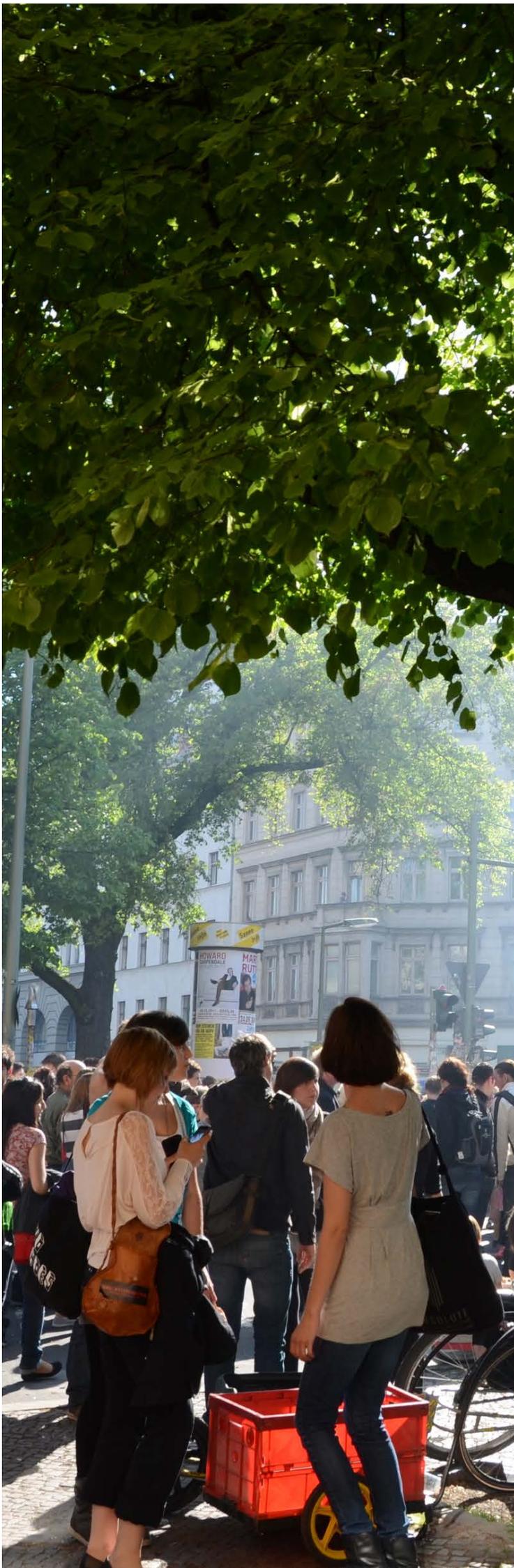


Life Patterns Project

Pathways in Adult Life: Summary Report on the 2013 Survey

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Photo: Julia Coffey

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of the survey you completed earlier 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, attitudes to life, and health and wellbeing. With your contribution, we are able to provide valuable insights that can inform governments, social institutions, and your generation.

This report takes a longitudinal view to provide a perspective on how you have fared over the last five years at work, studying, in your social relationships and your wellbeing and living arrangements. This enables us to understand what has changed for your generation and what has not, and how the different elements of your lives are related.



SAMPLE AND LIVING SITUATION

This report is based on the responses of 638 participants from Victoria, Tasmania, the ACT and New South Wales. Participants were aged 24-25 years in 2013. We note there is an increase in the number of participants that complete the survey on-line compared to those who complete the printed survey. This year 40% of surveys were completed online, an increase from 29% last year. Consistent with previous years, there were more women respondents than men (68% to 32%), and 63% 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 2013, (%)

Female	68
Male	32
Metropolitan centre	63
Regional centre	22
Country town	11
Rural, not in a town	4

Over the last five years the proportion of you who have moved into independent living arrangements has increased. In 2013, fewer participants currently live at home with their parents and rely on direct support from their family as a main source of financial support than in the previous four years. In addition, full-time work continues to be the main source of financial support and more people are in a relationship (either married, in an on-going or in a de facto relationship) than in the previous years. Table 2 shows the trend towards a more independent living over the last 5 years. In addition to the data presented in Table 2, further analysis of your responses show that males (41%) are more likely to be living at home with their parents than females (36%). The level of education achieved also seems to make a difference. For example, those that have not completed a post-secondary school course or degree (42%) were more likely to live with their parents than those that have (37%). Finally, in terms of 'civil status', women are more likely to be married (8% vs. 5%) and in a de-facto relationship (15% vs. 8%) than men.

