

Chapter 2

Housing Multigenerational Households in Australian Cities: Evidence from Sydney and Brisbane at the Turn of the 21st century

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Introduction

The global trend towards city living, together with population ageing, has precipitated significant economic, social, political and environmental shifts. Amongst other outcomes, these shifts have led to changes in family configurations and living arrangements. Some changes are directly related to family forms – notably delayed childbearing, increased divorce rates and higher incidence of re-partnering – while others are less directly related, including improved employment opportunities for women, delayed retirement and more complex migration patterns both within and between countries. These changes are also happening in highly urbanised Australia.

Much housing-related research into such changes, however, has focussed on the worldwide increase in the number and percentage share of single person households over recent decades (de Vaus and Richardson 2009). An oft-neglected, though nonetheless significant, living arrangement is that of multigenerational households, where multiple generations of related adults co-reside in the same household. In Australia in 2011, single person households comprised one-quarter of all households (24.3%), while multigenerational households comprised around one-sixth (14.5%). In terms of the total population, however, members of multigenerational households comprised one-fifth of the Australian population (19.7%), while members of single person households comprised around one-eleventh (8.8%; ABS 2012a; 2012b).

This chapter draws on research funded by the Australian Research Council undertaken between 2012 and 2014 to report on the nature and scale of multigenerational households in Australia, their motivations for living together and their experiences of multigenerational living. Through this research, we identified a range of issues that need to be understood by policymakers and industry in order to effectively cater to the needs of a broad range of households, including multigenerational households. We focus on the reasons why and how multigenerational households live together and their implications on suitable housing design, and associated housing and planning policies. Specifically, multigenerational households have a higher propensity to live in owner-occupied detached housing, yet

affordable options of these are becoming increasingly rare in areas with good access to employment and services as a result of house price increases and compact city policies. What housing solutions then can developers and policymakers alike offer to this sizeable Australian population?

Multigenerational Households across Nations and Time

Much 21st-century research into people's living arrangements has focussed on shrinking average household size. Indeed, as de Vaus and Richardson (2009: 4) point out, the percentage share of single person households in many western societies worldwide has consistently increased post-WWII, with many (like Australia, Germany and the Netherlands) increasing by threefold or more between 1946 and 2006. Some research connects this rise to the western individualised concept of family formation (e.g. Popenoe 1993) where 'the family' as a social institution has increasingly played a diminishing role, assisted by the onset of 'new individualism' – the individualisation of welfare rights and entitlements (Giddens 1998: 6) – since the late 20th century. Others have suggested an increase in the number and percentage share of single person households is an indirect result of population ageing, with ever increasing numbers of older persons worldwide living alone and a concurrent decline of multigenerational co-residence throughout the 20th century (Grundy 1999; Tinker 2002). Harper (2006: 165) notes that 'the knowledge of demographic ageing is itself impacting on social, economic and political decisions [taken by] both national and international institutions, and individuals themselves', including impacts on important life course transition points (first home-leaving, partnering, and childbirth) and subsequently people's living arrangements.

Since the 1980s, waves of global economic downturn have resulted in uncertain employment conditions and increasing pressure to higher education attainment. As a consequence, these have precipitated changes to the decline in multigenerational co-residence in eastern and western societies alike (Cobb-Clark and Ribar 2009; Yieh et al. 2004). While economic difficulty and increased pressure for tertiary qualification have been noted as primary contributors to young adults' delayed first home-leaving and consequently a return to multigenerational co-residence, there is also evidence to suggest that family background and ethnicity are strong factors that affect the home-leaving motivation and timing of young adults (Flatau et al. 2007).

Recent Australian and international research into multigenerational households has focussed largely on delayed home-leaving amongst the younger generations (e.g. Alessie et al. 2005; Flatau et al. 2007) and the financial dis-benefits experienced by older generations as an unintentional (and to many, undesirable) outcome (e.g. Cobb-Clark and Ribar 2009). Some research has also considered the 'boomerang' phenomenon – where adult offspring return to live in the parental home after periods of independent living (e.g. Parker 2012), which is now also observed in many western societies, including in Australia (Liu et al. 2013). The delayed home-leaving of young adults, however, is only part of the story. There is also evidence to suggest other factors are increasingly influencing the formation of multigenerational households.

