

£51 bn – the Cost of Family Failure to the taxpayer is large and growing

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Relationships Foundation's 'Cost of Family Failure Index' is now estimated to stand at £51 billion, up from £37 billion ten years ago.

This very large figure represents the financial cost of failure in our family and relational lives together as a nation. In essence it shows the extent of the financial cost of failed relationships borne by government – ie by the taxpayer. Moreover, this figure only shows one part of the overall picture as it cannot begin to take into account the often intense pain and suffering felt by those experiencing family failure.

Relationships Foundation has always argued that functioning families are key to learning, capacity building, acquiring skills and providing welfare. Family breakdown reduces health, wealth and wellbeing – the three things people are most interested in. And reduced health, wealth and wellbeing all put pressure on relationships making the cycle of breakdown more likely to go on turning.

Over the past decade the basis on which we have made our annual calculation has tracked the many changes and developments in how official figures are calculated and reported. Despite these often major changes it has so far often been possible to use proxy figures to update the indicators we originally selected. It has, however, become increasingly apparent that the Index now needs fundamental review, something that we have already begun for the future.

In the meantime, however, we have rounded off the first ten years of the Index by updating our last published figure (£48 bn) in line with increases in government expenditure in the specific areas we originally chose as indicators. Taxpayers pick up many of the costs when relationships fail and our Index has demonstrated this across five areas: tax and benefits, housing, health and social care, civil and criminal justice and education.

But to get bogged down in figures risks missing the main point. What matters more than the particular headline figure is the government's bizarre and persistent blindness to the issues it raises. Put at its simplest, Relationships Foundation's intention in publishing the cost of family failure index has been just that – to highlight **the cost**. And we've shown that the cost of family failure **is large and growing**. And that these rising costs are **borne by the taxpayer**. While Relationships Foundation recognises that some people will be wary of language which suggests that enabling good relationships is the business of the state we need to remember that the state – the taxpayer – already is involved in picking up the ever-increasing bills.

Relationships Foundation deplores the way the costs of family failure continue to increase. It is time for the Prime Minister formally to place family policy at the heart of her government. Like others, we have long argued that responsibility for family matters should be located in the Cabinet Office. The government needs a long-term strategy to support the modern family otherwise it will soon be simply incredible for it to make any coherent claims to be seen as 'family friendly'.

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Relationships Foundation is the think tank for a better connected society. It was set up in 1993 to develop relational thinking and engage with policy makers. Website: <http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org>

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