Table 2. Living arrangements, relationships and financial status, 2009-2013, (%)

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Living arrangements					
Living at home with parents	63	58	50	45	38
Living in a share house	20	25	30	27	24
Living on your own	4	4	4	6	9
Living with your partner	9	13	17	22	29
Civil status					
Single, unattached	60	56	44	48	43
Married	1	1	3	4	7
In an on-going relationship	33	38	37	40	40
In a de-facto relationship	4	6	8	10	13
Sources of financial support					
Full-time work	20	27	40	55	64
Part-time work	62	58	47	34	25
Direct family support	34	29	21	12	9

EDUCATION

The data in this survey reaffirms the pattern of high rates of participation in post-secondary school studies for this cohort. We are aware that a small proportion of participants have not followed the post-school pathway of further and higher education, however by 2013 an overwhelming majority of participants (85%) have done some study since leaving school. By 2009, 77% (74% of males – 78% of females) have completed a post-secondary school qualification, and a third of all participants are still studying (34%; males and females equal). Of those still studying, a slight majority are full-time (55%). The transition from education into work is one of the main processes occurring at the moment. Between 2010 and 2013 the percentage of participants studying decreased from 72% to 34%.

The reported sources of financial support also reflect changes in the balance between study and work. To some extent this also reflect the increasing proportion of participants who have completed their studies and are entering full-time work. Sixty-six per cent of those who have completed post-secondary education said that full-time work was their main source of financial support compared to 51% of those who are still studying (51%). Part-time work as a source of financial support was more common among those that have not completed a tertiary course or degree (33%) than among those who have (23%). We turn now our attention to the sphere of work to continue highlighting the interrelationship between the different spheres of life.



EMPLOYMENT

This year's survey has not presented any surprises in relation to the persistent flow from part-time to full-time work. More of you are working full-time than two years ago (from 39% in 2011 to 54% in 2013) and part-time employment has dropped from 33% in 2011 to 16% in 2013. In terms of status of employment, the trend is from non-permanent to permanent work for most of the participants. Table 3 illustrates this trend.

Table 3. Employment status 2009 – 2013, (%)

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Permanent	34	40	46	52	60
Renewable contract position	3	5	8	9	9
Limited term contract	3	4	6	6	5
Sessional or casual	47	37	29	21	16
Not applicable	13	13	10	9	8
Other	1	1	1	2	2

Comments by some participants illustrate the trend towards more secure employment. While some participants enjoy the stability and standard hours that are associated with some full-time work, others value flexibility at work, which for some enables a better distribution of their time.

As I'm permanent and full time I have a feeling of security and I have been able to achieve certain things because of this. (Regional, female)

I have really enjoyed leaving hospitality and having evenings and weekends off. Having some routine has really improved my happiness, though sometimes I find it hard to fit in things like doctor's appointments, etc., which can only be done during the week. (Urban, female)

My working conditions are great and flexible allowing me to do more or be involved in activities outside of work. (Regional, male)

While Table 3 shows the progression towards more stable employment for a majority of you, many participants still have not achieved security in their work. Patterns of employment insecurity and instability are also reflected in the proportion of participants working irregular hours. At least seven out of ten participants currently working are doing some form of irregular hours. Table 4 shows the working conditions for those participants that have been employed from 2009-2013.