An empirical Australian national study by Judd et al. (2010) indicates that high rates of relationship breakdowns have seen older adult 'children' (in their thirties and forties) returning to live with their parents for practical, financial and emotional support. External shocks, notably the global economic downturn as experienced in the late 2000s, have also played a significant role in older adults returning to live in the parental home (Kaplan 2009). In parallel, there is also growing evidence of older parents moving in to reside with their adult children, both in Australia and overseas (Olsberg and Winters 2005; Swartz 2009). Australian studies highlight the increasing incidence of relationship breakdowns amongst older people, with some parents moving in to live with their adult offspring for emotional and practical support but also to provide caring duties for their grandchildren (Judd et al. 2010). These shifts have reconfigured the role that 'the family' plays in care giving (Swartz 2009) in an environment where government policies increasingly encourage older people (and people with disabilities) with low care needs to remain living in the general community, where feasible, rather than relocate to residential care facilities. In Australia, this is reflected in changes to de-institutionalise the aged and disability care sectors (Australian Government 2012; DisabilityCare Australia 2013).

These already complex trends and responses to policy changes are further complicated by Australia's continually changing cultural fabric. Australia's main sources of immigrants have gradually shifted from English-speaking countries (most notably the UK) to Asian and African nations (including China and India) since the introduction of multicultural policies in the 1970s (Burnley 2009). These new migrant sources have resulted in increased diversity in Australia's cultural and ethnic makeup, and many of these more recent migrants had come from societies where multigenerational co-residence is a common arrangement (Billari and Rosina 2005; Chui 2008; Izuhara 2010; Mehio-Sibai et al. 2009). Furthermore, many of those new migrants entering Australia under the family reunion scheme are, for financial reasons, likely to live in multigenerational households. This is significant as the number of applicants to the family reunion scheme, and particularly for their financially non-contributing older parents to migrate to Australia, has been increasing since the mid-2000s (Liu and Easthope 2012). This is already reflected in the changing cultural landscape of multigenerational households in Australia, with a gradual shift away from the more traditional migrant sources from Southern Europe to Asia and Africa, where as much as two-fifths of immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East lived in multigenerational households in 2011 (Liu et al. 2013).

These changes considered, multigenerational households have comprised around one-fifth of all households in Australia since the 1980s. This is despite their numbers having continued to grow and nature of their formation continuing to change. Geographically, the concentration of multigenerational households in Australia has not played out equally across the country, with the majority of multigenerational households in early 21st century living in the outer suburbs of the major cities. The outer suburbs are the main growth centres of these cities (ABS 2013) and offer more affordable housing options for households that require larger dwellings than the inner ring suburbs where there have been notable absolute decreases in the number of multigenerational households since the 1980s. These same inner ring suburbs have also experienced the most intense outcomes of Australia's compact city policies, where lower density housing stock has over time

gradually been replaced by higher density housing that is often considered less suitable for multigenerational co-residence (Liu et al. 2013).

Methodology

In this chapter we report on the findings of a multi-year study of multigenerational households in Australia. We used a mixed-methods approach, including a time-series analysis of Australian Census data, a specially designed web-based survey, solicited diaries and follow-up interviews with multigenerational household members in Greater Sydney and Brisbane. This chapter focuses on the results of the web-based survey, with materials from the other methods used to provide supporting evidence.

This research notes Cohen and Casper's (2002: 1) advice that 'conceptually, standard practices for identifying multigenerational living arrangements and their implications remain elusive'. As such, a multigenerational household is defined as any household in which more than one generation of lineally related adults (i.e. of parental-offspring relations) co-reside in the same household, with the oldest of the youngest generation being 18 years or older. This definition is designed to be as broad and as encompassing as possible, though notable multigenerational household forms – e.g. three-generation households where the oldest grandchild is still to turn 18 – are excluded. Compared to other similar studies, however, our definition and its application (especially in the Census analysis) represent the most comprehensive collection of socio-demographic and housing data of these households in Australia.

