logistic regression, with higher values meaning reports of being closer to their parent living elsewhere. Models also included demographic and contextual variables. *N* = 1,269 observations from 848 children. 95% confidence intervals are shown.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 5–6, K cohort

6.2 Children's reports of having enough time with parent

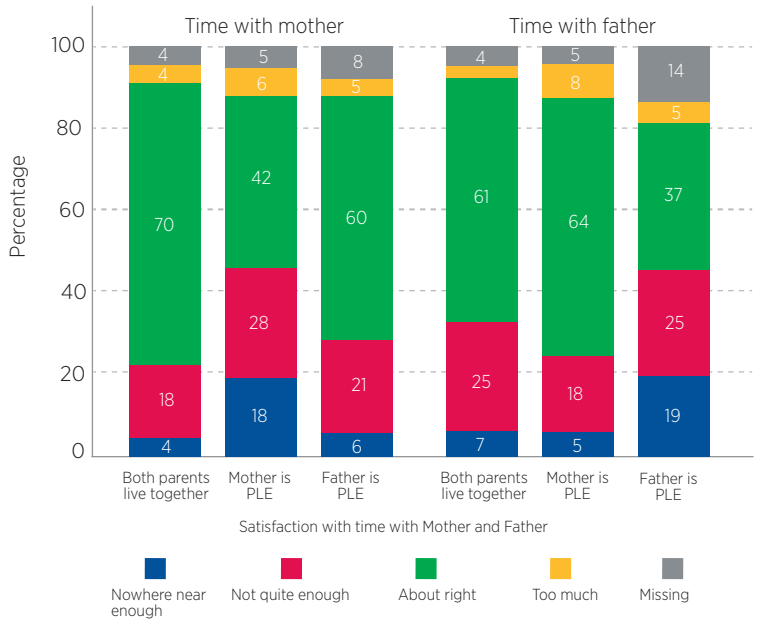
Children at age 12–13 and 14–15 years have been asked whether they think the amount of time their mother, their father, and their parent living elsewhere spends with them is enough, too much or not enough.[23] We use this information to further contribute to the analyses of children's relationships with mothers and fathers according to children's living arrangements, and then, more specifically, to analyse children's relationships with their parent living elsewhere. While 'enough' time is not necessarily a measure of quality time, it gives a sense of children's satisfaction with the time they have with their parents.

Figure 31 shows that a majority of children living with both mother and father say they spend about the right amount of time with their mother, while much fewer say this is the case if their mother is their parent living elsewhere. Almost one in four of these children with a mother living elsewhere say they spend nowhere near enough time with her. Children with a father living elsewhere are somewhat less likely to say they spend the right amount of time with their mother than are those living with both parents, with slightly more saying they spend not quite enough time with her.

Children who have a father primary carer are the most likely to say they spend about the right amount of time with him. Children with a father living elsewhere are the least likely to say this, with one in four saying they spend nowhere near enough time with him, as was the case for children reporting on mothers living elsewhere. Children living with both parents fall between these extremes, with one quarter saying the time they spend with their father is not quite enough.

23 See Table 2, column 5 for relevant sample sizes. As noted in the data section, some children were not asked questions about their parent living elsewhere. However, children with very little contact with their parent living elsewhere may be asked these questions.

Figure 31: Children's satisfaction with time with mother and father when parents live together or apart



Note: Includes children who live with 2 biological parents ('Parents live together'). The sample sizes for 'Mother is PLE' are much smaller than those for 'Father is PLE' and so it is expected that the confidence intervals will be relatively large on the estimates for 'Mother is PLE'.

Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 5–6, K cohort

Multivariate analyses were again used to examine children's satisfaction with the amount of time they spend with each parent. These analyses focused on children who reported they spent nowhere near enough, not quite enough or about the right amount of time with each parent, with the model predicting greater satisfaction with this shared time. Results are shown in Table 15 for analyses of time with mother and time with father, including children with and without parents living apart. As with the analyses of closeness, this model includes a variable for the amount of time children spend with their father.

There were associations between the care time arrangements and children's reports of having enough time with each of their parents that were consistent with those for children's reports of closeness. Children were less satisfied with their time with their mother when they stayed 10–14 nights per fortnight with their father and, also, if they rarely or never saw their father who lived elsewhere. Children were more satisfied with their time with their father, the more nights they stayed with him, although children with day-only contact with their father had satisfaction levels above those who stayed with him one night a fortnight. Except for those staying with their father 5–9 or 10–14 nights per fortnight, children with a father living elsewhere were less satisfied with the amount of time with him than were children living with both parents. Children who stayed with their father 5–9 or 10–14 nights per fortnight were more satisfied with the time spent with him compared to children living with 2 biological parents.

Looking at the control variables, girls were more likely than boys to report having enough time with each of their parents. It appears that this largely reflects the findings for children who live with both their biological parents, as in the specific analysis of children who have parents living apart that follows below, child gender was not statistically significant.

From other research using LSAC we know that a key factor in explaining differences in children's satisfaction is the amount of time parents spend in paid employment, with less satisfaction among children whose parents work longer hours (Strazdins et al., 2017). This is likely to be a factor also in considering children's satisfaction with how much time they spend with their parent living elsewhere but is beyond the scope of this report to take into account, since parental work hours are not available for many of the parents living elsewhere (specifically, those who are non-respondents to LSAC).

Table 15: Multivariate analyses of satisfaction with time spent with mothers and with fathers, when parents live together or apart

		Enough time with mother	Enough time with father
		Odds ratio	
Nights **with father** when parents live apart (reference = parents live together)	Less often or never	0.58*	0.04***
	Day only (up to monthly)	0.69	0.53*
	1 night/fortnight	0.68	0.24***
	2–4 nights/fortnight	0.78	0.54**
	5–9 nights/fortnight	0.94	1.96*
	10–14 nights/fortnight	0.15***	2.42**
Parent relationship status (reference = single)	Partnered	0.93	1.36
Indicators of sibling presence (For each indicator, reference = none of that sibling type)	Has full siblings	1.24	1.16
	Has half siblings	0.99	1.17
	Has step siblings	0.27***	0.57
Family socio-economic status (reference = top 80%)	Bottom 20%	0.62***	0.94
Child gender (reference = girl)	Boy	1.51***	1.62***
Child age (reference = 12–13 years)	14–15 years	1.13	1.05
Number of observations		6,541	6,530
From number of children		3,710	3,693

Note: Model estimated using ordered logistic regression, with higher values meaning more satisfaction with time with parent living elsewhere. Excludes those who said 'too much time'. Models also included ethnicity and region. Constants for cut-points not shown. * p <.05; ** p <.01; *** p <.001

Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 5–6, K cohort.

The analyses were extended to include coparenting and contextual variables, to explore children's reports of how much time they spent with their parent living elsewhere (Table 16).

- The least satisfied children were those who stayed with their parent living elsewhere rarely or not at all, and the most satisfied were those who stayed with this parent 5–9 or 10–14 nights per fortnight.
- Children whose parents lived a long distance apart – more than 500 km apart or their other parent was living overseas – were the least satisfied.
- Children were least satisfied when children last lived with both parents between 2 and 4 years ago.

The coparenting indicators were not statistically significant for this model.

Table 16: Multivariate analyses of enough time with parent living elsewhere

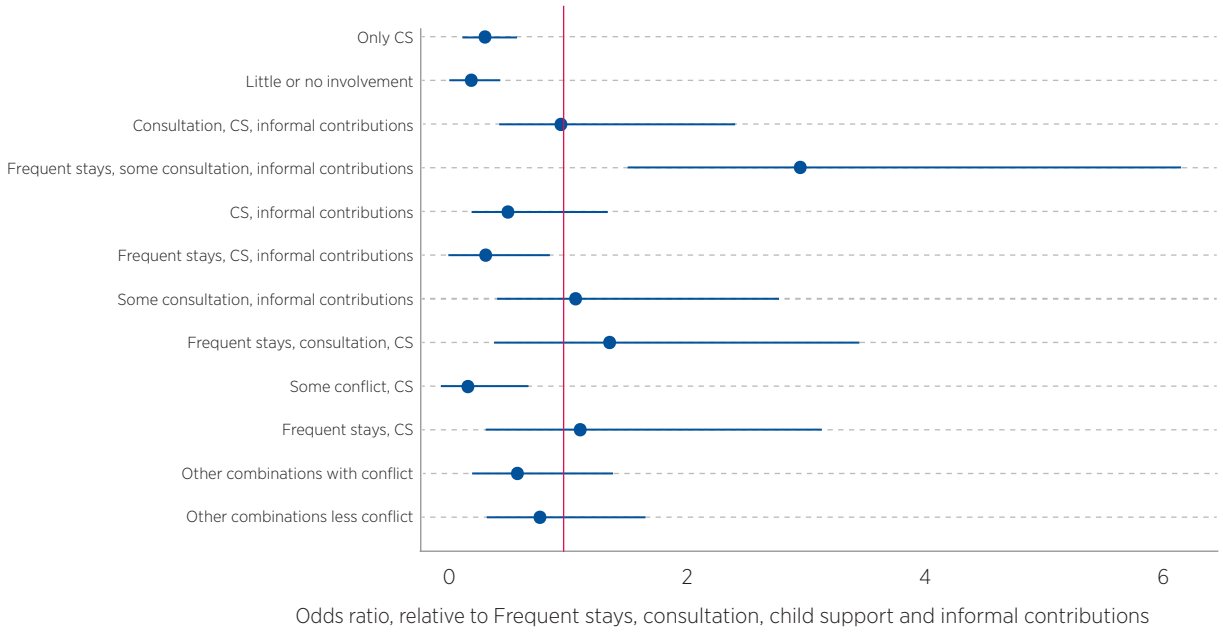
		Enough time with parent living elsewere
		Odds ratio
Who is parent living elsewhere (Reference = father)	Mother	0.78
Nights **with parent living elsewhere** (Reference =5-9 nights/fortnights)	Less often or never	0.04***
	Day only (up to monthly)	0.32***
	1 night/fortnight	0.23***
	2–4 nights/fortnight	0.33***
	10–14 nights/fortnight	3.14
Proximity (reference = <5 km)	5–19 km	1.04
	20–49 km	0.70
	50–500 km	0.66
	>500 km or overseas	0.51*
When child lived with 2 parents last (reference = up to 2 years)	Never	0.80
	>2 up to 4 years	0.48**
	>4 years	0.70
Parents' previous relationship status (reference = married)	Never lived together	0.88
	Cohabited	0.81
Coparenting	Some consultation	1.30
	Often/Always conflict	0.86
	Child support	0.75
	Informal financial contributions	1.37
Child gender (reference = girl)	Boy	1.17
Child age (reference = 12–13 years)	14–15 years	0.90
+ Demographic variables		
Number of observations		1,273
From number of children		850

Note: Model estimated using ordered logistic regression, with higher values meaning more satisfaction with time with parent living elsewhere. Excludes those who said 'too much time'. Models also included demographic variables as in Table 15. Constants for cut-points not shown. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 5–6, K cohort.