Table 4. Working conditions 2009 – 2013, (%)

Does your work ever involve...	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Working night or evening shifts	54	51	51	47	44
Weekend work	72	67	67	59	59
Working public holidays	58	51	50	46	43
Variability in when you work	N/A	N/A	27	33	42
Not applicable	22	24	5	30	27
Other non standard shifts	5	4	5	4	4

Table 4 reveals that over the last five years a significant proportion of participants have done irregular working hours. According to the 2013 survey, working irregular hours was most common among those in part-time work, in jobs not related to their field of study, and those still studying. While many conditions have remained the same, it is important to point out the increasing percentage of people affected by variability in their work. The conditions of irregular work have an impact in other spheres of participants' lives, including wellbeing and the capacity to sustain relationships that matter to them, as the following quotes illustrate.

Shift work can be difficult to maintain health, relationships and a balanced lifestyle. You're working when your friends, family or partner are at home. You can't just go away on weekends or public holidays. Shifts can change at short notice and aged care is short staffed so a lot of extra shifts. People who don't work shift work will never understand how hard it is on your body, body clock and routine. (Regional, female)

I have to sacrifice some other commitments due to shifts & on call. I have to be organised to fit in the other aspects of my life around work. Changes in shift & long hours occasionally take a toll on my health, resulting in me becoming run down, fatigued & occasionally sick. The flexibility provided by the shift hours however, also has its advantages so that I can have days off during the week. The shifts also offer me the extra cash I need at the moment as I am saving for our wedding. (Urban, female)

Weekend work and public holidays work are draining and disrupt my work / social life balance but are non-negotiable if I am to keep my job. (Urban, female)

The challenges and difficulties experienced by participants as a result of their working conditions might help explain the predisposition of some to seek new employment opportunities. Of those currently working, a third are looking for another job; half are expecting to stay in their job at the most for two years; and 50% said that 'looking for a better opportunity' was the main reason for changing jobs. A possible interpretation of this data is that it takes a few years of navigating the labour market to arrive at the preferred job.



YOUR GENERATION

Findings from this survey reveal two patterns that have been consistent over time. Firstly, like your generational predecessors (popularised as members of Generation X), finding a job in your field of study has not been easy for many of you. Nonetheless, six out of ten participants reported that they are currently working within their field of study and that their tertiary qualification has helped them to get their current job. A quarter of participants, however, asserted that they feel they need another degree to help them get a work in their chosen field of study, while a third of participants stated that there are few jobs in the area related to their field of study. This data illustrates a pattern that we have seen with both cohorts in the Life Patterns program: a weakening of the relationship between tertiary education credentials and work compared with previous generations (e.g. the “baby boomers”). While studying might pay off in terms of employment opportunities, for your generation, like the preceding one, the route is far from linear and smooth. The following quotes illustrate the experiences shared by many participants.

After finishing my degree I spent almost a year trying to find work in my field of study. I was then able to find work in my field or study but know of many fellow students who went through the same course as I who have not yet found work in our field of study. (Urban, male)

I currently have a job in the general field of my study. But, the job I would prefer (in development work) is in a competitive field. I feel like I would need a masters and experience to get a job in this area. (Urban, female)

The lack of jobs available in my chosen career negates the completion and high results of my uni degree. It seems you get further by knowing someone than by having the appropriate skills. (Country, male)

Secondly, the research provides an insight into the interrelationships between study, work and relationships in participants’ lives. Like the Generation X participants in the Life Patterns study, managing ‘the balance’ between the commitments and demands of different life spheres can be difficult. The following quotes highlight some common problems experienced by participants who are studying.

I overloaded my schedule by taking on full-time study and trying to work at the same time. I had problems with anxiety and at times, depression. I would like to dedicate more time to exercise but don't feel like I can fit it in right now. (Urban, female)

Uni load is so much. I took weeks off work to complete it. This leads to financial struggle but I am supported by parents. This is good but I don't like my parents needing to support me. (Urban, female)

These two quotes illustrate the impact that combining study and work has had on the wellbeing (mentally and financially) of some members of your generation. We now turn our attention to issues related to wellbeing and broader goals in life.