Census Analysis

Custom cross-tabulations from the six most recent five-yearly Australian Census were purchased following consultations with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census specialists. This allowed for a time-series analysis of key demographic and socioeconomic statistics relating to multigenerational households in Australia spanning a 25-year period between 1986 and 2011. The definition of multigenerational households as described above was applied to the cross-tabulations, which highlighted the age groups, Statistical Local Area of residence, region of birth, dwelling structure, tenure and housing costs (monthly mortgage repayment and weekly rent by quintile) of multigenerational household members.

Web-based Survey

A web-based questionnaire survey was administered via the online portal Key Survey between August 2012 and July 2013, during which time 392 members of 382 multigenerational households in Greater Sydney and Brisbane completed the survey. Participants were recruited via university staff and student online portals, advertisements in local newspapers in local government areas known to have large proportions of people living in multigenerational households (as identified through the Census data analysis), mX (a free daily newspaper available at the city centres) and posters in public libraries in 28

local government areas throughout Sydney and Brisbane. The survey was translated into Arabic, Spanish and simplified Chinese and advertised in migrant newspapers to encourage non-English speakers to participate. As a consequence of these recruitment methods, the survey presents a slight bias towards households with tertiary students who have yet to leave home (or had previously moved out but returned, i.e. boomeranged) compared to the total population living in multigenerational households. The cultural and household makeup and the dwelling structure and tenure profiles of the respondents, however, match closely with the Census analysis. The confidence interval for the survey is 4.95 at 95 per cent confidence, calculated on the basis of individuals living in multigenerational households in Sydney and Brisbane.

Respondents were asked to complete three sections of the survey, focussing on:

1. the dwelling;
2. the living arrangement – including the reasons why they live together – and how it impacts on their personal and family lives; and
3. their personal thoughts on multigenerational living and their likelihood of continuing with this arrangement.

Multiple adult members of the same household were encouraged to complete section three (in confidence) to provide multiple perspectives, and in ten households two members of the same household completed the survey.

The questionnaire included a mix of pre-coded and open-ended questions. Pre-coded questions were analysed using frequency tables and cross-tabulations, while open-ended questions were post-coded and analysed thematically, focussing specifically on why these households co-reside and their likes and dislikes of the arrangement.

Solicited Diaries and Follow-up Interviews

Two qualitative methods – solicited diaries and follow-up interviews – were designed to provide more in-depth data from multigenerational households, especially regarding the day-to-day experiences and interpersonal relationships amongst multigenerational household members. For both of these methods, whole households (instead of individuals) were considered as units, but efforts were made to accommodate household members who wanted to complete the diaries or be interviewed separately. For each participating household, a package containing instructions, a stamped return envelope and two A5 notebooks was provided. The diaries and interviews were conducted between October 2013 and March 2014.

Survey respondents were asked if they would participate in the diary-writing and interviews, and 61 agreed to do so. Attrition was experienced during scheduling, with only 29 households eventually continuing on to the diaries and interviews. Two households chose to skip the diary exercise and partook in interviewing only; members from three households were also interviewed separately due to scheduling difficulty, with the main interviews completed face-to-face at the participant's home and supplementary interviews conducted over the phone, resulting in a total of 21 interviews from 18 households.

In all, 21 completed diaries were returned from 15 households, with each diary comprising between 15 and 30 (often single-page) entries. Interviews lasted between 20 minutes and two and a half hours. All interviews were transcribed professionally, and together with the diary entries these transcripts were analysed using thematic coding.