In the multivariate analyses with the composite parent living elsewhere variable, children were actually most satisfied with their time with their parent living elsewhere when that parent's involvement included frequent stays, informal financial contributions and consultation but not child support. See the odds ratios from this model in Figure 32. This probably indicates that these are the families in which children spend the greatest amount of time with the parent living elsewhere (given earlier analyses showed that child support payments were least likely when children stayed more nights per fortnight with their parent living elsewhere).

Figure 32: Children's reports of having enough time with their parent living elsewhere by parent living elsewhere's involvement



Note: See Table 10 for derivation of the specific groupings. Based on model estimated using ordered logistic regression, with higher values meaning more satisfaction with time with parent living elsewhere. Models also included demographic and contextual variables. *N* = 1,196 observations from 811 children. 95% confidence intervals are shown.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 5–6, K cohort.

6.3 Parent–child conflict

Parent–child conflict is expected to increase as children approach and go through adolescence, although few families experience high levels of conflict (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). It may be, though, that parents who are themselves experiencing challenges in their relationship, or their coparenting relationship, may face more challenges in managing conflict with their children. Here we continue with the focus on parent–child relationships by exploring to what extent parents report that there is conflict between themselves and their 12–13 and 14–15 year old children. This differs, then, from the previous subsections in that parents' reports are used rather than children's.

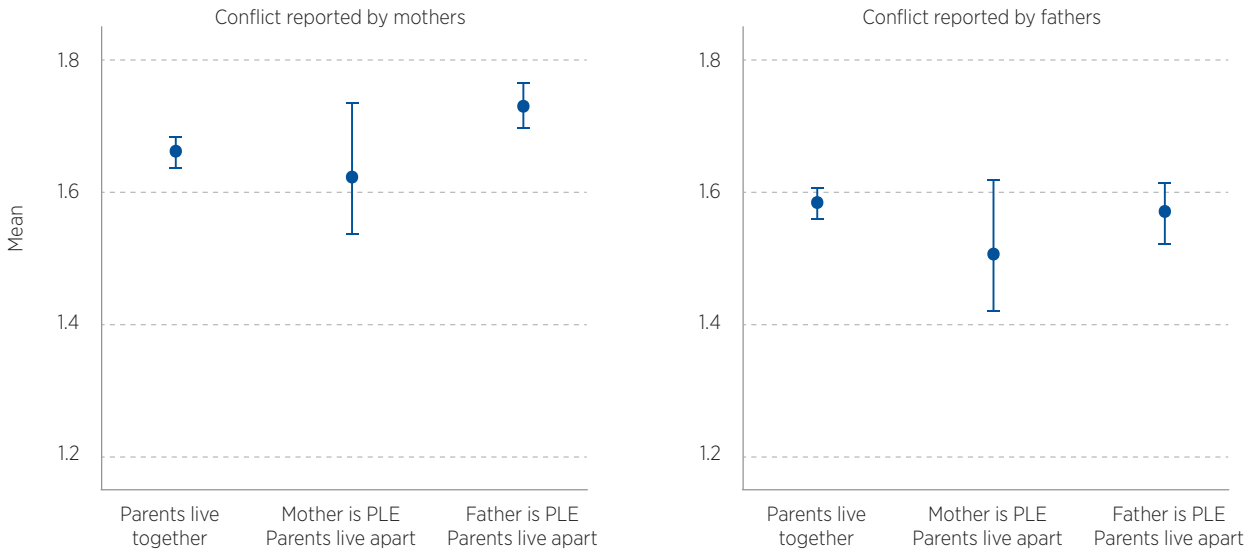
The conflict measures were derived from responses by parents about the frequency of experiencing situations that are indicative of conflict. For 6 items, parents respond using a 5-point scale (1 = not at all to 5 = almost all or all the time), from which an average conflict score was derived, which was higher when there was more conflict.[24] The items capture the frequency of the following occurring between each parent and the study child, as reported separately by mothers and fathers: 'we disagree and fight'; 'we bug each other or get on each other's nerves'; 'we yell at each other'; 'when we argue we stay angry for a very long time'; 'when we disagree, I refuse to talk to [child]'; and 'when we disagree, [child] stomps out of the room, or house or yard'.

These questions were asked of each responding parent – mothers and fathers, whether in the primary carer or parent living elsewhere households. We do not have this information for all parents of the children in LSAC, given non-response, in particular by fathers in the primary carer and parent living elsewhere households.

Figure 33 shows the distribution of the conflict scales according to whether mothers and fathers who responded were one of the two parents in an 'intact' family or were from a family with a mother or father living elsewhere. These data indicate that conflict, as reported by mothers, is somewhat greater when the father is living elsewhere. Conflict as reported by fathers is actually a little lower when that father is living elsewhere rather than living with the child's biological mother.

24 The Cronbach's alpha for mothers' conflict scale was 0.82 and for fathers' conflict scale was 0.81. These are in the 'good' range for internal reliability

Figure 33: Conflict between parents and children, as reported by mothers and fathers, according to whether there are parents living apart



Notes: Includes children who live with 2 biological parents ('Parents live together'). The sample sizes for 'Mother is PLE' are much smaller than those for 'Father is PLE' and the confidence intervals are relatively large on the estimates for 'mother is PLE' (95% confidence intervals shown).

Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 5–6, K cohort

We turn to multivariate analyses to explore how parent-reported conflict varies for parents who are in 2-parent families, or parent living elsewhere families, also taking account of other characteristics. Ordinary least squares were used, with the pooled data for 2 waves, to analyse the measure of conflict as reported by mothers and as reported by fathers.

As shown in Table 17, according to these analyses, the difference in mother-reported conflict that, above, was attributable to there being a father living elsewhere, is no longer apparent. It appears that the socio-economic and demographic factors contribute to the levels of conflict in these families. Mother-reported conflict does not vary according to the number of nights children stay with their father, except that lower levels of conflict are apparent when children spend 2–4 nights or 10–14 nights per fortnight with their father.

Table 17 shows that overall there is **more** conflict reported by fathers when fathers live elsewhere. However, the number of nights children stay with those fathers attenuates that association such that the higher conflict only reflects the situation in which children have very little contact with their father. If children spend some nights with a father living elsewhere, those fathers actually report lower levels of conflict than fathers in 2-biological parent families.

Table 17: Multivariate analyses of conflict in 2-parent and parent-living-elsewhere households

		Conflict reported by mother	Conflict reported by father
Parents (reference = biological parents live together)	Mother lives elsewhere	0.03	0.19
	Father lives elsewhere	0.11	0.24*
Nights **with father** when parents live apart (reference = biological parents live together)	Less often or never	-0.08	-0.09
	Day only (up to monthly)	-0.11	-0.29**
	1 night/fortnight	-0.12	-0.26*
	2–4 nights/fortnight	-0.15**	-0.28**
	5–9 nights/fortnight	-0.11	-0.21*
	10–14 nights/fortnight	-0.18*	-0.20
Parent relationship status (reference = single)	Partnered	-0.06*	0.09**
Indicators of sibling presence (For each indicator, reference = none of that sibling type)	Has full siblings	-0.00	0.04
	Has half siblings	0.07*	-0.02
	Has step siblings	0.01	0.00
Family socio-economic status (reference = top 80%)	Bottom 20%	0.05**	0.03
Child gender (reference = girl)	Boy	-0.02	0.00
Child age (reference = 12–13 years)	14–15 years	0.01	0.02
Constant		1.73***	1.46***
Rho		0.697	0.655
Number of observations		6,853	5,240
From number of children		3,774	3,090

Note: Model estimated using ordinary least squared (random effects), with higher values meaning more conflict with the child. Models also included ethnicity and region. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 5–6, K cohort

If we turn to the focused analyses of conflict as reported by parents living elsewhere, Table 18 shows that very little was statistically significant. Further, these analyses were repeated with the composite measure of parent-living-elsewhere involvement, and statistically significant differences in reported parent–child conflict were not apparent for this variable (findings are therefore not shown).

As noted above, in relation to children's reports about closeness, it may be that characteristics of parents and of children that are not included in these analyses are better able to explain the variation in parent–child conflict. In future analyses with these data, it would be helpful to incorporate other information about parents' relationships with their children to explore whether there are characteristics of parents, children or families that are important in this area of wellbeing.

Table 18: Multivariate analyses of conflict in parent-living-elsewhere households

		Conflict reported by PLE (coefficient from ordinary least squares)
Who is parent living elsewhere (reference = father)	Mother	0.17**
Nights with parent living elsewhere (reference = 5–9 nights/fortnight)	Less often or never	0.04
	Day only (up to monthly)	-0.11
	1 night/fortnight	-0.06
	2–4 nights/fortnight	-0.10
	10–14 nights/fortnight	-0.04
Proximity (reference = <5 km)	5–19 km	0.01
	20–49 km	-0.05
	50–500 km	-0.13*
	>500 km or overseas	-0.05
When child lived with 2 parents last (reference = up to 2 years)	Never	-0.14
	>2 up to 4 years	0.00
	>4 years	-0.03
Parents' previous relationship status (reference = married)	Never lived together	0.14
	Cohabited	0.03
Coparenting	Some consultation	0.03
	Often/Always conflict	-0.03
	Child support	-0.01
	Informal financial contributions	-0.02
Child gender (reference = girl)	Boy	0.02
Child age (reference = 12–13 years)	14–15 years	-0.02
Constant		1.62***
Rho		0.602
Number of observations		856
From number of children		570

Notes: Model estimated using ordinary least squared (random effects), with higher values meaning more conflict with the child. Models also demographic variables as in Table 17. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 5–6, K cohort

6.4 Social-emotional wellbeing

Finally, this section returns to where we left off in section 3.3, looking at children's wellbeing, through the SDQ total difficulties score (see Box 2 for information about this measure). In those earlier analyses we showed that children's wellbeing was lower when they had parents living apart, and this was not fully accounted for by the different demographic characteristics, parental mental health or parenting styles that applied in those families. Of course, there are numerous other ways even these characteristics of families and parents could be measured and incorporated into the analyses, which might better explain the differences in these outcomes. For example, we have only included in our analyses characteristics of the child's primary carer. If children live with or spend time with a parent other than their primary carer, the characteristics of that other parent are likely to be also relevant to children's social-emotional wellbeing. We therefore recognise this limitation in these analyses.

This analysis uses primary carer's reports on children's SDQ total difficulties, and therefore focuses on children across ages 4–5 years through to 14–15 years. To begin, Table 19 shows the results of analysing the SDQ total difficulties for all children in this range according to children's care arrangements (relative to living with 2 biological parents), adding in key demographic variables, then adding in parent mental health and parenting. Child gender and age are in all the models. The analyses that informed section 3.3 involved estimating these models on each age range one at a time (except using just an indicator of having parents living apart, rather than care arrangements) but here all ages are combined.

