

More families going solo

SHARON LABI, Sunday Telegraph, 1 June 2008

THE once-dominant traditional family unit is under threat by the soaring number of single parents and childless couples.

Demographers say the nuclear family of two parents and two children is losing ground to couples with no children and sole-parent families.

In the 10 years from 1996 to 2006, the number of couples with children grew just two per cent while the number of sole-parent families rose 23 per cent and the number of couples with no kids increased by nearly 22 per cent.

“The bottom line is that people are increasingly choosing to live in smaller and smaller social units, as singles, as couples, as single parents. The days of the big family are gone,” demographer Bernard Salt said.

Social researcher Mark **McCrimble** said the number of single-parent families started from a low base to reach 800,000 Australia-wide in 2006 but would keep growing.

While the number of sole-parent families has risen, the number of divorces granted has dropped slightly.

In 2006, there were 2.3 million two-parent families and nearly 1.9 million couples without children.

Factors contributing to the difference in figures include couples not formalising their separation with divorce, de-facto couples with children splitting and more women having children on their own.

“Women, economically, are far more empowered and so don't need a male provider,” Mr **McCrimble** said.

“The social desirability of marriage or being in a stable relationship to have a child is not as strong as once it was and so women are able to do their own thing.”

Raising Children Network director Warren Cann said single parents can do as good a job raising children as couples. He said: “One advantage of being a single parent is you don't have to constantly negotiate your approach with another person. You can do it your way.”

However, he said single parents were more prone to economic and social difficulties.

Colleen Potter has become a single parent twice -- two years after the birth of daughter Shae, now 12, and after the birth of 10-month-old son Jack.

“It's hard, and sometimes can be lonely, but I'd much rather have two kids and myself in a safe, loving, happy environment than a volatile, uncertain, unpleasant environment,” she said.