



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Life Patterns Project

Pathways in Adult Life: Report on 2009 Survey

Prepared for Victoria University TAFE

By
Dr. Hernán Cuervo, Mr. David Farrugia,
Dr. Graeme Smith & Prof. Johanna Wyn
Youth Research Centre
The University of Melbourne
March 2010



Youth Research Centre
Faculty of Education
The University of Melbourne
Victoria 3010 Australia
T: +61 3 8344 9633 F: +61 3 8344 9632
E: ycrc@edfac.unimelb.edu.au



Pathways in Adult Life: Summary Report on 2009 Survey

This report presents the results of the survey *Pathways in Adult Life* 2009 that students at the Victoria University TAFE (VU) completed last year. The survey is part of an ongoing research project, *Life Patterns*, conducted by the Youth Research Centre, at the University of Melbourne. It explores the options being taken up by young Australians: how they are balancing study, work and personal relationships, how they feel about their health and wellbeing and what kind of priorities and expectations they have in the present and for the future. This report gives you a summary of the findings from that survey, and compares VU students with our overall sample drawn from a number of Victorian TAFE institutions. With VU students' contribution, we are able to provide valuable insights that can inform governments, social institutions and their generation.

The project extends an earlier study we undertook of young Victorians who left school in 1991, who are now in their 30s. We now have two cohorts of Australians and can compare similarities and differences in the experiences of young adulthood across two generations. By completing the survey in 2009, VU students have contributed to the second cohort.

This report shows that managing study and work alongside other life commitments is an important and often challenging aspect of their lives. It reveals that the support and advice that they received from family has been the most positive aspects of life. In addition to the importance that family has in their lives, they value significantly having a steady job, developing friendships and staying healthy. Most significantly, the report shows strong gender difference within the group. For instance, work occupies a more prominent place in their lives for males than for females, while the latter place a greater interest in their studies. Males place a higher priority on leisure activities and on their health than females, with one fifth of the latter expressing that they felt unhealthy in the past few months. Nonetheless, the majority asserted that they would like to spend more time maintaining health and fitness, and developing personal relationships and sharing time with family as well.

Sample

This survey had 348 participants. Table 1 shows that our participants, the group on which this report is based, is close to evenly split on gender but with a few more males taking part (57% males, 43% females), especially in the case of VU participants. Participants come mostly from metropolitan and regional centres and a few from rural areas. Participants from VU were more likely to come from a metropolitan area, and less likely to come from a regional centre, than the cohort overall.

Table 1. Composition of the group, (%)

	Total	VU
Female	43	32
Male	57	68
Metropolitan centre	48	71
Regional centre	40	21
Country town	8	7
Rural, not in town	4	1

As with the general population, participants come from across the various school sectors. More than half attended government schools, at least one fifth studied in catholic schools and the rest at independent schools. The majority completed Year 12 (69%), while a third completed up to Year 11 or 10. Table 2 shows these schooling patterns. Victoria University had slightly less government school graduates than the cohort overall.





Table 2. School background, (%)

	Total	VU
Government school	62	55
Catholic school	24	26
Independent school	14	19
Completed Year 12	69	72
Completed Year 11	12	14
Completed Year 10	16	12
Completed other Year level	3	2

Family, friends and work

Similarly to our first cohort, participants said that since leaving school the support from their family has been the most positive aspect in their life. This was followed by the support from friends, what they have learned about themselves and social life. Interestingly, these aspects rated over other issues such as studies and work. These results reinforce the importance that this group gives to maintaining personal relationships and wellbeing. Further, it reveals that friends and family have been central to most participants for making a successful transition from school. Table 3 depicts these positive elements, including responses by gender, with a comparison between VU students and the rest of the cohort.

Table 3. Positive aspects of your life, by gender, (%)

	Most positive or positive					
	Male		Female		Total Group	
	Total	VU	Total	VU	Total	VU
Support from family	87	85	89	88	88	86
Support from partner	52	53	58	75	55	60
Support from closest friends	73	78	79	75	76	77
Support from other friends	53	49	51	50	52	49
My work situation	66	70	54	54	61	65
My work mates	62	66	48	51	56	60
My studies	67	66	74	58	70	64
What I have learnt about myself	81	80	79	73	80	77
My social life	81	87	70	65	76	80
Travel experiences	54	49	56	43	54	47
Involvement with a community group	34	35	28	36	31	36
Sporting/leisure pursuits	66	55	46	46	57	52



Youth Research Centre

Faculty of Education
The University of Melbourne
Victoria 3010 Australia

T: +61 3 8344 9633 F: +61 3 8344 9632

E: ycrc@edfac.unimelb.edu.au



Table 3 illustrates some important gender differences we want to point out in this report. For instance, females were slightly more likely than males to assert as a positive aspect the support from their partner and closest friends. They also found their studies to be a more positive element in their lives than males did. By contrast, while work did not rank as one of the most positive aspects for either, males expressed greater satisfaction with their work situation and their work mates than females. In general, participants from VU had similar responses to the rest of the cohort, with the exception that more women from VU say that support from a partner is a positive aspect of their lives.

This difference in the importance of study and work was also reflected in responses about participants' main commitment in the past years. Table 4 shows that females have placed a greater commitment to their education than males, while the latter have made work their main priority in 2007 and 2008. This pattern is the same for participants from VU, although VU participants are less likely to be mixing work and study than the cohort overall.