Table 19: Multivariate analyses of SDQ total difficulties when parents live together or apart

		PLE comparison	Plus demographics	Plus mental health and parenting
		Coefficients		
Nights **with father** when parents live apart (reference = biological parents live together)	Less often or never	2.35***	1.83***	1.52***
	Day only (up to monthly)	1.27***	0.80***	0.61***
	1 night/fortnight	1.51***	1.06***	0.91***
	2–4 nights/fortnight	0.94***	0.55***	0.53***
	5–9 nights/fortnight	0.76***	0.41*	0.56***
	10–14 nights/fortnight	0.80***	0.47	0.82***
Parent relationship status (reference = single)	Partnered		-0.20	0.01
Indicators of sibling presence (For each indicator, reference = none of that sibling type)	Has full siblings		-0.29**	-0.58***
	Has half siblings		0.44***	0.27**
	Has step siblings		0.63**	0.55*
Family socio-economic status (reference = top 80%)	Bottom 20%		0.66***	0.57***
Parental mental health (K6)	Better mental health			-1.15***
Parenting	More warmth			-0.23***
	More consistency			-0.79***
	More angry parenting			2.45***
Child gender (reference = girl)	Boy	1.32***	1.32***	1.05***
Child age (reference = 4–5 years)	6–7 years	-0.90***	-0.90***	-0.71***
	8–9 years	-1.07***	-1.06***	-0.95***
	10–11 years	-1.14***	-1.12***	-0.99***
	12–13 years	-1.55***	-1.53***	-1.39***
	14–15 years	-1.75***	-1.75***	-1.46***
Constant		7.92***	8.12***	12.49***
Number of observations		39,655	39,655	39,655
From number of children		9,407	9,407	9,407
rho		0.637	0.627	0.529

Notes: Model estimated using ordinary least squared (random effects), with higher values meaning more conflict with the child. For parenting and mental health, missing values were substituted with the cohort-Wave specific means of those variables. Models also included cohort, ethnicity and region, socio-economic status and dummy variables to indicate those with mean-substituted values for parenting styles and parental mental health. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 1–6, K cohort; Waves 3–6, B cohort

The significantly poorer outcomes, as indicated by a higher SDQ total difficulties score, are apparent for children with parents living apart, at all of the care arrangements shown. With the comparison being children living with 2 parents, those who saw their father little or not at all had the poorest scores, followed by those who stayed with their father once a fortnight or less often. Other care arrangements were also related to poorer wellbeing compared to those living with 2 biological parents, even with the range of socio-demographic, parenting and mental health variables in the models. There were also significant findings apparent for family structure, socio-economic status, parental mental health and parenting.

We extend the analyses as in the subsections above to include information about the contexts, care arrangements and coparenting when children have parents living apart. To start with, the above model (3) with socio-demographic variables and parenting and mental health variables is estimated for children with parents living apart. Then, the variables for care arrangements and coparenting are added. See Table 20.

The demographic, parenting and parent mental health variables were statistically significant within the parent-living-elsewhere sample, and most remained significant with the inclusion of the context, care and coparenting variables. Of these additional variables some of the key findings are:

- Children's difficulties are significantly lower in families of parents who were previously married, rather than previously cohabiting. (This may reflect unobserved differences between previously married and previously cohabiting families.)
- The time since parents' separation does not have a significant association with children's social-emotional wellbeing.
- Children had a significantly higher difficulties score when there was always/often inter-parent conflict. They had a significantly lower difficulties score when the parent living elsewhere made informal financial contributions.

Table 20: Multivariate analyses of children's SDQ when parents live apart

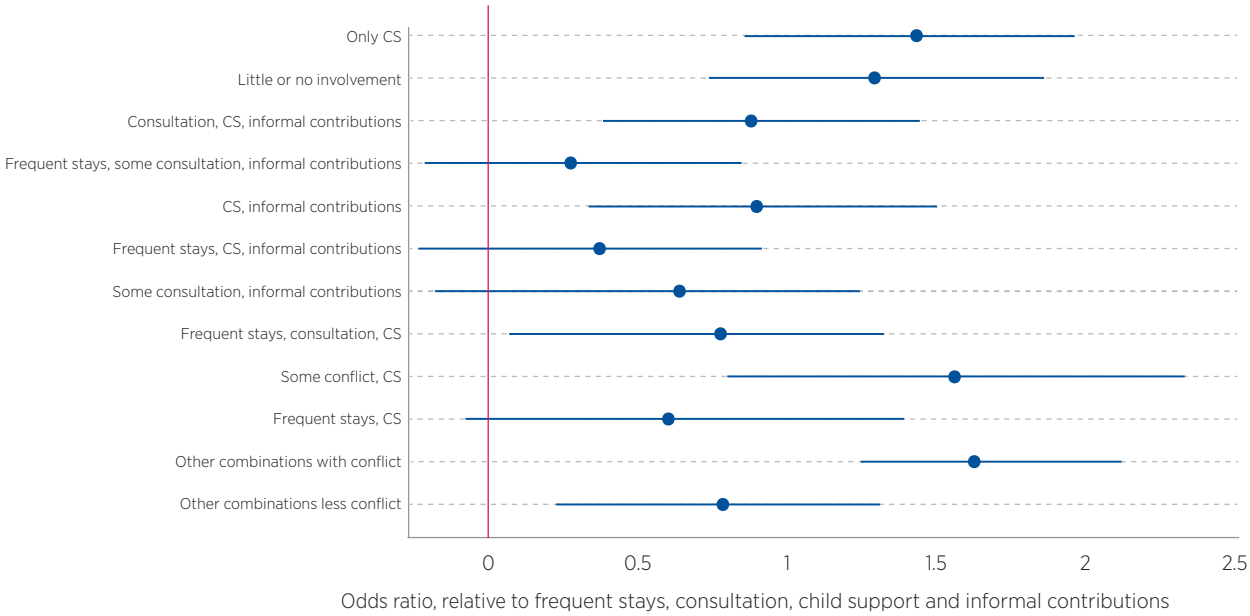
		Demographics and mental health and parenting	Plus context/care/ coparenting PLE variables
		Coefficients	
Who is parent living elsewhere (reference = father)	Mother	-0.06	-0.02
Nights **with father** (reference = 5–9 nights/fortnight)	Less often or never		1.14***
	Day only (up to monthly)		0.47
	1 night/fortnight		0.59*
	2–4 nights/fortnight		0.15
	10–14 nights/fortnight		0.49
Proximity (reference = <5 km)	5–19 km		-0.06
	20–49 km		-0.10
	50–500 km		-0.29
	>500 km or overseas		-0.49*
When child lived with 2 parents last (reference = up to 2 years)	Never		0.19
	>2 up to 4 years		0.13
	>4 years		0.17
Parents' previous relationship status (reference = married)	Never lived together		0.80
	Cohabited		0.68***
Coparenting	Some consultation		0.12
	Often/Always conflict		0.57***
	Child support		-0.05
	Informal financial contributions		-0.29*
Parent relationship status (reference = single)	Partnered	-0.05	-0.08
Indicators of sibling presence (For each indicator, reference = none of that sibling type)	Has full siblings	-0.48**	-0.22
	Has half siblings	0.33	0.21
	Has step siblings	0.55	0.56
Family socio-economic status (reference = top 80%)	Bottom 20%	0.38**	0.31*
P1 Mental health (K6)	Better mental health	-1.12***	-1.08***
Parenting	More warmth	-0.18	-0.19
	More consistency	-0.84***	-0.80***
	More angry parenting	2.98***	2.95***
Child gender (reference = girl)	Boy	1.10***	1.11***
Constant		12.06***	11.13***
Number of observations		7,119	7,119
From number of children		2,410	2,410
rho		0.543	0.541

Notes: Model estimated using ordinary least squared (random effects), with higher values meaning more conflict with the child. For parenting and mental health, missing values were substituted with the cohort-Wave specific means of those variables. Models also included age, cohort, ethnicity and region, categories for missing values on care and contexts variables, and dummy variables to indicate those with mean-substituted values for parenting styles and parental mental health (not shown). *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, K cohort; Waves 3–6, B cohort

The model for children with parents living elsewhere was re-estimated using the composite parent-living-elsewhere variable and the coefficients for this variable are shown in Figure 34. The reference group is those children who have frequent stays with their parent living elsewhere, who is consulted and pays child support and informal financial contributions. Children's total difficulties score is significantly higher for a number of groups of children, in particular those whose parent living elsewhere is only involved through the payment of child support or who is not involved at all or only a little. Also, others whose parents always or often experience conflict are reported to have more difficulties on the SDQ measure compared to the reference group. Other differences, and overlaps between groups, are evident in this figure.

Figure 34: Children's SDQ when parents live apart, children aged 4–5 to 14–15 years, parent living elsewhere's involvement findings



Notes: See Table 10 for derivation of the specific groupings. Based on model estimated using random effects ordinary least squares regression. Models also included demographic and contextual variables. *N* = 6,519 observations from 2,348 children. 95% confidence intervals are shown.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1-6, K cohort; Waves 3–6, B cohort

6.5 Summary

The second research question covered by this report concerned the wellbeing of children in separated families. The first 3 subsections of this section explored this by looking at wellbeing through the lens of parent–child relationships. That is, measures of closeness, 'enough time' and conflict were considered to be indicators of children's wellbeing, even though they could equally be explored as inputs to children's wellbeing. These measures were compared for children with and without parents living apart and, for the former, according to the contexts and care arrangements experienced by children. The focus was on children at 12–13 and 14–15 years.

For parent–child relationships, there were differences for children whose parents lived apart, in general indicating more challenges for these children. However, for some, parent–child relationships appeared no different to those children living with 2 biological parents. How much time children and parents spent together seemed to make a difference to some of these measures of parent–child relationships. Further, there were even some positive elements observed, for example, with children who stayed with their father at least 5 nights per fortnight being more satisfied with the amount of time shared with him compared to children living with 2 biological parents. This may reflect differences in the characteristics of these fathers that have not been taken into account here; most notably, it may be that fathers in 2-parent families work longer hours and are therefore less available to children compared to fathers in other family forms.

In the analyses of relationships between children and parents living elsewhere, the contextual variables were generally not significant. Further, the coparenting indicators were only significant in the analyses of children's

reports of closeness, for which some consultation and informal financial contributions, and an absence of conflict, were associated with more closeness.

These analyses could be extended in the future to take account also of the characteristics of parents living elsewhere, along with parenting information, to consider what else, other than care time arrangements, contributes to children's relationships with parents post-separation. For those families who have separated over the course of LSAC, a useful direction to pursue with these data would be to incorporate information about the involvement by the parent living elsewhere in child care prior to the parents' separation.

Additional analyses were presented here looking at children's wellbeing through the SDQ total difficulties score, to provide insights on the social-emotional wellbeing of children according to their care arrangements and contexts. Confirming the findings presented in section 3.3, children had poorer outcomes when they had parents living apart, after taking account of a range of socio-demographic characteristics, as well as primary carer parenting and mental health. In particular, worse outcomes were evident for those who had very little or no contact with their father, followed by those who stayed up to one night a fortnight with him. Of the coparenting indicators, parents' conflict was the one with the strongest association with social-emotional wellbeing, with children having poorer wellbeing in these families. On the positive side, the informal financial contributions by the parent living elsewhere was somewhat related to children having better social-emotional wellbeing, perhaps being an indicator of more flexible, co-operative parenting arrangements.

