



TITLE: Attitudes towards Personal Relationships

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In 2004, the then-Federal parliament successfully introduced changes to the Marriage Act (1961) to limit the definition of marriage exclusively as a union between a man and a woman. In the intervening ten-plus years, there have been significant changes in attitudes, which put these legislative changes not only at odds with the attitudes of Australians, but global legislative trends. Polls suggest almost 70 percent of Australians are in favour of marriage equality, but this interestingly is occurring against the backdrop of downward trends in the marriage rate and increasing cohabitation rates. Using the Household, Income, Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey, a nationally representative longitudinal survey, this paper charts attitudes towards personal relationships—marriage, cohabitating and the rights of homosexual couples—over time following the 2004 legislative changes. Preliminary analysis suggests there is an increasing acceptance of cohabitating relationships and divorce but a strengthening of attitudes in favour of marriage as a social institution and the granting of similar rights to homosexual couples afforded to heterosexual couples.