Case Studies

The major cities of Sydney and Brisbane were chosen as two contrasting case studies for the research. As the main receiving city of many immigrants to Australia, Sydney has long had an ethnically diverse population. Further, since the 1980s it has also had the highest percentage share of its population living in multigenerational households amongst all state capitals. The proportional increase of multigenerational households in Sydney between 1986 and 2011 (43.6%) has also exceeded the overall proportional increase of households in the city over the same period (39.7%). While Brisbane is also experiencing significant recent population growth (especially since 2000) and particularly from overseas and interstate immigrants, the ethnic composition of settlers is different to that of Sydney's (OESR 2011). In terms of increases in multigenerational households, Brisbane had the most rapid proportional growth amongst all state capitals during 1986–2011 (62.5%), though this was dwarfed by the overall increase in households (91.5%). Moreover, Sydney and Brisbane are contrasting case studies as they have different housing market conditions so that each population has distinctive housing demands and constraints (Yates and Gabriel 2006). This is important as housing affordability was highlighted by many survey respondents from both cities as a significant financial factor that influenced their decision to enter a multigenerational co-residence arrangement.

Reasons for Multigenerational Co-residence

Survey respondents were asked to provide reasons behind their decision to live in a multigenerational household in an open-ended question in the survey. Responses to this question were post-coded and analysed thematically. Two-fifths of the respondents provided multiple reasons, suggesting that the formation of multigenerational households in contemporary Australia is the product of complex decision-making of the households, involving a mix of active choice and circumstantial constraints. The ten most commonly nominated reasons for multigenerational co-residence are presented in Table 2.1.

Recent literature suggests that the rise in the number of multigenerational households in western societies has predominantly been due to a delay in young adults' first home-leaving (Cobb-Clark and Ribar 2009; Gee et al. 2003). While there is evidence to suggest this is also true in Sydney and Brisbane – with 'adult children yet to leave home' being the third most common reason for multigenerational co-residence amongst our survey respondents – there is also evidence of other, more significant drivers behind this increase. For Sydney and Brisbane respondents alike, finance appeared to be the main driving force, with two-fifths or more respondents from each city stating this as one of their primary reasons, but as explained below this could encompass a wide range of considerations. Other primary

reasons include 'ease in providing care and support', and 'starting and/or continuing education', two factors that may have also limited some respondents' ability to afford independent living. Of note, a much smaller proportion of survey respondents nominated cultural practices as a reason for multigenerational living. This is in contrast to work by Flatau et al. (2007) in Australia and work undertaken in Canada by Gee et al. (2003), which found that cultural practices were an important motivator of multigenerational living.

Table 2.1 Top ten reasons for living in multigenerational households, multiple responses, Sydney and Brisbane, 2012–2013

	Sydney		Brisbane	
	No.	%	No.	%
Financial	97	38.0	70	55.1
Care arrangement and support	48	18.8	36	28.3
Adult children yet to leave home	46	18.0	17	13.4
Starting/continuing education	29	11.4	16	12.6
Older (grand)parents moving in	27	10.6	12	9.4
'We're a family'	23	9.0	9	7.1
Convenience/practicality	20	7.8	11	8.7
Cultural practice	20	7.8	3	2.4
Adult children boomeranged	6	2.4	10	7.9
Relationship breakdown	3	1.2	10	7.9
Other	8	3.1	2	1.6
Households stating multiple reasons	99	38.8	67	2.84
Total respondents	255		127	

Source: survey (multiple response question).

These primary reasons given by survey respondents for living in a multigenerational household represent a mix of structural constraints and individual choices, although for most households the line between choice and constraint is blurred.

While finance was the most commonly nominated driver for multigenerational co-residence amongst our respondents, it represents the expression of active choice in:

- sharing household costs – 'share expenses and so parents can support child during a stressful period of time' [Brisbane, survey];
- assisting children in their pursuit of higher qualifications – 'my eldest daughter is working part-time and going to university' [Brisbane, survey]; and

- being able to afford a better home now or in the future – ‘I can’t afford to rent in areas that provide reliable access to the CBD. Areas I possibly could afford are too far for daily commuting and are poorly serviced by public transport’ [Sydney, survey]; ‘to help with the cost of living, to have a better quality of life, to support/help each other’ [Brisbane, survey].