It should be noted that the above analyses on the pooled data may miss some important findings around particular contexts or care arrangements that matter more at particular ages of children, or perhaps that matter more in the early months after the parents' separation or indeed in later years. Of course, in the face of family conflict, there may also be specific factors that are important in explaining which children are doing well in social-emotional or other terms. More sophisticated analyses of these data may be possible to answer questions such as these in the future.

7. Summary, discussion and conclusion

To summarise the findings from the research report, we return to the original research questions, then discuss the limitations of this research, along with possible future directions.

7.1 Research questions

1. What do the care arrangements and contexts of children look like when they have parents who live apart, and how do they vary by child age?

To answer this question, in section 3 we explored the socio-demographic characteristics of families, as well as contexts specific to those children who have parents living apart. In section 4 we explored the care arrangements and coparenting. Child age differences were explored throughout but, also, the analyses in section 4 explored how care arrangements and coparenting varied according to children's characteristics (including family characteristics) and parental relationship/residence contexts.

First, comparisons of socio-demographic characteristics of children with parents living apart confirmed their being from more disadvantaged families, on average, compared to those who lived with both parents, at least as measured in the primary carer's household. The socio-economic disadvantage was particularly marked for the youngest children with parents living apart. As the pool of children with parents living apart grew due to parental relationship breakdown, there was a greater proportion not in the lowest socio-economic status category. Further, the youngest children with parents living apart more often had parents who had never lived together, with relatively few parents having married. As with socio-economic status, as the parent living elsewhere numbers grew, children in this group increasingly had lived with both of their parents at some time, with it being more likely that these parents had previously been married.

These circumstances of children in the LSAC data are broadly consistent with those derived from other studies of children with parents living apart (Cashmore et al., 2010; Qu & Weston, 2010; Qu et al., 2014), although depending upon how samples are selected, there are differences in the extent to which families with different types of arrangements are represented. For example, the LSSF sample is drawn from a sample of parents who had separated recently who were registered with the Child Support Program, which may not be representative of all separated parents, such as those with older children or families in which parents are high-income earners. While LSAC is based on birth cohorts of children, and is broadly representative of families in these cohorts, we are aware that survey attrition may mean the sample at later waves is not fully representative of all families, perhaps excluding those with particularly challenging situations. Indeed, in establishing the sample scope, the more complex family forms were excluded from the analyses if they were so complex that parental relationships could not be accurately identified.

A contribution of this research, that has not been the primary focus of other recent Australian research, was the examination of some contextual information relating to the time of parents' separation and previous marital status, as well as their proximity to each other (although these variables have been analysed to some extent in other reports). As described above, there were differences in the distribution of their parental relationship contexts (whether previously married, cohabiting or never lived together) by child age. Looking at time since separation, for the oldest children with parents living apart, some have experienced this separation recently while others never lived with both parents. For the youngest children, there is of course not so much diversity in the timing of parents' separation. The proximity of the parent living elsewhere's household to that of the primary carer varied across the sample, varying also within ages of children but with about one in five children having parents who lived less than 5 km apart and another 24% living 5–19 km apart.

Children's care arrangements were described here in terms of the number of nights they stayed with their parent living elsewhere or, for some analyses, the number of nights they stayed with their father. The latter perspective was included to take account of there being some children with their mother being the parent living elsewhere, more so with child age, even though this only applied to a small proportion of families. As has been reported in other studies, it was most likely that children stayed only or primarily with their mother, with small percentages in shared care, and even smaller percentages in predominantly their fathers' care. Within the pooled sample of children with parents living apart, 23% stayed only with their mother and had no (or less than monthly) daytime contact with their father, 14% only had daytime contact, 44% stayed with their father up to 4 nights a fortnight, and 8% stayed with him 5 to 9 nights a fortnight ('shared care') with 5% overall staying with him more than this. Contact information was missing for 7% of children.

If we compare this to the Wave 1 LSSF sample, for example, these LSAC data include more children who never stay with their father and fewer in shared care. In the LSSF Wave 1 sample, 11% never saw their father, 22% had daytime-only contact, 48% stayed most nights with their mother, 20% were in shared care and 5% stayed more or all nights with their father. The different LSSF scope (recently separated parents) and the use of the Child Support Program for the sampling frame may contribute to these differences.

In accord with other research (Qu & Weston, 2010; Qu et al., 2014), care arrangements varied by child age, with daytime-only contact most likely for the youngest children, and time with fathers increasing with child age. There were other differences related to proximity (living closer was associated with more time with parents living elsewhere) and parental relationship contexts (care time greatest when parents had previously been married, and less when children had never lived with both parents together). There was no evidence of shared care being more likely soon after parents' separation.

Some coparenting indicators were explored to provide other insights on the quality of the relationship between children's parents. One captured whether parents sometimes consulted over childrearing matters and one captured whether there was often or always conflict between parents. According to primary carers in the pooled sample, 40% said there was some consultation, 30% no or little consultation and 22% no or little contact, with information missing for 8% of the sample. Regarding conflict, 15% said there was often or always conflict, 62% conflict sometimes, rarely or never and 15% no contact, plus 8% missing information. The indicators of sometimes consulting and often/always conflict were used throughout.

We also explored how the parents living elsewhere described the conflict between themselves and the other parent, and found that these parents tended to more often report that they rarely or never had conflict, compared to the primary carer parents. The likelihood of consultation and conflict varied by a number of the contextual variables explored. For example, when children had never lived with parents (or parents had never lived together) there was less contact between parents, and so also less consultation and conflict. But if parents had separated in the previous 2 years, it was most likely that parents consulted and had conflict.

Indicators of financial coparenting were also explored, looking at an indicator of primary carers receiving child support or receiving informal financial support. Putting the 2 indicators together in the pooled data, from primary carers' perspectives, 33% received child support and informal financial contributions, 24% received child support only, 15% received informal financial contributions only and 19% received no financial support, plus there was missing information for 10% of the sample. Note that a limitation of this research was that we did not capture whether the primary carers contributed financially to the parent living elsewhere. This is likely to happen in some families, given that some of the LSAC primary carers do not actually have majority care of the children, and so some of those receiving no financial help will instead be payers. When information about financial support was compared for the 2 parents, there were considerable differences, with parents living elsewhere reporting that they made financial contributions more often than was reported by the primary carers. Future research should explore what contributes to these different reports.

The contextual factors that explained the likelihood of child support receipt were somewhat different to those explaining the likelihood of receiving informal financial contributions, although the children least likely to receive either were those who had no or infrequent contact with their parent living elsewhere. Child support was least likely in the 2 years after parents' separation, while informal financial contributions were most likely in this time. There were other variations according to coparenting variables, parents' relationship history and socio-demographic characteristics. For more analyses of parents financial support using LSAC see Qu and Weston (2012a).

To accentuate the heterogeneity of post-separation arrangements, information about care arrangements and coparenting were put together into a composite variable, which highlighted the varied ways that parents may (or may not) parent together despite living apart. King and Heard (1999) presented similar research for the USA, also showing the heterogeneity there.

Overall, this research showed that the circumstances of parents who live apart vary greatly, in their own resources, personal attributes, the pathways that led to their living apart, and in the relationships between themselves and their children. Further, these factors can change over time, perhaps adding greater complexity to the situation.

Understanding the characteristics and contexts of these families is particularly important in thinking about the potential wellbeing of children in those families, which is discussed in the following section in response to the second research question. Knowing more about the circumstances of these families is also relevant in thinking about policy supports for children of different ages whose parents live apart. Those supports may need to vary depending upon the ages of children, and may need to address or take account of some of the socio-economic disadvantages that are faced by such families.

2. Which children are experiencing more difficulties with their post-separation arrangements and overall wellbeing?

To answer this question we looked at a range of information from LSAC, some parent reported and some child reported. Measures of how care arrangements were working included parents' satisfaction with the parent living elsewhere's time or involvement with the study child, children's satisfaction with the time they had with each parent, children's reports of closeness to each parent, and parents' reports of conflict with their child. We also had measures of what children's moods and behaviours were like as they transitioned between households and children's reports of how they found living in the home of each of their parents. We also analysed children's social-emotional wellbeing. We were able to compare some of the measures for children with parents living apart to children living with both parents. This was possible for reports of closeness, enough time and conflict, as well as social-emotional wellbeing.

Looking at how wellbeing and experiences were related to care time arrangements, children generally reported poorer outcomes when they had parents living apart with whom they had no or little contact. This was evident especially among children who did not stay nights with their parent living elsewhere but was also apparent for some measures for children who stay one night a fortnight or less with that parent. These families in which children have little or no contact with their other parent, however, are more likely to have a history of negative experiences such as substance abuse or family violence (Kaspiew et al., 2014). This may therefore contribute to children's poorer wellbeing. In families in which children have no day or night-time stays with their parent living elsewhere, an indicator that the primary carer may be reluctant to have the other parent further involved is that despite that parent's low level of involvement with the child, a number preferred that the parent living elsewhere was less involved (16%, compared to 8% in the pooled sample saying they preferred less involvement).

In contrast to this, when children spent a significant number of nights with their parent living elsewhere, depending on which measure was explored, their wellbeing was not necessarily different to that of children who live with both parents together. This was the case in comparing children's reports of closeness to their father, for example, and reports of having enough time with their father. However, when examining social-emotional wellbeing using the SDQ total difficulties score, children did have poorer outcomes if they had parents living apart. While the poorest scores were found for children with no or little time with their father, those who spent approximately equal time with each parent had significantly poorer wellbeing than children living with both biological parents, after also taking account of socio-demographic variables.

When it came to exploring children's experiences with their care arrangements (looking at moods and behaviours around transitions, and reports of living in each parent's household) there was a lot of variation that was not attributable to care arrangements or other factors explored here. However, there were more positive outcomes for children who shared time between their parents' households more equally, which is not surprising since this means it is more 'normal' for them to transition between households and to spend time in each place.

The care time arrangement as measured by nights spent with the parent living elsewhere was not the only factor that mattered to children's wellbeing. Throughout, children tended to have poorer wellbeing if their parents always or often experienced conflict, consistent with other research (Baxter et al., 2011; King & Heard, 1999; Lucas et al., 2013). The analyses here, with a rich set of information about children's care arrangements and contexts, as well as demographic variables, highlight the importance of this factor in thinking about how children may experience their parents' separation.

Primary carers reporting that they sometimes consulted with the parent living elsewhere was, in contrast, related to positive outcomes, perhaps being an indicator of better functioning post-separation parenting arrangements. Sobolewski and King (2005) likewise found that cooperative parenting contributes to a situation that is more positive for children, being linked to more frequent contact, more responsive parenting and relationship quality. Another indicator that quite likely captures positive relationships is that of the parent living elsewhere informally contributing financially to the children's (and in some cases the primary carer's) costs. This indicator also tended to be associated with better outcomes for children. It seems more likely that this reflects a more collaborative relationship, or a more involved parent living elsewhere, rather than being a reflection of this parent's financial input. In fact, the child support indicator rarely was statistically significant in predicting children's outcomes.

