



The  
Marriage  
Foundation

Press Release from The Marriage Foundation

Date: 01 December 2013

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Cohabiting couples will account for half of all family breakdown in 2013

Despite accounting for only one in five parents, unmarried couples are set to overtake married couples as the main source of family breakdown by the end of 2013.

Cohabiting couples make up only around 19 per cent of parents, according to Office for National Statistics (ONS) data. However in 2010, they accounted for 48 per cent of family breakdown cases.

The wealth of data provided by the Understanding Society survey published this month has enabled the annual rate of family breakdown to be quantified for the first time. While an average of 5.3 per cent of cohabiting couples with dependent children under sixteen years old split up each year since 2009, only 1.3 per cent of equivalent married couples break up.

Based on current trends, the percentage of family breakdowns from unmarried households is set rise to 50 per cent by the end of 2013, according to a report by the Marriage Foundation think tank.

It will be the first time in British history that more unmarried couples have split up than those who have tied the knot.

Harry Benson of the Marriage Foundation, who wrote the report said: "This marks a significant tipping point for society today. We hear so often that rising rates of divorce is the cause of growing family instability, but these statistics prove how far that is from being the case.

Divorce rates have actually been falling since 2004.

"It is frequently said that low income and poor education are the main reasons behind family breakdown, rather than whether or not the parents are married. But if anything, the average income and level in education has improved since the 1980s, while family breakdown has doubled.

"We haven't poorer or less well educated these past thirty years, but we have become less willing to commit to our families. The link between declining numbers of marriages and increasing levels of family breakdown is plain for everyone to see.

Harry Benson continued: "In short, we have an epidemic of family breakdown in this country because so few people realise how badly the odds of success are stacked against unmarried cohabiters. If you're living together as unmarried parents, you're four times more likely to split up than married parents.

“And that’s why this research finds that one fifth of couples who cohabit account for one half of all family breakdown.

“94% of studies in OECD countries have shown that family breakdown has a detrimental effect on children’s wellbeing.

“We also know that family breakdown presents estimated annual bill of £46 million to the taxpayer. The huge cost is due to the greater likelihood that single parents require additional financial support – benefits, tax credits and housing – as well as other support and interventions – such as health, domestic violence – in comparison with couple parents.

“That’s why, for the sake of the children and society at large, parents and future parents should seriously consider making a concrete commitment to their family by getting married, or at the very least making a clear plan for where they are headed.”

ENDS

**Notes to editors:**

For media inquiries please contact Beatrice Timpson on 07803 726 977 or [beatrice@mippr.co.uk](mailto:beatrice@mippr.co.uk). Harry Benson is available to be interviewed on 07515 699187.

The Marriage Foundation was founded by Sir Paul Coleridge, a High Court Judge, moved by his personal experience in 40 years as a barrister and judge specialising in family law. The Foundation seeks to improve public understanding of marriage reduce the numbers of people drawn into the family justice system – some 500,000 children and adults each year.

[www.marriagefoundation.org.uk](http://www.marriagefoundation.org.uk)