Table 4. Main commitment in 2007 and 2008, by gender, (%)

	Male				Female				Total Group			
	2007		2008		2007		2008		2007		2008	
	Total	VU	Total	VU	Total	VU	Total	VU	Total	VU	Total	VU
Full time work	39	35	46	46	18	19	13	23	30	30	32	39
Full time study	32	33	22	24	41	46	32	42	36	38	26	30
Mixing work and study	18	24	19	19	28	19	36	15	22	23	26	18

Not surprisingly, this commitment of many males to full time work is also shown in the responses about the sources of financial support. More than half of the male participants stated that they supported themselves through the income of their full time employment. On the other hand, women were more likely than men to support themselves with the income of their part time work and the support of their families. Finally, youth allowance was also an important source of financial income for both men and women. Participants from VU were mostly similar to the cohort overall, except that women from VU are more likely to be relying on personal savings.

Table 5. Sources of financial support, by gender, (%)

	Male		Female		Total Group	
	Total	VU	Total	VU	Total	VU
Part time work	21	21	53	58	35	33
Full time work	54	55	22	19	40	44
Direct family support	22	18	30	27	25	21
Repayable loans from family	1	2	4	8	2	4
Private loan	3	0	4	8	4	2
Youth allowance	18	18	21	19	19	18
Scholarships or bursaries	2	2	4	8	3	4
Personal savings	12	11	21	34	16	18
Other	6	2	7	8	7	4





THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

What is important in your life

When we asked participants what level of importance different aspects of life have, many of gave family relationships (86%) and developing friendships (82%) as being of high importance. However, having a steady job most often assumed the highest significance (87%). In addition, physical and mental health were also given a very high importance by participants (both at 83%). There were no significant gender differences regarding all these topics.

Differences between genders appeared in relation to aspects of life that were rated of medium or low importance. For instance, males were more likely to place an emphasis on staying in their local area than young women (m=54%, f=39%) and being involved in leisure time activities was also more important for young men than for young women (m=79%, f=63%). Women placed a greater emphasis on doing well in studies (m=70%, f=87%), marriage or living with a partner (m=38%, f=53%) and having children (m=30%, f=48%) than men.

Wellbeing and health

Despite these priorities, when we asked participants how they actually spent their time, pursuing work and career was the highest ranked activity. This was followed by time spent on family and home life and on studies. Responses mirror those of the earlier generation (our first cohort, now age 35) with time spent on work, family and social life leaving little time for involvement in community or political activities. Tables 6 shows these patterns, including a gender comparison of how much time participants would like to give to the following activities. In comparison to the cohort overall, young men and women from VU are spending less time on their studies.



Youth Research Centre

Faculty of Education
The University of Melbourne
Victoria 3010 Australia

T: +61 3 8344 9633 F: +61 3 8344 9632

E: ycrc@edfac.unimelb.edu.au



Table 6. Comparison of actual time spent with preferred time spent on different activities, by gender, (%)

	"Most of the time spent..."											
	Male				Female				Total Group			
	Actual		Want to		Actual		Want to		Actual		Want to	
	Total	VU	Total	VU	Total	VU	Total	VU	Total	VU	Total	VU
Work & career	60	59	64	64	52	62	67	76	57	60	65	68
Further studies	37	20	38	27	56	46	53	54	45	29	45	36
Personal relations	27	22	39	36	36	41	54	69	31	28	46	47
Home life	42	46	50	50	54	58	63	62	47	50	56	54
Local community life	7	6	11	9	5	0	12	8	6	4	11	9
Political action and causes	3	2	4	0	4	0	8	4	4	1	6	1
Leisure	35	36	41	41	17	19	32	50	27	31	37	44
Health and fitness	39	29	53	50	23	19	54	69	32	26	54	56
The environment	11	9	17	18	10	11	17	19	10	10	17	18

The results in table 6 reveal that quite a few of participants spent less time on the aspects of life that they valued most highly, such as developing personal relationships, family and home life and maintaining health and fitness. Interestingly, the majority of participants would like to spend more time pursuing their work and career. The figures show us that while many men seem to be able to spend enough time on pursuing their work, a significant group of women are unable to dedicate the time to work and career they would like. Finally, while study is one of the main commitments in life for young women, they would like to spend less time on this. Overall, further studies and training was the only activity where participants are not spending less time than they wish to.

It is important to note that maintaining health and fitness presents the greatest gap between how participants currently spent their time and how they would like to spend it – with a 22% difference. In other words, many participants feel that they are not keeping a balance between different activities and that health is an area where they should spend more time and energy. Moreover, it is females rather than males that believe that they have not pay the adequate attention to their health – with a 31% difference compared to males' 14% difference.





Furthermore, when we asked participants how healthy they felt physically and mentally in the past few months, it was females that reported lower levels of health. Table 7 shows these results. In general, participants from VU rate their levels of mental health as healthier than the overall cohort.

Table 7. Health status, by gender, (%)

	Male				Female				Total Group			
	Physical health		Mental health		Physical health		Mental health		Physical health		Mental health	
	Total	VU	Total	VU	Total	VU	Total	VU	Total	VU	Total	VU
Very unhealthy or unhealthy	11	11	12	4	21	26	22	27	16	16	16	11
Neutral	21	23	22	26	29	26	29	8	24	24	25	20
Very healthy or healthy	68	66	66	70	50	48	49	65	60	60	59	69

Overall, table 7 reveals that the percentage of females feeling physically or mentally very unhealthy or unhealthy is double that of their males counterpart. It could well be that the challenge to balance study, work and personal relationships is affecting participants' – especially females – wellbeing and health. Hopefully, our in-depth interviews in this year will give us and the participants an opportunity to reflect on this issue and the possibility to unearth the reasons for this pattern in health.

Thank you for your involvement in our research. We hope to keep working together with you to build a well informed picture of this generation.

We appreciate and thank you for your contribution and we look forward to seeing how 2010 have gone for the group.