The findings discussed above emerged in the multivariate analyses when other socio-demographic and contextual factors were taken into account. Of course, it may be that there are *other* characteristics of families with different care arrangements that have not been explored here, that may at least partially account for the differences observed. Further, an important point is that certain care arrangements have not necessarily *caused* positive or negative outcomes. It may be, for example, that more equal sharing of time between parents reflects better relationships between all family members, and perhaps greater sharing of parenting even before parents separated, that then flows through to better experiences for all after the separation.

We will not endeavour to answer what is the most important factor in predicting children's outcomes when they have parents living apart. The findings were too diverse across the range of outcome measures explored. In the multivariate analyses we included a measure of family socio-economic status, along with other demographic variables, in order to see whether care arrangements contributed to wellbeing even with the inclusion of these variables. With the inclusion of these other variables, care arrangements generally remained significant in explaining variation in child outcomes, but not always. These 'control' variables – the socio-economic and demographic variables – were important also, to varying degrees depending on the outcome explored.

Findings relating to these characteristics highlight how it is not only the post-separation parenting arrangements that matter to children's wellbeing, with other important factors including family income and family structure. For children's social-emotional wellbeing, parenting and parent mental health also mattered. Appropriate programs, services or policies that aim to improve the wellbeing of children with parents who live apart need to take account of these factors.

7.2 The limitations of the study and possible future directions

This research aimed to contribute to the vast international and Australian research literature that relates to children's post-separation care arrangements, making use of the rich information in LSAC collected about and from children with parents living elsewhere over the first 6 waves of the study.

The large-scale nature of LSAC, which includes children with and without parents living apart, and capturing those that transition between these states over the waves, is a great strength of this study. There are, of course, issues around attrition and non-response of parents living elsewhere that suggest we may not have complete representation of all children whose parents live apart. This needs to be kept in mind when generalising from this research to the broader population.

Given the need to restrict the scope and size of this research, not all the rich information in LSAC could be exploited here, and in part the limitations of the research relate to the exclusion of some information that could be added to extensions of this research. Most notably, throughout the analyses when describing children's parental or family characteristics, only those pertaining to the child's primary carer have been used. Clearly, with interviews also with the parent living elsewhere, some of the socio-demographic information from these interviews could be added to the analyses, to consider how the characteristics of the parent living elsewhere (typically the father) also contribute to children's outcomes. For example, analyses of LSAC by Lucas et al. (2013) showed that children's wellbeing is in part explained by the parenting of fathers living elsewhere. In this report we have included some analyses of the parents living elsewhere, and their descriptions of the parenting arrangements, but adding in those parents' characteristics would be a useful future direction with these analyses. The difficulty, of course, is that this information is only available for the subset of responding parents living elsewhere.

The information collected through LSAC does not always allow us to investigate how each of the parents living apart views their circumstances, given there is a greater focus on the primary carer household. For example, parents are asked about whether they consider the parent living elsewhere has enough involvement with the LSAC study child, but a similar question has not been asked about the involvement of the primary carer. The information nevertheless provides opportunities for new insights to be gathered on a range of topics that incorporate both parents' perspectives, including the data presented here on coparenting and conflict.

An advantage of LSAC is that it contains a wealth of information about children's outcomes at different ages, in addition to the parental and family characteristics. Exploring associations between children's care arrangements and their wellbeing is challenging, though, because wellbeing may be measured in a vast set of ways and, further, for the LSAC sample, measures are changed to be age appropriate as children grow. Ideally, a research project would focus on specific sorts of outcomes, so these age-related differences could be taken into account, and factors that affect a specific domain (social-emotional, physical health or learning, for example) could be explored.

This paper covers a number of measures to give some overall insights but further analyses may be needed or warranted to delve further into the findings. Nevertheless, the findings here elaborate on earlier work on post-separation parenting; in particular, through the focus on child age differences. The age-related differences that emerged are important to acknowledge in relation to the development of appropriate services or programs, for which different approaches may be needed for separated families involving the youngest children, when there is more evidence of vulnerability compared to families with older children.

Despite there being significant findings that emerged throughout this report, to what extent these are meaningful and important differences has not been explored. There is considerable heterogeneity across the families in

which parents live apart, and no doubt many details that are pertinent to the wellbeing of parents and children that are not collected in LSAC. Qualitative research has focused on the quality of relationships between children and their parent living elsewhere, providing insights that cannot be gleaned from quantitative data as has been used here. For example, Nixon, Greene, and Hogan (2012) discussed how from the perspective of children, closeness to fathers living elsewhere is not just a function of how often they are in contact with their father. They note, on page 381:

> Children's experiences of closeness to fathers were related to perceptions of their fathers' commitment to their relationship and his obligation to his parenting role, and to a sense of connection to and familiarity with their fathers.

Details such as these are not available through LSAC. A known limitation of the study relates to the sample size. While LSAC is valuable for this research because it is nationally representative, when we focus on children in different care arrangements, the sample sizes are small relative to those in some studies purposively designed for research on post-separation parenting. For this reason, the analyses were usually conducted on a pooled sample, adjusting for child age, giving us sufficient sample to compare children across different care arrangements and contexts. Further, the sample is likely to not fully represent separated parents who have especially difficult or distant relationships. Given that much of this research found these families to be especially problematic in relation to children's wellbeing, it is important to be mindful of the fact that even those within this sample may be better off than families who are not represented well here.

There are further research opportunities with these data beyond those described above. For example, making more use of the longitudinal data is possible, to examine transitions in the various care arrangements and coparenting, and even to consider how the characteristics post-separation are related to differences in coparenting and relationships observed in LSAC at previous waves. Of course, as children grow and the study continues, more work with these data will be possible, tracking children through adolescence.

There were many findings from this research, as highlighted above. It is hoped that this provides some new insights to support the government to develop policies, programs and services for separated families; in particular, to identify those children and families likely to be at greatest risk of poor wellbeing and point to programs or policies that can be further developed to promote positive wellbeing.

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Appendix: Supplementary tables

Table A1: Multivariate analyses of primary carer mental health when parents live together or apart

Characteristics of Child, primary carer and the PLE relationship (Primary carer reported)	Category	PLE indicator	Add partner-status indicator	Add other demographics
		Coefficients		
Child has parents living apart (reference = biological parents live together)	Has parents living apart	-0.16***	-0.06***	-0.04**
Parent current relationship status (reference = single)	Partnered		0.13***	0.13***
Indicators of sibling presence (For each indicator, reference = none of that sibling type)	Has full siblings			-0.01
	Has half siblings			-0.05***
	Has step siblings			-0.02
Socio-economic status (reference = top 80%)	Lowest 20%			-0.07***
Ethnicity (reference = Australian non-Indigenous)	Indigenous			-0.14***
	Overseas-born			-0.07***
Region of residence (reference = major city areas)	Inner regional areas			0.02*
	Outer regional areas			0.02*
Child gender (reference = girls)	Boy			-0.01
Constant		4.42***	4.29***	4.33***
Rho		0.533	0.533	0.528
Number of observations		47,059	47,059	47,059
From number of children		9,649	9,649	9,649

Note: Models include child age and child variables also but these results have not been shown.

Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Table A2: Multivariate analyses of primary carer parenting styles when parents live together or apart

Characteristics of child, primary carer and the PLE relationship (Primary carer reported)	Category	Warm parenting	Angry parenting	Hostile parenting	Consistent parenting
		Coefficients			
Child has parents living apart (reference = biological parents live together)	Has parents living apart	-0.02	0.03	0.04	-0.04*
Parent current relationship status (reference = single)	Partnered	-0.03*	-0.00	-0.07	0.03*
Indicators of sibling presence (for each indicator, reference = none of that sibling type)	Has full siblings	-0.11***	0.09***	0.13***	0.00
	Has half siblings	-0.06***	0.04**	0.05	-0.07***
	Has step siblings	-0.03	0.01	-0.16	0.04
Socio-economic status (reference = top 80%)	Lowest 20%	-0.01	0.03**	0.09**	-0.10***
Ethnicity (reference = Australian non-Indigenous)	Indigenous	0.02	0.08*	0.05	-0.30***
	Overseas-born	-0.02**	0.02	-0.13***	-0.18***

Characteristics of child, primary carer and the PLE relationship (Primary carer reported)	Category	Warm parenting	Angry parenting	Hostile parenting	Consistent parenting
		Coefficients			
Region of residence (reference = major city)	Inner regional	-0.01	-0.03**	-0.05	0.00
	Outer regional	-0.00	-0.04**	-0.05	0.01
Child gender (reference = girls)	Boy	-0.02*	0.11***	0.15***	0.01
Constant		4.67***	2.02***	1.80***	4.18***
Rho		0.503	0.546	0.446	0.576
Number of observations		48,655	39,137	19,397	39,128
From number of children		9,999	9,333	9,107	9,332

Notes: In models with only age and cohort, the coefficients on having parents living apart were 0.01 (not significant, $p > 0.05$) for warm parenting, 0.03 ($p < .001$) for angry parenting, 0.11 ($p < .01$) for hostile parents, -0.09 ($p < .001$) for consistent parenting. All models include child age and cohort variables but these results have not been shown. The sample used varied across parenting measures given some were not collected at all ages (see Figure 2).

Source: In-scope families, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Table A3: Time since children lived with both parents together, by age

	0–1	2–3	4–5	6–7	8–9	10–11	12–13	14–15	Total
	Percentages								
Never	77.1	48.7	30.8	23.9	19.5	16.3	10.8	9.7	24.6
Up to 2 years	22.9	34.5	25.3	18.0	15.4	12.9	9.6	9.1	17.3
>2 up to 4 years		15.7	30.0	19.8	15.9	13.4	14.5	7.3	16.4
>4 years			12.9	36.8	47.6	56.0	64.3	73.2	40.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Information could not be derived for a small percentage of families. This missing category is not shown but is included in the total.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Table A4: History of children's residence with P1 and PLE, children with parents living apart, by age

Prior living arrangements	0–1	2–3	4–5	6–7	8–9	10–11	12–13	14–15	Total
	Percentages								
P1, PLE and child have not lived all together	40.9	26.2	17.5	13.9	10.6	9.4	6.4	5.7	13.7
P1 and PLE used to live together but separated prior to child's birth	36.2	22.5	13.3	9.8	8.8	6.8	4.4	4.0	10.7
Child lived with both parents together, P1 and PLE were previously married	5.5	18.1	35.1	42.3	48.6	55.1	59.8	60.9	44.7
Child lived with both parents together, P1 and PLE were previously cohabiting	17.3	32.0	33.4	32.3	30.8	27.7	28.3	28.3	29.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Information could not be derived for a small percentage of families, and this missing category is not shown but is included in totals.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Table A5: Parents' previous relationship status, children with parents living apart, by age

Parents' previous relationship status	0–1	2–3	4–5	6–7	8–9	10–11	12–13	14–15	Total
	Percentage								
Married	13.0	22.6	38.1	45.3	51.3	57.1	61.4	62.8	47.6
Cohabited	46.1	50.1	43.6	39.1	36.8	32.5	31.0	30.4	37.6
Never lived together	40.9	26.2	17.5	13.9	10.6	9.4	6.4	5.7	13.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Information could not be derived for a small percentage of families, and this missing category is not shown but is included in totals.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Table A6: Proximity of other parents' home to the primary carer's home, children with parents living apart, percentages of children with parents living apart by age

