

Life Patterns Project

Pathways in Adult Life: Summary Report on the 2011 Survey

Johanna Wyn, Jessica Crofts,
Hernán Cuervo, David Farrugia,
Chris Peterson, Graeme Smith
& Dan Woodman

Youth Research Centre
The University of Melbourne
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Life Patterns Project Team
Youth Research Centre
Melbourne Graduate School of Education
The University of Melbourne
Parkville VIC 3010
Australia

Phone: (03) 83344 9633
Fax: (03) 8344 9632

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PATHWAYS IN ADULT LIFE:

SUMMARY REPORT ON THE 2011 SURVEY

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of the survey you completed this year. The survey is part of an ongoing research project by the Youth Research Centre, at The University of Melbourne. It explores the pathways through different areas of life taken by Australian young people, including their experiences in education, the workplace, their family and personal relationships, their attitudes to life, and their health and wellbeing. This report summarises some of the most significant results from the survey. With your contribution, we are able to provide valuable insights that can inform governments, social institutions, and your generation.

In this report we are able to compare the experiences of your group – Generation Y – with an older group of participants – Generation X – who we surveyed when they were the same age that you are now. In this report we compare both generations across a range of attitudes and life priorities, noting the similarities and differences between these two groups at around age 23.



SAMPLE AND LIVING SITUATION

This report is based on the responses of 727 participants from Victoria, Tasmania, the ACT and New South Wales. There were more women than men (67% to 33%), and 60% of participants lived in a metropolitan area, with the rest distributed mostly in regional centres and country towns. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the participants involved in this round of the survey.

Table 1. Composition of the group in 2011, (%)

Female	67
Male	33
Metropolitan centre	60
Regional centre	26
Country town	10
Rural, not in a town	4

Half of all participants lived at home with their parents, although this has decreased 4% since 2010 and 14% since 2009. The rest of our participants are mostly living in share houses or with their partner, with some living alone and a few in college residences. This change in living situation reflects a change in the lives of some participants, many of whom are leaving higher education and may be leaving home for opportunities elsewhere.

Interestingly, this situation is different to that experienced by our Generation X participants. Compared to the situation of our older cohort at this time in their lives, 10% more of the participants in this survey have left their parents' home. Table 2 illustrates the current living situation of this sample.

Table 2. Living Situation 2011, (%)

At home with parents	50
In a share house	28
On your own	5
With your partner	17
In college	1
Other	4

It is also worth noting that a slightly higher percentage of our female participants have left home (47% of females are living at home with parents, as opposed to 56% of males). Looking at our participants' relationship status, around half of our participants are single at this point in their lives and almost 40% are in ongoing relationships. Table 3 summarises the relationships of this group.

Table 3. Relationship status in 2011, (%)

Single, unattached	51
Married	3
In an ongoing relationship	39
In a parenting role	2
De facto relationship	8



EDUCATION

This section of the report discusses participants' education experiences. Firstly, it is worth noting that a significant minority of our participants (34%) did not enter post-school studies immediately after completing secondary education. Table 4 shows that many participants had multiple reasons for delaying their entry into further education, with the most popular being travel, uncertainty over the future, and financial reasons.

Table 4. Reasons for taking a gap year, (%)

To earn enough money to support my studies	36
To gain work experience before studying	22
To gain independence (eg, move out of home/town)	37
To travel	43
I wasn't sure what I wanted to study after school	40
To qualify for youth allowance	36

Looking at the data on educational experiences shows that just over half (57%) of our participants are currently studying. Of these, 74% are studying full time and 26% part time. The majority of participants (81%) have spent three or more years in post school education. Table 5 compares the number of years spent studying since leaving school for both generations at the same point in life.

Table 5. Years spent studying since leaving school, (%)

	Gen X	Gen Y
One	12	6
Two	14	13
Three	74	81

Table 5 highlights that while the majority of both generations had spent three or more years in post school education, this trend was stronger amongst Generation Y participants than for Generation X participants. Slightly more than half of participants (53%) have completed a post school course or degree at this time.

EMPLOYMENT

Participants seek a variety of sources of financial support ranging from full or part time work, family support, savings, and government benefits. These vary according to their socioeconomic status (SES). Socioeconomic status in this study is calculated on the basis of parental occupation and level of education. Table 6 summarises these findings.

Table 6. Sources of financial support, (%)

	Total	Low SES	Mid SES	High SES
Part time work	47	40	45	60
Full time work	39	47	46	24
Direct support from family	21	15	24	29
Repayable loans from family	6	4	7	9
A private loan from institution	6	6	8	4
Youth allowance	23	19	28	27
Scholarship or bursaries	10	9	10	13
Personal savings	34	32	32	37

This data shows some interesting differences in sources of financial support across different socioeconomic status groups. In particular, participants from a high socioeconomic background are more likely to be drawing on direct support from their families, whereas participants from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to report full time work as their source of income. In addition, participants from high socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to rely on Youth Allowance for financial support. These participants are also more likely to be currently studying, a finding which may explain these differences.

Many participants enrolled in study are also in paid work. In fact around three quarters of participants in this survey combined work and study either constantly or most of the time. We asked participants for their attitudes about combining work and study, finding a range of experiences. While some had no difficulty combining the two, others reported that they found this combination of activities difficult. Twenty-seven per cent of participants would prefer to study without working, while 12% would like to enter the workforce right away without having to continue their studies. Interestingly, our Generation Y cohort is more likely to have combined work and study throughout their post-school education than our Generation X cohort (45% as opposed to 32%).

