

Marriage Foundation

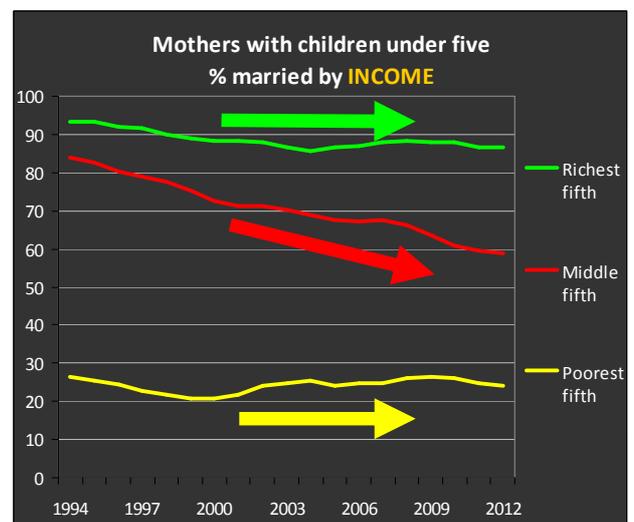
Middle classes shun marriage

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- New analysis of data from the Family Resources Survey and the General Household Survey shows that the trend away from marriage was largely confined to low income groups prior to the 1990s but is now spreading to families on middle income.
- The Marriage Gap – across families of different age, education, employment and housing status – began to emerge for the first time during the 1970s.
- But whereas the vast majority – 84% – of middle earning families with young children were still marrying in 1994, only 59% were married in 2012, a fall of 25% over 18 years.
- Among mothers with children under five, the proportion of middle earners who are married has fallen faster than any other income group.
- The Marriage Gap matters because couples who marry before having a child are more likely to stay together, thus avoiding the increased risks to income and child well-being if they split up.



Recent figures from the Office for National Statistics show that births to married parents accounted for 53% of all births in 2014 compared to 91% in 1972 (ONS 2015a).

This trend away from marriage has profound consequences for stability & children's outcomes.

Couples who marry before their child is born are more likely to stay together while bringing up their child – independent of age and education – compared to couples who marry later or not at all.

Whereas 76% of couples stay together if they were married before their child was born, 44% stay together if they married later on and 31% if they never married (Benson, 2015).

Couples who split up are then far more likely to experience poverty and need higher levels of

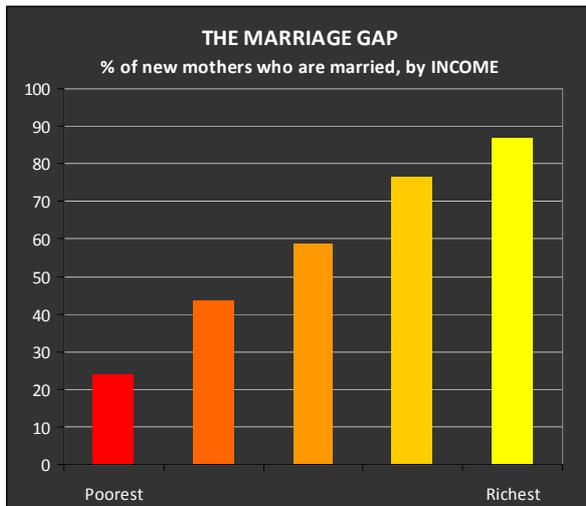
state support. For example, 60% of lone parents receive housing benefit compared to just 10% of couple parents (DWP 2015; ONS 2015b).

Whether through the drop in income, loss of contact with one parent, or psychological impact of parental divorce, children living in lone parent families tend to fare worse on almost any negative social indicator (Amato 2005; Brown 2004; Panico et al 2010).

In our study published this month for the Marriage Foundation (Benson & McKay 2015), we reported new findings from our analysis of data from the Family Resources Survey (DWP 2014) and General Household Survey (ONS 2007).

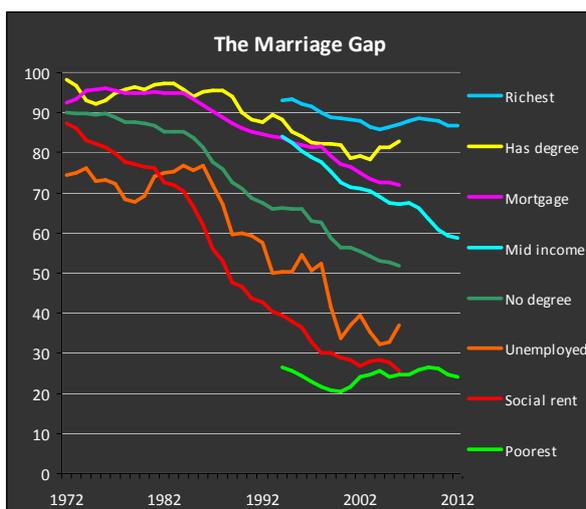
The main finding from our analysis of the Family Resources Survey data was that a huge Marriage Gap has emerged between rich and poor families.

Whereas 87% of mothers with children under five in the highest income groups are married, only 24% of those in the lowest income groups are married, a Marriage Gap of 63%.



Our further analysis of data from the General Household Survey between 1972 and 2006 shows that the Marriage Gap had begun to widen from the 1970s onwards. This widening gap was apparent across a range of factors, such as age, education, employment, housing status and whether mothers smoked or not.

Combining these two analyses shows that the trend away from marriage was concentrated among lower income families during the 1970s and 1980s. It was only during the 1990s that middle income families began to turn their backs on marriage.



In other words, the Marriage Gap that was confined to rich and poor families prior to the 1990s has now spread to middle income families.

Among middle earning families – representing the fifth and sixth decile by household income –

the proportion who are married has fallen from 84% in 1994 to 59% in 2012.

This represents the biggest change among any income group.

MOTHERS WITH CHILDREN UNDER FIVE % married by household income deciles

	Decile	1994	2012	Change
Richest	1,2	93.2	86.8	-6.4
	3,4	90.9	76.6	-14.3
Middle	5,6	84.1	58.8	-25.3
	7,8	54.8	43.6	-11.2
Poorest	9,10	26.5	24.1	-2.4

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Acknowledgments

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