Proximity	0–1	2–3	4–5	6–7	8–9	10–11	12–13	14–15	Total
	Percentage								
<5 km	23.0	21.5	16.8	19.0	18.8	19.4	16.3	16.2	18.5
5–19 km	22.0	27.1	23.6	24.4	21.7	24.5	26.5	23.9	24.0
20–49 km	18.2	16.8	14.7	15.6	13.1	12.8	12.2	13.0	14.1
50–500 km	14.4	13.5	16.6	17.0	16.0	16.2	18.4	15.8	16.3
>500 km or overseas	12.2	12.5	12.4	14.9	12.8	14.0	13.9	17.6	13.8
Unknown/missing	10.2	8.6	15.9	9.2	17.6	13.2	12.7	13.7	13.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Table A7: Number of nights per fortnight children with parents living apart stay with their father

Number of night per fortnight with dad	0–1	2–3	4–5	6–7	8–9	10–11	12–13	14–15	Total
	Percentage								
No days or nights	30.9	32.4	23.6	25.5	17.3	21.6	20.4	24.0	23.0
Day only up to monthly	48.4	24.4	14.6	10.7	8.8	9.4	10.3	12.2	13.7
1, or less often than fortnightly	5.7	13.4	15.8	18.5	15.8	18.5	15.1	15.2	15.9
2–4	9.6	23.5	30.0	33.6	30.0	28.7	29.3	20.1	27.8
5–9	1.7	3.5	4.4	6.9	9.9	11.6	9.3	10.2	8.0
10–14	0.9	1.7	1.9	3.9	4.7	4.8	8.5	10.5	4.7
Missing	2.8	1.1	9.8	1.0	13.6	5.5	7.1	7.8	6.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Table A8: Shared or joint parenting

Primary carer reports of shared or joint parenting	No days or nights	Day only up to monthly	1, or less often than fortnightly	2–4 nights/ fortnight	5–9 nights/ fortnight	10–14 nights/ fortnight	Total
I have main care	96.6	95.9	96.9	83.4	15.4	2.5	81.7
Shared or joint parenting	0.4	3.3	2.4	16.5	84.0	88.3	17.1
Other parent has main care	0.41	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.5	9.2	0.4
Other	2.6	0.7	0.5	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Excludes those with missing data on this question.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 4–6, B and K cohorts

Table A9: Multivariate analyses of the number of nights per year children stay with their parent living elsewhere (OLS Regression)

Variable	Category	Nights with parent living elsewhere	Nights with father living elsewhere
Who is the parent living elsewhere (reference = father)	Mother	4	N.A.
Proximity (reference = <5 km)	5–19 km	-6***	-4***
	20–49 km	-13***	-9***
	50–500 km	-29***	-17***
	>500 km or overseas	-42***	-31***
When child lived with 2 parents last (reference = up to 2 years)	Never	-14***	-27***
	>2 up to 4 years	2	1
	>4 years	-3*	-3
Parents' previous relationship status (reference = married)	Never lived together	-17***	-19**
	Cohabited	-12***	-7*
Parent relationship status (reference = single)	Partnered	5***	4
Indicators of sibling presence (For each indicator, reference = none of that sibling type)	Has full siblings	1	-9***
	Has half siblings	-7***	-20***
	Has step siblings	-1	13**
Family socio-economic status (reference = top 80%)	Bottom 20%	-4**	-6***
Ethnicity (reference = Australian non-Indigenous)	Indigenous	-12**	-17**
	Overseas-born	-4	-10**
Region (reference = major cities)	Inner regional	4*	3
	Outer regional	6*	10**
Child gender (reference = girl)	Boy	4	7*
Child age (years) (reference = 0–1)	2–3	9**	9*
	4–5	13***	15***
	6–7	17***	21***
	8–9	22***	28***
	10–11	23***	27***
	12–13	17***	32***
	14–15	21***	37***
Constant		55***	70***

Variable	Category	Nights with parent living elsewhere	Nights with father living elsewhere
Rho (proportion of variation explained by within-child variation)		0.591	0.705
Number of observations		7,964	7,964
From number of children		2,694	2,694

Notes: Categories for missing contexts were included but results not shown. This was estimated using random effects analyses, given multiple records per family. Excludes those with missing information on number of nights children stay with parent living elsewhere. Parents were married, indicates child lived with parents when they were married. All other cases are coded to 'no'.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Table A10: Multivariate analyses of the number of nights per year children stay with their parent living elsewhere, parent living elsewhere reports (OLS Regression)

Variable	Category	P1 report	PLE report
		Coefficient	
Who is the PLE (reference = father)	Mother	4	14*
Proximity (reference = < 5km)	5–19 km	-10***	-16***
	20–49 km	-16***	-23***
	50–500 km	-40***	-53***
	>500 km or overseas	-63***	-74***
When child lived with 2 parents last (reference = up to 2 years)	Never	-16*	-21*
	>2 up to 4 years	0	5
	>4 years	-4	-1
Parents' previous relationship status (ref= married)	Never lived together	-9	-4
	Cohabited	-7	-4
Parent relationship status (reference = single)	Partnered	10***	7*
Indicators of sibling presence (For each indicator, reference = none of that sibling type)	Has full siblings	7	10*
	Has half siblings	-7*	-5
	Has step siblings	-3	-6
Family socio-economic status (reference = top 80%)	Bottom 20%	-5*	-3
Ethnicity (reference = Australian non-indigenous)	Indigenous	-5	5
	Overseas-born	-2	4
Region (reference = major cities)	Inner regional	6	6
	Outer regional	8	4
Child gender (reference = girl)	Boy	7*	7*
Child age (years) (reference = 4–5)	6–7	8*	3
	8–9	14***	6
	10–11	18***	10*
	12–13	12*	5
	14–15	16**	-2
Constant		71***	96***
Rho (proportion of variation explained by within-child variation)		0.577	0.567
Number of observations		3,121	3,121
From number of children		1,410	1,410

Note: Categories for missing contexts were included but results not shown. This was estimated using random effects analyses, given multiple records per family. Excludes those with missing information on the dependent variables.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart and both parents' reports, LSAC Waves 3–6, B and K cohorts

Table A11: Contact and consultation with parent living elsewhere by age of child, percentages

Contact and consultation	0–1	2–3	4–5	6–7	8–9	10–11	12–13	14–15	Total
	Percentage								
Some consultation	40.7	38.5	34.6	39.9	39.9	43.5	44.2	40.6	40.2
No or little consultation	40.4	35.4	33.4	33.8	28.8	28.5	25.5	22.5	30.4
No or little contact	14.2	23.4	21.3	25.1	17.3	22.3	22.2	26.8	21.7
Missing	4.7	2.8	10.8	1.3	14.0	5.8	8.1	10.1	7.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Table A12: Anger and hostility with parent living elsewhere by age of child, primary carer reports, percentages

Anger and hostility	0–1	2–3	4–5	6–7	8–9	10–11	12–13	14–15	Total
	Percentage								
Often/always	13.8	17.8	17.0	14.6	14.0	15.3	13.0	10.8	14.6
Sometimes	23.2	21.3	24.3	22.4	21.7	21.3	22.7	18.7	22.0
Never/rarely	48.0	39.9	37.2	42.1	38.9	41.1	40.3	41.2	40.5
No contact	9.1	17.9	10.5	20.3	11.5	17.7	15.9	19.3	15.4
Missing	6.0	3.0	11.0	0.5	13.8	4.7	8.1	10.1	7.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Table A13: Within family comparison of parent living elsewhere and primary carer reports of anger and hostility

	Parent living elsewhere report of frequency of conflict					
Primary carer report of frequency of conflict	No contact (%)	Never/ rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often/ Always (%)	Total (%)	*N*
No contact	30.5	31.6	14.6	23.3	100.0	60
Never/rarely	0.8	76.8	16.8	5.6	100.0	1,663
Sometimes	1.2	51.9	33.4	13.6	100.0	895
Often/always	5.9	30.1	30.9	33.1	100.0	487
Total	2.4	61.4	23.6	12.7	100.0	3,105

Note: Excludes those with missing data on this question.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart and both parents' reports, LSAC Waves 3–6, B and K cohorts.

Table A14: Multivariate analyses of primary carer reports of consulting and conflict with child's parent living elsewhere

Variable	Category	Some contact	Some consultation	Often/Always Conflict
			Odds ratio	
Who is the PLE (reference = father)	Mother	0.86	1.15	0.74
Proximity (reference = <5 km)	5–19 km	0.79	0.86	1.24
	20–49 km	0.50***	0.52***	1.38*
	50–500 km	0.34***	0.36***	1.53**
	>500 km or overseas	0.15***	0.16***	1.19
When child lived with 2 parents last (reference = Up to 2 years)	Never	0.11***	0.20***	0.31***
	>2 up to 4 years	0.56***	0.60***	0.75*
	>4 years	0.33***	0.46***	0.62***
Parents' previous relationship status (reference = married)	Never lived together	0.42**	0.62	0.80
	Cohabited	0.51***	0.66**	0.99
Parent current relationship status (reference = single)	Partnered	0.65***	0.84	1.01
Indicators of sibling presence (For each indicator, reference = none of that sibling type)	Has full siblings	1.52***	0.87	1.28*
	Has half siblings	0.76*	0.73**	0.91
	Has step siblings	1.29	0.89	0.59
Socio-economic status (reference = top 80%)	Lowest 20%	0.71***	0.84	0.96
ethnicity (reference = Australian non-Indigenous)	Indigenous	0.43**	0.60*	0.84
	Overseas-born	0.61**	0.80	0.90
Region of residence (reference = major city)	Inner regional	0.85	1.03	0.94
	Outer regional	0.60**	0.70*	0.85
Child gender (reference = girls)	Boy	0.97	1.10	1.01
Child age (years) (reference = 0–1)	2–3	0.21***	0.55**	1.02
	4–5	0.13***	0.44***	1.06
	6–7	0.16***	0.44***	0.70
	8–9	0.18***	0.56**	0.69
	10–11	0.16***	0.44***	0.66
	12–13	0.13***	0.41***	0.48**
	14–15	0.07***	0.34***	0.41**
Wave (reference = 4 to 6)	Wave 1 to 3	NA	0.47***	N.A.
Constant		825.25***	18.12***	0.15***
Rho		0.536	0552	0.500
Number of Obs.		7,921	7,895	7,891
Number of children		2,668	2,670	2,667

Notes: Categories for missing contexts were included but results not shown. This was estimated using random effects analyses, given multiple records per family. Excludes those with missing information on the dependent variables.