WELLBEING AND GOALS IN LIFE

Tables 5 and 6 illustrate how participants rate their physical and mental health. In general, while the majority of you report being healthy, there is a significant minority (between 13% and 18%) who say they do not feel they are physically or mentally healthy.

Table 5. Physical health 2012-2013, (%)

	2012	2013
Very unhealthy	3	2
Unhealthy	11	15
Neutral	18	21
Healthy	50	49
Very healthy	18	13

Table 6. Mental health 2012-2013, (%)

	2012	2013
Very unhealthy	3	4
Unhealthy	11	13
Neutral	26	24
Healthy	46	45
Very healthy	14	13

In general terms, there has been a decrease in participants’ mental and physical health. Participants that reported feeling mentally and/or physically very unhealthy or unhealthy has increased from 14% to 17% of the total group between 2012 and 2013. When adding the group self-reporting ‘neutral’ health, we find that approximately four out of ten participants were unable to state that they feel healthy or very healthy. Further, the proportion reporting being mentally healthy or very healthy has declined since the first time we asked this question in 2007: from 67% to 58%.

Pressure of study, work, and being away from family, relatives and friends are conditions that seem to influence mental health negatively. While some exercise regularly to manage stress and keep fit and/or feel on-track with their goals in life; others are finding it hard to continue balancing different spheres of life. Here are some quotes that illustrate these different experiences.

I have found my adult work life takes a lot of time compared to when I was studying. Being desk bound has caused me to “fill out” a little, but I am still healthy. Work can be a bit mentally draining combined with meeting my other commitments. (Country town, male)

I am very happy & healthy at the moment as I am engaged & getting married in October. I occasionally suffer from anxiety, usually in association with stress & tiredness & this is when I feel out of control. (Urban, female)

I have recently moved cities to be with my partner. I have always been very close to my family, so moving out of home has been hard at times, realising I am not as involved in their lives any more. (Urban, female)

The quotes above reinforce common issues across both Generations X and Y over the years. Frustrations expressed about the difficulty of balancing life have had in many instances are related to feeling ‘time-poor’ regarding your capacity to spend time with family and personal relationships.



In last year's report, we showed that from 2005 to 2012 little changed in your priorities in life: 'to have a special relationship with someone', 'to have financial security' and 'to care and provide for a family' have been participants' top three priorities. These priorities are present in the quotes above.

Table 7. What level of importance do the following have for you personally, 2013, by "very high", (%)

	"Very high" in 2013
Involvement in community activities	8
Earning a lot of money	11
Developing friendships	37
Being physically attractive	13
Marriage or living with a partner	37
Having a steady job	50
Involvement in leisure activities	40
Involvement in work as a career	24
Family relationships	58
Having children	29
Working to correct social problems	12
Owning your own home	41

The numbers displayed in Table 7 confirm the concern for stability and security at work and the predominance of family relationships as significant aspects of participants' lives. The last question of the survey asks you to reflect and comment on issues that matter to and that might or might not be covered in previous questions. In the last two surveys, but particularly in 2013, we have found that costs of living and housing affordability are common concerns for your generation. These quotes summarise this generational feeling.

The cost of living is ridiculous! Rent is beyond the reach of the common person & competition is ruthless for poor quality infrastructure. For the first time in my life I have a steady, decent wage and I am still unable to be totally financially independent from my elderly parents. I find it greatly upsetting but other than that, things are improving slowly.
(Urban female)

I find it frustrating that most people in our generation will never own their own home if they wish to live in places like Melbourne. Personally, with my job it limits me to the places I can work; certainly not rural (where I am originally from). It has always been a dream of mine to own my own home and it is somewhat depressing to think that I never will unless I move away from Melbourne.
(Urban female)

In sum, some consistent generational patterns can be found over time: the quest to secure a job, the need to achieve a better balance between work and study and other spheres of life, and the powerful role of family and personal relationships in participants' lives. 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 your lives.

**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://web.education.unimelb.edu.au/ycr/life_patterns/

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