Concurrently, finance also represents the respondents’ constraints in:

- being unable to sustain an affordable housing option on their own – ‘my mother-in-law is divorced and she has been a housewife all her life, so can’t support herself financially’ [Sydney, survey]; and
- affording the high cost of living in Australian cities – ‘Sydney is very expensive to rent other than on the outskirts which means family is fragmented and unable to offer support’ [Sydney, survey].

Similarly, the second most common reason for co-residence – ease in providing care and support – is a reflection of both active choice and structural constraints, with some households co-residing because:

- older parents and/or young adult children cannot financially afford to, or indeed want to, live independently – ‘My mother did not have enough savings or pensions to live alone’ [Sydney, survey];
- retired parents have moved in to help take care of young children and to share resources – ‘My father assists me with baby sitting and picking up the kids from school. He also helps to pay my mortgage’ [Brisbane, survey]; and
- paying for a service/facility to care for their family members is an unacceptable (and often unaffordable) option, whether for cultural or personal reasons – ‘culturally, having [my mother] live by herself was unacceptable to me’ [Sydney, survey].

While many respondents explained that they decided to live together for pragmatic reasons such as to share resources and provide care for their family, others gave more emotive reasons for multigenerational cohabitation. These included a desire to provide a better future for their children (which may be culturally related, especially with migrants’ original migration experience and aspirations; Teunissen 1992) – ‘My daughter is a uni student (part time), while I can’t pay her fees for her I can at least cover most of the general living expenses like food, electricity and transport. This enables me to feel that I am providing for her and helping her build a better future’ [Brisbane, interview]; ‘I think that it’s just expected that you look after your children until they’re ready to fly the coop, as it were, and then they’ll look after you when you’re in your old age. It’s kind of a trade’ [Sydney, interview] – or to reciprocate the care they received in the past – ‘It is our belief that we should ‘give back’ or contribute to the older generation who sacrificed much to provide us with our upbringing. It is important to provide that respect and acknowledgement of the older generation’ [Brisbane, diary].

Indeed, one-in-twelve respondents nominated family as a primary reason for co-residence. For these respondents, the decision to live with their family was often an easy

one to make – ‘we’re a family – it makes sense for us to live together’ [Sydney, survey] – though most acknowledge the complex nature of family, or the familial bond itself, which are often more difficult to articulate clearly – ‘the main reason is we cannot live without each other. We are bonded strongly to each other as in family’ [Sydney, survey].

Notably, more than two-fifths of the survey respondents nominated multiple reasons for their co-residence, pointing to the complexity that led these households to co-reside. While finance was the most common driver for multigenerational co-residence, it was only the sole reason given by one-third of cases, with ‘ease in providing care’ and ‘starting/continuing education’ often precipitating financial constraints. Several respondents also used multigenerational co-residence as a means of achieving life-long goals, with improved financial conditions being an unexpected positive outcome. For example, one diary and interview participant noted that had her family not entered into a multigenerational co-residence situation, her husband would not have been able to leave a career that he had grown to dislike and return to study. As such, the drivers behind multigenerational co-residence are decidedly complex and often multiplicitous.

Housing Outcomes of Multigenerational Households

The evidence presented above regarding the reasons for multigenerational co-residence infers some important implications for housing and welfare policies. Many multigenerational households live together at least in part for financial reasons, often influenced by housing (un)affordability. As a result of their household structure, many multigenerational households also have specific space and housing design needs, which include accommodating elderly and disabled household members, young children and students. This raises the question of what type of housing multigenerational households desire and actually live in.