Source: In-scope families with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Table A15: Multivariate analyses of matched sample of primary carer and parent living elsewhere reports of inter-parent conflict

Characteristics of child, primary carer and the PLE relationship (Primary carer reported)	Category	P1 report Often/ Always Conflict	PLE report Often/ Always Conflict
		Odds ratio	
Who is the PLE (reference = father)	Mother	0.77	3.23***
Proximity (reference = <5 km)	5–19km	1.41	1.01
	20–49km	1.71*	1.72*
	50–500km	1.99**	2.16**
	>500 km or overseas	1.78	1.70
When child lived with 2 parents last (reference = Up to 2 years)	Never	0.29*	0.96
	>2 up to 4 years	0.66*	1.30
	>4 years	0.53**	0.93
Parents' previous relationship status (reference = married)	Never lived together	0.92	0.38
	Cohabited	1.06	1.00
Parent current relationship status (reference = single)	Partnered	1.06	0.66
Indicators of sibling presence (For each indicator, reference = none of that sibling type)	Has full siblings	1.09	1.07
	Has half siblings	0.70	0.94
	Has step siblings	0.35*	0.76
Socio-economic status (reference = top 80%)	Lowest 20%	1.01	1.30
Ethnicity (reference = Australian non-Indigenous)	Indigenous	1.65	0.79
	Overseas-born	0.96	0.79
Region of residence (reference = major city)	Inner regional	1.17	0.87
	Outer regional	0.96	0.76
Child gender (reference = girl)	Boy	1.01	1.06
Child age (years) (reference = 4–5)	6–7	1.00	0.59
	8–9	0.82	0.67
	10–11	0.84	0.76
	12–13	0.48*	0.69
	14–15	0.53	1.03
Constant		0.09***	0.04***
Rho		0.587	0.549
Number of observations		3,084	3,084
From number of children		1,403	1,388

Notes: Categories for missing contexts were included but results not shown. This was estimated using random effects analyses, given multiple records per family. Excludes those with missing information on the dependent variables.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart and both parents' reports, LSAC Waves 3–6, B and K cohorts

Table A16: Financial coparenting, by cohort and child age, percentages

Financial contributions to Primary carer	0–1	2–3	4–5	6–7	8–9	10–11	12–13	14–15	Total
	Percentage								
Child support and informal financial contributions	38.0	35.5	35.4	31.6	34.7	32.0	27.7	27.3	32.6
Child support only	16.7	21.0	23.5	24.3	23.9	24.2	26.7	25.0	23.8
Informal financial contributions only	10.7	11.4	13.0	16.0	13.1	16.7	18.5	18.4	15.0
No financial contributions	28.4	23.5	16.6	22.4	14.8	18.7	18.1	17.6	18.9
Missing	6.2	8.7	11.6	5.7	13.5	8.3	9.0	11.7	9.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: In-scope families with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Table A17: Within family comparison of parent living elsewhere and primary carer reports of financial coparenting

	Parent living elsewhere report of financial coparenting					
Primary carer report of financial coparenting	Child support and informal financial contributions (%)	Child support only (%)	Informal financial contributions only (%)	No financial contributions (%)	Total (%)	*N*
Child support and informal financial contributions	93.7	0.8	5.3	0.2	100.0	1,453
Child support only	91.5	5.6	2.7	0.1	100.0	682
Informal financial contributions only	59.5	1.4	38.7	0.4	100.0	700
No financial contributions	60.1	5.4	31.8	2.8	100.0	272
Total	82.7	2.4	14.4	0.5	100.0	3,107

Note: Excludes those with missing data on this question.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart and both parents' reports, LSAC Waves 3–6, B and K cohorts

Table A18: Multivariate analyses of primary carer reports of financial support received by parent living elsewhere (logistic regression)

Variable	Category	Child support agreement	Informal payment
		Odds ratio	
Who is the primary carer (reference = father)	Mother	0.08***	1.22
Nights with PLE (reference = less often than monthly or never)	Day only (up to monthly)	3.14***	19.14***
	1 night/fortnight	3.24***	15.38***
	2–4 nights/fortnight	4.44***	38.26***
	5–14 nights/fortnights	0.83	106.26***
Proximity (reference = <5 km)	5–19 km		
	20–49 km	1.00	1.02
	50–500 km	1.08	0.54***
	>500 km or overseas	0.80	0.75*
When child lived with 2 parents last (reference = up to 2 years)	Never	2.47***	0.72*
	>2 up to 4 years	1.55***	0.72**
	>4 years	1.75***	0.87
Parents' previous relationship status (reference = married)	Never lived together	0.27***	0.87
	Cohabited	0.57***	0.82
Parent relationship status (reference = single)	Partnered	0.86	0.79*
Indicators of sibling presence (For each indicator, reference = none of that sibling type)	Has full siblings	1.42**	0.96
	Has half siblings	1.41**	0.77*
	Has step siblings	0.54**	0.91
Socio-economic status (reference = top 80%)	Lowest 20%	0.86	1.10
Ethnicity (reference = Australian non-Indigenous)	Indigenous	0.62	1.54
	Overseas-born	0.64**	1.28
Region of residence (reference = major city)	Inner regional	1.06	1.02
	Outer regional	0.67**	0.96
Child gender (reference = girl)	Boy	0.96	0.98
Child age (years) (reference = 0–1)	2–3	1.41	0.87
	4–5	1.49*	0.93
	6–7	1.02	0.69*
	8–9	1.88***	0.72
	10–11	1.09	0.65*
	12–13	0.95	0.56**
	14–15	1.06	0.70
Constant		0.84	0.19***
Rho		0.517	0.414
Number of observations		7,845	7,874
From number of children		2,680	2,667

Notes: Categories for missing contexts were included but results not shown. These models were estimated using random effects analyses, given multiple records per family. Excludes those with missing information on dependent variables.

Source: In-scope families with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Table A19: Multivariate analyses of primary carer and parent living elsewhere reports of financial support (matched sample)

Variable	Category	Primary carer child support	PLE child support	Primary carer informal	PLE informal
		Odds ratio			
Nights with PLE (reference = less often than monthly/ never)	Day only (<= monthly)	2.54*	1.33	6.10***	3.60*
	1 night/fortnight	2.45*	2.58*	4.56***	3.18*
	2–4 nights/fortnight	3.63***	2.02	13.00***	12.71***
	5–9 nights/fortnight	0.67	0.55	40.93***	83.77***
	10–14 nights/ fortnight	0.50	0.34	(omitted)	(omitted)
Proximity (reference = <5 km)	5–19 km	1.11	1.12	1.32	1.87
	20–49 km	1.55*	2.15**	0.65*	2.14
	50–500 km	1.12	1.62	1.02	4.34**
	>500 km or overseas	2.50**	1.35	1.32	5.36**
When child lived with 2 parents last (reference = up to 2 years)	Never	2.41*	2.58	0.55	0.29
	>2 up to 4 years	2.24***	1.70**	0.56**	0.69
	>4 years	2.17***	2.09***	0.81	0.41
Parents' previous relationship status (reference = married)	Never lived together	1.00	0.81	0.73	2.30
	Cohabited	0.49***	0.47***	0.74	0.71
Relationship status (reference = single)	Partnered	0.66*	0.74	0.84	0.79
Indicators of sibling presence (for each indicator, reference = none of that sibling type)	Has full siblings	1.47*	1.47	0.67*	0.56
	Has half siblings	1.84**	1.17	0.62**	0.59
	Has step siblings	0.62	1.68	0.70	0.57
Socio-economic status (reference = top 80%)	Lowest 20%	0.96	1.05	1.04	0.82
Ethnicity (reference = Australian non-Indigenous)	Indigenous	0.31*	0.54	1.91	2.42
	Overseas-born	0.63*	0.73	1.13	2.51
Region of residence (reference = major city)	Inner regional	0.79	0.76	0.88	0.96
	Outer regional	0.56**	0.73	1.04	0.99
Child gender (reference = girl)	Boy	1.01	0.76	0.93	0.83
Child age (years) (reference = 4–5)	6–7	0.33***	0.54	0.74	3.24
	8–9	0.50**	0.52*	0.65	1.55
	10–11	0.28***	0.54*	0.75	1.32
	12–13	0.19***	0.47*	0.59*	1.35
	14–15	0.21***	0.42*	0.64	0.79
Constant		3.22*	12.33***	0.98	29.39***
Rho		0.497	0.460	0.469	0.466
Number of observations		3,120	3,136	3,033	3,033
From number of children		1,410	1,411	1,382	1,382

Notes: Categories for missing contexts were included but results not shown. This was estimated using random effects analyses, given multiple records per family. Excludes those with missing information on dependent variable.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart and both parents' reports, LSAC Waves 3–6, B and K cohorts

Table A20: Primary carer satisfaction with involvement of parent living elsewhere, by cohort and child age, percentages

Primary carer reports about how much PLE should be involved	0–1	2–3	4–5	6–7	8–9	10–11	12–13	14–15	Total
	Percentage								
A lot more involved	31.5	29.1	28.1	28.8	24.2	27.1	24.4	23.3	26.7
A little more involved	22.0	19.6	17.6	21.7	17.8	20.4	20.5	20.7	19.8
Level of involvement	36.8	39.9	35.9	39.0	37.4	38.9	38.6	39.0	38.1
Less involved	3.5	8.6	7.5	10.0	8.1	9.0	8.4	7.0	8.2
Missing	6.2	2.8	11.0	0.5	12.6	4.7	8.1	10.1	7.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: In-scope families with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Table A21: Within family comparison of parent living elsewhere and primary carer reports of satisfaction with involvement of parent living elsewhere

	Parent living elsewhere reports on their own involvement					
Primary carer reports about how much PLE should be involved	A lot more involved (%)	A little more involved (%)	Level of involvement about right (%)	Less involved (%)	Total (%)	*N*
A lot more involved	54.6	30.6	14.2	0.6	100	798
A little more involved	43.8	31.9	23.9	0.3	100	813
Level of involvement	39.2	26.3	34.0	0.5	100	1,634
Less involved	49.5	25.7	24.8	0.0	100	172
Total	44.5	28.6	26.5	0.5	100	3,417

Note: Excludes those with missing data on this question.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart and both parents' reports, LSAC Waves 3–6, B and K cohorts

Table A22: Multivariate analyses of primary carer being satisfied with PLE involvement (logistic regression)

Variable	Category	Odds ratio
Who is the PLE (reference = father)	Mother	0.75
Nights with PLE (reference = less often than monthly or never)	Day only (up to monthly)	1.10
	1 night/fortnight	0.79
	2–4 nights/fortnight	1.61***
	5–9 nights/fortnight	4.66***
	10–14 nights/fortnight	3.61***
Proximity (reference = <5 km)	5–19 km	0.83
	20–49 km	0.74**
	50–500 km	0.61***
	>500 km or overseas	0.59***
When child lived with 2 parents last (reference = up to 2 years)	Never	1.46*
	>2 up to 4 years	0.93
	>4 years	1.08

Variable	Category	Odds ratio
Parents' previous relationship status (reference = married)	Never lived together	0.70
	Cohabited	0.98
	Some consultation	1.21*
	Often/Always conflict	0.52***
	Child support	1.11
	Informal financial contributions	2.23***
Parent relationship status (reference = single)	Partnered	1.32**
Indicators of sibling presence (For each indicator, reference = none of that sibling type)	Has full siblings	0.96
	Has half siblings	1.22*
	Has step siblings	0.70
Socio-economic status (reference = top 80%)	Lowest 20%	0.95
Ethnicity (reference = Australian non-Indigenous)	Indigenous	0.97
	Overseas-born	1.17
Region of residence (reference = major city)	Inner regional	1.24*
	Outer regional	1.24
Constant		0.30***
Rho		0.333
Number of observations		7,709
From number of children		2,646