Looking at the kind of job that participants have, table 7 shows our participants perception of whether or not their job is likely to lead them to a future career, and compares these to our Generation X cohort at the same time in their lives

Table 7. Career status of jobs, (% of those agreeing with the statements)

	Gen X	Gen Y
I have a job in my preferred career area	35	30
In a 'stepping stone' job related to my preferred career	20	18
In a job not directly related to my preferred career	18	31
In a job without any particular career in mind for myself	8	9

The table shows that about a third of our participants have jobs in their preferred career area, with a further 18% in jobs that they feel will lead them to their preferred career. In contrast, another third of our participants are in jobs that are unrelated to their preferred career. Interestingly, at this time in their lives, the Generation X participants were more likely to report being in their preferred career, with only 17% of them in jobs unrelated to their careers. It seems as though our younger cohort are spending more time in jobs unrelated to their preferred careers.

WELLBEING

Tables 8 and 9 illustrate how participants rate their physical and mental health. In general, while most participants report being healthy, there is a significant minority who say they do not feel they are physically or mentally healthy.

Table 8. Physical health, (%)

Very unhealthy	2
Unhealthy	13
Neutral	22
Healthy	49
Very unhealthy	14

Table 9. Mental health, (%)

Very unhealthy	3
Unhealthy	13
Neutral	23
Healthy	47
Very unhealthy	15

Comments from our participants show that the difficulty and stress of balancing various life priorities was a commonly reported issue influencing participants' physical and mental health.

Uni work & money issues stress me out. Centrelink Youth Allowance does not pay enough to cover rent, bills, car needs, medical or dental, but uni hours & work requirements don't allow time to work.

Graduating from uni in March. It's been quite a roller coaster of emotion. From happiness & relief of finally finishing my 4 year course, to the anxiety worry, frustration and self doubt when finding a graduate job. It's hard enough putting your work out there for the world to see and gets even harder when you get no reply, or attend countless interviews with no job at the end of it all. And I guess that's where physical health comes in.

With many participants juggling work and study while trying to maintain a family and social life, stress and life balance seems to be influencing those who do not report feeling physically or mentally healthy.

ATTITUDES AND LIFE PRIORITIES: A GENERATIONAL COMPARISON

Popular culture and media is full of references to Generation X and Generation Y, with discussions of widely held beliefs about the differences between these two groups. Our data shows that in terms of their attitudes, priorities and ambitions, there are many ways in which these two generations are more similar than they are different. The following data compares both groups across a range of issues related to their priorities in work, family, and their views on the way their lives will turn out in the future. Table 10 depicts the results of which conditions are "very important" for when deciding on a job for the future.

Table 10. Importance of the following in deciding on a job for the future, (%,'very important')

	Gen X	Gen Y
Secure	62	62
Well paid	37	40
High status	14	8
Full time	56	43
Flexible hours	18	24

This table illustrates that there is the same emphasis on security and good pay across both groups. Compared to the older generation, Generation Y places somewhat less emphasis on high status jobs and full time hours, and somewhat more emphasis on job flexibility. Looking at priorities for the future shows more similarities than differences. Table 11 shows these comparisons.

Table 11. How would you feel if the following happened? (% , very unhappy + unhappy)

	Gen X	Gen Y
Never got married	74	69
Never had children	76	76
Had a non-working partner	52.5	58
Couldn't get a full time job	91	85

Generation Y places less emphasis on full time work and is slightly less tolerant of a non-working partner than the previous generation in our study. Aside from this, attitudes are very similar between the both groups. Looking at plans for the future shows that the main difference between groups is the likelihood of marriage, as table 12 shows.

Table 12. Likelihood of the following in five years? (% , very likely)

	Gen X	Gen Y
I'll be married	26	16
I'll be a parent	10	8
I'll have a secure well-paid job	40	29
I'll be in a position of authority	14	9

Two differences stand out in table 12. The first is that Generation Y participants are less likely than Generation X participants were, to predict that they will be married in the next five years. Since this table shows relatively similar attitudes towards the idea of marriage in general, this seems to reflect a cultural shift in which young people are putting off marriage in favour of concentrating on other aspects of their lives for the time being. Secondly, while Generation Y participants place the same emphasis on secure and well paid jobs, they are less optimistic about being in a position like this in five years time than Generation X participants were.

Generation Y places a similar emphasis on the importance of these two aspects of life (marriage and having a secure and well paid job), but anticipate that they will take longer to reach these milestones than Generation X participants. Our interview data with Generation Y revealed a range of attitudes towards future goals such as these, with most participants unconcerned with planning these events too far into the future. Asked as to whether they had concrete plans for five years in the future, one participant said:

Umm no and I don't really want to think about it. I like live as though life is an adventure and you know just take things as they come and hopefully I will be doing something really enjoyable.

Others had more specific plans, although without a solid timeline:

I imagine I would be working ... see I don't actually know where I want to work when I finish this course yet which is, you know, exciting. The summer research I've done or the summer jobs I've taken have made me kind of figured out where I don't want to go, but it's very hard to kind of pick an industry. So again this summer I'm looking at applying to a bunch of consulting places. I

Overall our data shows many similarities in attitudes and life priorities across our two groups of participants. The main difference is that Generation Y anticipates a more unstable path through the job market and are cautious of planning their work or family lives too far into the future. While you and your generation continue to negotiate the opportunities and challenges of these aspects of life, we hope to keep working with you to continue the task of building a well informed picture of you and your generation.

We appreciate and thank you for your contribution and we look forward to seeing how future years go for you and the group.

For more information on the Life Patterns Project visit our website:

http://www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/ycr/life_patterns/