Dwelling Structure and Tenure

The housing consumption patterns of multigenerational households differ to those of most other household types. Reflecting national trends since the 1980s, there is a higher propensity for multigenerational households in Sydney and Brisbane to live in detached houses than in other property types (Table 2.2). Consequently, very few multigenerational households live in medium and higher density dwellings, which tended to have fewer bedrooms and living spaces. This contrast in the types of housing that multigenerational households and all other households occupy is especially stark in Brisbane, with almost all multigenerational households living in detached houses (94.2%), compared to 81.9 per cent of all other households. This observation is a reflection of both the spatial needs of multigenerational households – which on average comprised more members than all other household types – but also the type of housing stock available in each city (a larger percentage share of Brisbane’s homes are detached houses compared to Sydney). In 2011, multigenerational households in Sydney had an average household size of 3.7 people (2.7 for all other households) while Brisbane’s multigenerational households had an average size of 3.6 people (2.7 for all other households).

Table 2.2 Dwelling structure of multigenerational households, Sydney and Brisbane, 2011–2013

	Multigenerational households (%)				All other households (%)	
	2012–2013 Survey		2011 Census		2011 Census	
	Sydney	Brisbane	Sydney	Brisbane	Sydney	Brisbane
Detached houses*	73.7	87.6	82.9	94.2	65.5	81.9
Semi-detached	4.9	0.9	9.0	3.3	11.4	6.6
Flats	18.3	8.8	7.7	2.3	19.7	8.1
Other**	3.1	2.7	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.5
Not stated	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0

* Survey responses include detached houses with or without a granny flat. For Census outputs, however, granny flats are counted as a separate dwelling; the figures quoted here may therefore be an undercount.

** For the survey, 'other' includes multigenerational households that had the following living arrangements – 'in two detached houses on adjacent lots', 'in two adjoining semi-detached dwellings on the same lot', 'in two adjoining semi-detached dwellings on adjoining lots', 'in two adjoining units/apartments', and 'in separate units/apartments within the same block'.

Source: ABS 2012b; survey.

Aside from a propensity to live in detached houses, multigenerational households are also far more likely to be living in owner-occupied properties than all other household types (see Table 2.3). Around four-fifths of multigenerational households in Sydney and Brisbane were owner-occupiers in 2011, compared to less than two-thirds of all other household types. Multigenerational households were also more likely to own their homes outright, though like most other household types, there has been a downward trend away from outright homeownership amongst multigenerational households since the 1980s (Liu et al. 2013). For the first time in 2011, there were higher percentage shares of multigenerational households living in homes that were mortgaged than fully owned across all state capitals and regional Australia. This reflects rapidly increasing house prices and decreasing affordability in cities Australia-wide (Yates and Gabriel 2006), which, as abovementioned, have prompted some to enter into a multigenerational co-residence situation.

Design and Modifications

As some of the survey and interview participants explained, homeownership was particularly important to many multigenerational households, not only because of the cultural importance placed on homeownership in Australia, but also because of the need to undertake home modifications, which cannot be easily achieved in a private or social rental situation. For many multigenerational households, and especially those who entered into the arrangement with adult children boomeranging or older parents moving in, some level of home modification

was required. Some spoke of temporary ‘quick fixes’ such as using tall bookcases as a dividing wall, while others undertook more substantial extensions and renovations to accommodate the extra household members. The ability to pool resources has also allowed some of these households to enter homeownership, something that they may not have been able to achieve on their own – ‘When we first came here we rented, and I didn’t have finances to buy a house and it was only in the last year that [my daughter] has saved, so we were able to use her savings and my permanent employment to actually be able to get a mortgage together. Otherwise I still wouldn’t be able to buy on my own’ [Brisbane, interview].

Table 2.3 Tenure profile of multigenerational households, Sydney and Brisbane, 2011–2013

	Multigenerational households (%)				All other households (%)	
	2012–2013 Survey		2011 Census		2011 Census	
	Sydney	Brisbane	Sydney	Brisbane	Sydney	Brisbane
Fully owned	41.5	33.6	35.6	30.8	25.5	22.0
Under mortgage	42.4	59.6	42.4	45.2	39.5	41.0
Rented*	16.1	16.8	19.5	22.2	27.9	31.1
Other	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.6	1.5	1.3
Not stated	0.0	0.0	1.6	1.3	5.6	4.6

* Include both private and social rentals.