Notes: Child age and gender not shown. Categories for missing contexts were included but results not shown. This was estimated using random effects analyses, given multiple records per family. Excludes those with missing information on parent satisfaction. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

Source: In-scope families with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

Table A23: Multivariate analyses of different informants being satisfied with PLE involvement (logistic regression)

Variable		Parent-living-elsewhere satisfaction	Primary carer satisfaction
		Odds ratio	
Who is the PLE (reference = father)	Mother	0.61	1.05
Nights with PLE (reference = less often than monthly or never)	Day only (up to monthly)	1.67	1.94
	1 night/fortnight	1.41	1.35
	2–4 nights/fortnight	2.45	3.19**
	5–9 nights/fortnight	9.48***	12.32***
	10–14 nights/fortnight	12.87***	5.81***
Proximity (reference = <5 km)	5–19 km	0.62**	0.89
	20–49 km	0.47***	0.81
	50–500 km	0.41***	0.86
	>500 km or overseas	0.13***	0.66
When child lived with 2 parents last (reference = up to 2 years)	Never	2.27*	0.71
	>2 up to 4 years	1.33	0.75
	>4 years	1.47*	0.85
Previous relationship status (reference = married)	Never lived together	1.41	1.28
	Cohabited	0.99	0.95

Variable		Parent-living-elsewhere satisfaction	Primary carer satisfaction
		Odds ratio	
Coparenting	Some consultation	1.61***	1.17
	Often/Always conflict	0.65*	0.55***
	Child support	0.77	1.13
	Informal financial contributions	1.88***	2.45***
Parent relationship status (reference = single)	Partnered	0.97	1.21
Indicators of sibling presence (For each indicator, reference = none of that sibling type)	Has full siblings	0.99	0.84
	Has half siblings	1.05	1.45*
	Has step siblings	0.78	0.81
Socio-economic status (reference = top 80%)	Lowest 20%	0.94	0.83
Ethnicity (reference = Australian non-Indigenous)	Indigenous	1.99	0.82
	Overseas-born	1.89***	0.94
Region of residence (reference = major city)	Inner regional	0.99	1.10
	Outer regional	0.77	1.10
Constant		0.07***	0.25**
Rho		0.397	0.390
Number of observations		3,098	3,098
From number of children		1,401	1,401

Notes: Child age and gender not shown. Categories for missing contexts were included but results not shown. This was estimated using random effects analyses, given multiple records per family. Excludes those with missing information on parent satisfaction.*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart and both parents' reports, LSAC Waves 3–6, B and K cohorts

Table A24: Multivariate analyses of over-excitement and withdrawal around transitions (multinomial logistic Regression)

		Primary carer (Base=relaxed)		PLE (Base=relaxed)	
Variable	Category	Over-excited	Withdrawn	Over-excited	Withdrawn
		Odds ratio			
Who is the PLE (reference = father)	Mother	0.93	0.93	1.59	1.50
Nights with PLE (reference = 2–4 nights/fortnight)	Less often than monthly or never	0.64*	1.26	2.62**	5.31***
	Day only (to monthly)	0.57**	0.90	1.34	1.39
	1 night/fortnight	1.17	1.44*	1.30	1.89*
	5–9 nights/fortnight	0.66**	0.66*	1.02	1.23
	10–14 nights/fortnight	0.72	0.41	1.92	2.18
Proximity (reference = <5km)	5–19 km	1.02	0.79	1.21	0.93
	20–49 km	1.29	0.82	1.07	1.14
	50–500 km	1.44*	0.93	1.00	1.19
	>500 km or overseas	1.29	1.14	2.09**	1.58
When child lived with 2 parents last (reference = up to 2 years)	Never	1.34	0.98	0.67	0.32
	>2 up to 4 years	1.38*	1.03	0.91	0.75
	>4 years	1.15	0.87	0.69*	0.44**

		Primary carer (Base=relaxed)		PLE (Base=relaxed)	
Variable	Category	Over-excited	Withdrawn	Over-excited	Withdrawn
		Odds ratio			
Previous relationship status (reference = married)	Never lived together	0.50*	0.33**	1.12	1.66
	Cohabited	0.95	0.91	1.09	1.05
Coparenting	Some consultation	0.87	0.78	0.86	1.25
	Often/Always conflict	2.42***	3.15***	1.41*	1.22
	Child support	1.08	1.07	0.92	0.63*
	Informal financial contributions	0.68***	0.51***	0.99	0.72
Parent relationship status (reference = single)	Partnered	1.16	1.22	0.90	1.36
Indicators of sibling presence (For each indicator, reference = none of that sibling type)	Has full siblings	0.79*	0.67**	1.03	1.01
	Has half siblings	0.96	0.96	1.11	0.69
	Has step siblings	0.86	0.74	1.35	1.42
Socio-economic status (reference = top 80%)	Lowest 20%	1.14	1.19	1.02	2.07***
Ethnicity (reference = Australian non-Indigenous)	Indigenous	0.77	0.78	1.04	1.48
	Overseas-born	0.60***	0.62**	1.00	1.53
Region of residence (reference = major city)	Inner regional	0.95	1.09	1.07	0.76
	Outer regional	1.16	0.73	1.02	1.06
Child gender (reference = girl)	Boy	0.95	0.98	0.94	1.46
Child age (reference = 4–5 years)	6–7	0.95	1.09	0.61**	1.75
	8–9	0.56***	0.92	0.45***	1.56
	10–11	0.44***	1.11	0.43***	2.08
	12–13	0.29***	0.63*	0.18***	1.05
	14–15	0.19***	0.55**	0.14***	0.98
Constant		1.01	0.73	0.53*	0.04***
Number of obs.		3,381		2,484	

Notes: A panel model for the multinomial logistic regression was not available in Stata, so this was estimated with a multinomial logistic regression, allowing for clustering within child records. Categories for missing contexts were included but results not shown. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Source: In-scope families with parents living apart, LSAC Waves 3–6, B and K cohorts

Table A25: Multivariate analyses of child sadness around transitions (ordered logistic regression)

Variable	Category	P1 – sadness on leaving for PLE stay	PLE – sadness at end of contact
		Coefficients	
Who is the PLE (reference = father)	Mother	1.30	2.08*
Nights with PLE (Reference = 2–4 nights/fortnight)	Less often than monthly or never	0.71	1.27
	Day only (up to monthly)	0.69	0.84
	1 night/fortnight	1.21	1.28
	5–9 nights/fortnight	1.15	0.74
	10–14 nights/fortnight	1.12	1.32
Proximity (reference = <5 km)	5–19 km	1.25	1.60**
	20–49 km	1.25	1.96***
	50–500 km	1.29	2.52***
	>500 km or overseas	1.35	7.88***
When child lived with 2 parents last (reference = up to 2 years)	Never	1.51	0.56
	>2 up to 4 years	1.01	0.73*
	>4 years	0.88	0.61**
Previous relationship status (reference = married)	Never lived together	0.60	0.56
	Cohabited	0.93	0.86
Coparenting	Some consultation	0.79	0.63***
	Often/Always conflict	2.65***	1.44*
	Child support	0.93	0.99
	Informal financial contributions	0.50***	1.23
Parent relationship status (reference = single)	Partnered	0.80	1.15
Indicators of sibling presence (For each indicator, reference = none of that sibling type)	Has full siblings	1.12	0.92
	Has half siblings	0.86	0.93
	Has step siblings	1.39	1.39
Socio-economic status (reference = top 80%)	Lowest 20%	1.14	1.33*
Ethnicity (reference = Australian non-Indigenous)	Indigenous	0.60	0.51
	Overseas-born	0.63*	0.95
Region of residence (reference = major city)	Inner regional	0.83	1.25
	Outer regional	1.02	1.47
Child gender (reference = girl)	Boy	0.72*	1.43*
Child age (reference = 4–5 years)	6–7	0.86	0.61*
	8–9	0.91	0.61**
	10–11	0.94	0.47***
Number of observations		3,288	2,247
From number of children		1,648	1,216

Notes: Categories for missing contexts were included but results not shown. This ordered logistic regression was estimated using random effects analyses, given multiple records per family. Constants for cut-points not shown. Excludes those with missing information on the dependent variable.*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart. LSAC Waves 3–6, B cohort and Waves 3–4, K cohort

Table A26: Multivariate analyses of 14–15 year olds' experiences living across 2 households

Variable	Category	'Belonging' in primary carer household	'Belonging' in PLE household	Possessions/ activities in PLE household
		Coefficients		
Who is the PLE (reference = father)	Mother	-0.11	-0.04	0.55
Nights with PLE (reference = 2–4 nights/fortnight)	less often than monthly or never	-0.13	-2.15**	-1.59
	Day only (up to monthly)	-0.18	-1.76**	-2.29***
	1 night/fortnight	-0.17	-1.62**	-2.26***
	5–9 nights/fortnight	-0.14	-0.27	0.40
	10–14 nights/fortnight	-0.07	1.12	1.69
Proximity (reference = <5 km)	5–19 km	-0.18	0.27	-0.39
	20–49 km	-0.09	-0.80	-1.60*
	50–500 km	-0.09	-0.09	-1.22
	>500 km or overseas	-0.17	0.47	-0.29
When child lived with 2 parents last (reference = up to 2 years)	Never	-0.44	-1.11	-1.56
	>2 up to 4 years	-1.07	-0.52	-1.17
	>4 years	-0.31	-0.49	-0.75
Previous relationship status (reference = married)	Never lived together	0.32	1.73	3.07
	Cohabited	-0.62	-0.23	0.05
Coparenting	Some consultation	-0.41	-0.42	0.02
	Often/Always conflict	-0.02	-1.14*	-1.04
	Child support	-0.13	0.16	0.18
	Informal financial contributions	0.44	1.07*	0.77
Parent relationship status (reference = single)	Partnered	0.17	0.08	-0.35
Indicators of sibling presence (For each indicator, reference = none of that sibling type)	Has full siblings	-0.43	-0.30	-0.53
	Has half siblings	-0.42	-0.23	-0.68
	Has step siblings	-0.70	1.00	0.92
Socio-economic status (reference = top 80%)	Lowest 20%	-0.21	-0.47	-0.03
Ethnicity (reference = Australian non-Indigenous)	Indigenous	0.81	0.62	1.16
	Overseas-born	0.54	0.97*	0.70
Region of residence (reference= major city)	Inner regional	0.10	0.33	-0.14
	Outer regional	-1.07*	-0.94	-0.97
Child gender (reference = girl)	Boy	-0.30	0.77*	0.70
Constant		28.17***	26.07***	25.86***
N		469	469	470

Notes: These were analysed using OLS. As the distributions were very skewed alternative specifications were tested but the findings were similar to those presented here, and so this version of the analysis was retained. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

Source: In-scope families of children with parents living apart, LSAC Wave 6, K cohort