



PRESS RELEASE FROM MARRIAGE FOUNDATION

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Marriage inequality between rich and poor soars to all-time high

New data analysed by Marriage Foundation shows an alarming widening of the marriage gap between rich and poor.

Marriage Foundation found mothers with young children are four times more likely to be married if they are wealthy than if they are poor.

Among mothers with children under five, Marriage Foundation research has found 87 per cent of those with household incomes over £45,000 are married compared to 24 per cent of those with incomes under £14,000.

Other social indicators such as education and housing status also indicate a stark gap between uptake of marriage for the most privileged and the least.

Only 25 per cent of mothers in social housing were married in 2006, the latest available year of data from the General Household Survey, compared to 72 per cent of mothers with a mortgage.

This gap has opened up almost entirely since the 1970s when marriage uptake for both groups, regardless of housing status, was around 90 per cent.

Similarly, 83 per cent of mothers with degrees were married in 2006, compared to only 52 per cent of mothers without a university education.

Harry Benson, Research Director of Marriage Foundation, the think tank dedicated to promoting stable families, compiled the report in collaboration with Professor Stephen McKay of Lincoln University.

Benson is concerned about what this means for family stability among the least well off. He commented: "What our research shows is an almost universal take-up of marriage among the rich, while for the poor it is on course for total extinction.

"Some claim marriage does not matter anymore, so what's the problem? But if it does not matter, why do the rich rush to tie the knot in their droves? It's because they know the act of getting married – discussing their future then making a public and legal promise to stick together in front of friends and family – changes the dynamic of the relationship, reducing their chances of splitting up.

“Our previous research has shown that those who marry have a far greater chance of survival as a couple than those who cohabit. 93 per cent of parents who are still together when their children complete their GCSEs are married.

“Cohabiting couples make up only 19 per cent of parents but account for half of all family breakdown.

“The drop in marriage rates amongst the poor is causing a huge rise in family breakup for the most disadvantaged.”

Sir Paul Coleridge is Chairman of Marriage Foundation and spent over forty years working in the family courts. He founded the think tank in 2012 in response to the ever-increasing crisis of family breakdown and the number of children he saw going through the family courts, particularly from among cohabiting couples. In 2014 he resigned as a High Court Judge to concentrate on the work of the Foundation. He commented:

“This research shows that children born to poor households are facing ever increasing disadvantage compared to their better off peers. Average incomes have risen since the 1970s, so they will be superficially better off materially than the previous generation.

“However, many, many more of them will suffer the trauma and longer term effects of family breakdown due to the increasing trend away from marriage.

“Whether through the psychological impact of parental separation or the loss of contact with one parent, children living in lone parent families tend to fare worst on almost any negative social indicator. They are more likely to be truant from school, suffer mental health problems, miss out on higher education and obtain less well-paid employment.

“No government or political party serious about combatting social inequality can afford to ignore these findings about the marriage gap. It is one of the main drivers of the cycle of social disadvantage which is inevitably passed on down the generations.

“Policy makers and commentators do no favours to this section of society by refusing to absorb what the research is telling us and pretending all domestic arrangements, however informal, have the same outcomes for children. They do not, and we all need to be honest about it. Turning a blind eye for fear of upsetting people does no one, least of all those affected, any favours at all.

“The government spends a fortune collecting the data. It is a largely pointless exercise if its implications are not heeded.”

Harry Benson added: “The rich elite talk liberal but they act conservative. It is quite frankly immoral that they are prepared to benefit from the institution of marriage themselves but will tell the poor it doesn’t matter or make a difference.

“Quite clearly getting married does make a difference to your life chances and your children’s outcomes. Anyone who cares about social mobility and inequality should be deeply concerned that the poor are not marrying.

“Now it is imperative that we find ways to encourage a revival of marriage among the poor.”

ENDS

Notes to editors:

For media inquiries please contact William Walter on 07971 441735.

Harry Benson is available to be interviewed, on 07515 699187.

Comparison between marriage rates for mothers with children under five with mortgages and in social housing 1972-2006

| | 1972 | 1982 | 1992 | 2002 | 2006 |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Mortgage | 92 | 95 | 85 | 76 | 72 |
| Social housing | 88 | 72 | 43 | 27 | 25 |

Source: Office for National Statistics (2007), Social and Vital Statistics Division, *General Household Survey*

About Marriage Foundation

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.

Marriage Foundation has highlighted the crisis of family breakdown. Their research has found that a child born today only has a 50 per cent chance of living with both parents by the time they reach fifteen.

Foundation research has also found that 93 percent of parents who stay together until their child’s fifteenth birthday are married.

A source of statistics on marriage, cohabitation, commitment, divorce and family breakdown can be found on the [Marriage Foundation website](#).