Source: ABS 2012b; survey.

While many households spoke of sharing resources as one benefit of multigenerational co-residence, the sharing of space was noted as a common drawback of such a living arrangement. This is despite the fact that many of the homes that multigenerational households occupy comprise multiple bedrooms and living spaces.

In particular, many participants spoke about how modern houses have not been designed with multigenerational co-residence in mind, and as such they have had to ‘make do’ and find alternative uses of bedrooms and living spaces. This was especially the case for households with adult children who boomeranged back to the family home after experiencing life shocks such as relationship breakdowns and therefore returned suddenly. Households in this situation spoke of turning living spaces into bedrooms or the rumpus becoming an off-limit storage area:

We had to modify our home, which is only a small home, to accommodate – changing the front sun room into a bedroom to accommodate children sleeping over, their children

coming here, changing another bedroom into our eldest son's room that we used before for an office, sewing room sort of thing. [Brisbane, interview]

As a result, shared living space is often limited, and with multiple users this can create tensions. Some households spoke of spending more time in their own bedrooms when all members of the household were home as the only solution for enjoying some level of privacy, whether it was the freedom of watching their own TV program or enjoying a hobby:

I think you need two living rooms and that might just be in our situation but my father is almost completely deaf so you can't watch TV with him, because the TV has to be at 400 decibels and so it would be challenging for all of three generations to share one TV or one living space. [Brisbane, interview]

Indeed, the ability to maintain some level of privacy in a shared home was the most common challenge faced by multigenerational household residents (see Table 2.4).

Table 2.4 Challenges of multigenerational co-residence, multiple responses, Sydney and Brisbane, 2012–13

	Sydney		Brisbane	
	No.	%	No.	%
Privacy/interference	102	60.0	60	57.7
Impact on intra/interfamilial relationships	32	18.8	20	19.2
Chores/Not pitching in	20	11.8	18	17.3
Space	13	7.6	11	10.6
Lack of flexibility/compromises	6	3.5	14	13.5
Nothing	15	8.8	1	1.0
Financial constraints	5	2.9	5	4.8
Noise	4	2.4	3	2.9
Generational contract/expectations	3	1.8	3	2.9
Stigma of living at home	2	1.2	3	2.9

Source: survey (multiple response).

The ability to make modifications is limited by a number of factors. Finance is often a top consideration for many multigenerational households wanting to modify their homes, where the high cost means that compromises were often made. Bedroom space is regularly prioritised, with kitchen and bathroom renovations to accommodate more adults (larger

pantry, repairs and replacements of appliances due to additional users) less likely to be carried out.

Some households that considered their multigenerational living arrangement to be long-term opted to design and build their own detached home to suit their household's needs. This is often a rather costly option, and some of these households also admitted to not knowing how best to design a dwelling for multigenerational co-residence, even though some of the families had lived together for several years prior. This partly comes down to the ability of architects, home builders and interior designers to fully understand these households' less common needs, but also the fact that the needs of these households are constantly changing, with young children growing up and older household members' ability to negotiate stairs being common considerations. One three-generation household that had their current dwelling specially designed for multigenerational co-residence admitted to changing their living arrangements five times in the seven years since first moving in because they simply did not (and could not) have anticipated some of the changes to their household – 'we've changed the configuration of our living arrangements a number of times' [Brisbane, interview].

Other households had opted not to create the 'ideal home' for their family, because they were concerned that it would limit potential resale opportunity of the property and their ability to recoup investment spent on the home – 'you'd never get the money back when you sell' [Brisbane, interview].

Implications on Housing and Planning Policies

A large proportion of multigenerational households live in detached houses in the outer suburbs because of their relatively larger household size and because this is where the larger and more affordable properties are. Despite living in larger properties, for many people living in a multigenerational household raises challenges in respect to sharing space and the (lack of) privacy that the 'traditional' detached family home in the suburbs offers. This has important implications for housing design and housing and planning policies.

At the scale of the dwelling, the design of many existing larger properties is not conducive to multigenerational living, partly because of changed housing needs (e.g. home offices, hobby rooms for the retired) but also the heightened need to provide spaces within the multigenerational home where some level of privacy can be maintained. The majority of larger project homes have open planned living areas with little ability to close off areas for different groups of users. Some developers have begun to respond to the market demand for multigenerational living in Sydney by providing custom-built houses for this market (Madigan and Vonow 2014), but this does not necessarily overcome the dilemma of re-sale value and the high cost involved in constructing these multigenerational homes raised by some of our research participants. Another solution may be to encourage the adoption of universal design principals in all new properties and major refurbishments (Beer and Faulkner 2009: 11). While the principles of universal design has been around since the 1960s (Follette Story et al. 1998), they are seldom put into practice outside of custom-designed homes. The introduction of the Livable Housing Design Guidelines

(Livable Housing Australia 2013) with its three levels of universal/adaptable design application is a step in this direction, but as it is a voluntary code it is unlikely to overcome resistance in the housing industry due to cost. Policies should encourage the adoption of these design principles in all new housing that would facilitate not only houses that are suitable to people of all ages, but also housing that can be more easily modified to suit a wider range of living arrangements, including multigenerational households. As suggested by some of our interviewees, better information and guidelines on housing design and modification for multigenerational living could also be helpful to consumers, designers and the housing industry.

At the city scale, the push for more compact cities has facilitated smaller households to live closer to employment and service centres, but affordable housing options for larger households with similar accessibility are rare. Based on evidence from this research, it seems likely that many young adults will continue to remain living in the family home and delay their first home-leaving. If these multigenerational households continue to be concentrated in the outer suburbs of major cities, with poor access to employment, higher education and service centres, this will negatively disadvantage these young adults and also impact the quality of these households' family life, a main reason why some of the multigenerational households co-reside in the first place. Urban planners and policymakers will need to take into account the resulting demand for affordable larger dwellings with good access to such services. This might include promotion of the provision of larger dwellings, or more flexible options, in multi-unit developments that are closer to service centres. There is some evidence that this is already occurring at the high-end of the Sydney development industry, with recent high-profile multi-unit developments including a large number of 3–4 bedroom (1 Australia Avenue n.d.) and dual-key apartments (Central Park n.d.). Such developments could be promoted throughout the market, to provide similar options at the more affordable end of the property scale. The relaxation of the rules regarding building secondary dwellings on the same title (e.g. granny flats), as has been the case recently in NSW (NSW DPI 2011), may also be beneficial in providing more housing options for multigenerational households.

Conclusions

Multigenerational households form a relatively small proportion of households in Australian cities, and as a result academic and policy concerns have moved towards the needs of single-person and other smaller households. In spite of this, multigenerational households contain a relatively large proportion of our population, and those numbers are growing rapidly in Australian cities. In Sydney, the largest of all of Australian cities, the growth in the number of people living in multigenerational households has far outpaced the growth of the population as a whole. It is important therefore that the needs of these households are not overlooked in policies and discourses focused on the compact city and the need to house smaller households.

The nature of multigenerational living means that many multigenerational households have particular housing needs that are not necessarily well-served by the type of housing

they are currently living in – predominantly detached houses in the outer suburbs of cities – which can disadvantage these households in regards to access to employment, education and services and in regards to the suitability of the design and layout of these properties for multigenerational living. The solutions lie in recognising multigenerational families as a common and important household form and in developing suitable planning and housing design. This does not necessarily mean the development of custom built ‘multigenerational housing’, but instead suggests that housing design and planning policies need to be flexible enough to accommodate many different household forms. Suggestions include better information and guidelines for multigenerational dwelling design and modification, the wide adoption of universal design principles, planning policies to facilitate the provision of larger dwellings in multi-unit developments and the building of secondary dwellings on the same property title.

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