

# MARRIAGE WORKS



Marriage  
Foundation

Championing marriage for the good of society....  
*especially our children*

Selected Research and Other Papers 2012-2020



# An Introduction from Sir Paul Coleridge

In 2012, together with a group of like-minded individuals, I set up Marriage Foundation. Its main aim was simple; unequivocally to champion marriage as the gold standard for parental relationships. Why was this necessary? It seemed to us that there was a relentless drip-drip campaign which was, either deliberately or unintentionally, undermining one of the oldest and most useful of social arrangements in favour of nothing except informal cohabitation and, as a society, we were collecting the dividends in ever higher rates of family breakdown. Having spent over four decades in the family courts- both at the Bar and as a judge- I knew first-hand what family breakdown invariably looked like and its appalling short and long term effects on families and especially their children.

Since 2012 our research department under our director Harry Benson has been producing a steady stream of fascinating research. Sometimes this research has been collaborative with other universities but more often it is our own unique and original work. Again and again this research has supported our underlying case; that committed, married relationships work best for families because they last, on average, three times as long. The media (mainstream and social) always pick up and broadcast our research. Overall, we have produced more than 40 papers and been quoted in the media over A THOUSAND TIMES.

We know that people find our work accessible, inspiring and timeless and the purpose of this publication is to show that our research proves that marriage is not just a nice idea for the couple involved but an essential key to stable family life and so a stable society.

This is a small selection of the press releases of our more important research papers (plus the corresponding press coverage) put out simultaneously with the full papers. All the full

papers are downloadable from our website. Visit [www.marriagefoundation.org.uk](http://www.marriagefoundation.org.uk) to access all our full research reports or for more information about us.

We think, both individually and taken together, they make an impressive case and deserve the widest possible audience: private individuals, policy makers and the media.

We hope you too will be inspired by their content.



**Sir Paul Coleridge**  
*Chairman – Marriage Foundation*

Championing marriage  
for the good of society...  
*especially our children*



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# Marriage Foundation’s Team

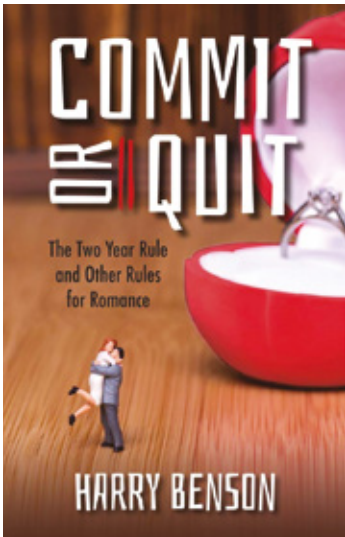


## Harry Benson

Our research director Harry Benson is one of Britain’s leading researchers and writers on family structure and especially marriage having spent the last twenty years researching, writing and teaching both these subjects.

His many research findings for Marriage Foundation are routinely cited in the media and by politicians and often make front page news in the mainstream press. As founder of a Bristol charity, he taught hundreds of relationship courses to thousands of couples, including ‘Let’s Stick Together’, a pioneering programme for new parents evaluated by the Department for Education and delivered mainly through NHS post-natal clinics. He has also co-authored influential family policy papers for the Centre for Social Justice.

Harry’s research is shot through with his own personal experience. His last book ‘What Mums Want: And Dads Need To Know’ – co-authored with his wife Kate – explains how their own back-from-the-brink experience demonstrates how marriages go wrong and what makes them go right. It made #11 on Amazon.



His latest book ‘Commit or Quit - The Two-Year Rule and Other Rules for Romance’ is the first of its kind on cohabitation and commitment. The principles in it have been road-tested by his own children! Harry and Kate live on a rural small holding, have been married for 34 years, and have six teen and young adult children. Hopefully that means they are doing something right!



## Michaela Hyde

Michaela Hyde is the executive director for Marriage Foundation and coordinator of the UK National Marriage Week.

Michaela first became involved with Marriage Foundation after hearing Sir Paul speaking at a conference in 2014. She passionately believes that healthy marriages are fundamental to a stable society, offering the best life chances for children and that for marriages to work and last, they require regular care and investment by both partners. Michaela has brought this message to the nation on many occasions over the past few years through media appearances including BBC One’s Sunday Morning Live, Sky News, Premier Radio, Trans World Radio and numerous interviews on local BBC radio stations across the UK. She has also written and hosted her own podcast ‘The M Word’, which she presented with her husband on a fortnightly basis.

Michaela has been married to Nick since 1999 and they have two teenage children.





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# RESEARCH

## AND PRESS COVERAGE



# The average length of marriage

HARRY BENSON DECEMBER 2019

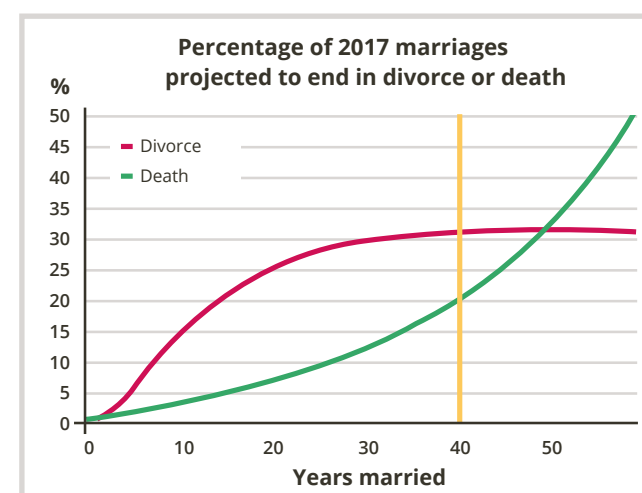
- Using the same method used by Office for National Statistics (ONS) – but adjusting for the significant number of UK couples who marry overseas – I estimate that the average (median) length of a marriage beginning today is *40 years before ending in either divorce or death*.
- This contrasts sharply with the oft-quoted figure of 12 years, which is the average (median) length of *marriages that end in divorce*.
- Previous analysis by ONS estimated that the average marriage beginning in 2010 would last 30 years. So why the big improvement?
- Part of the reason is an adjustment for overseas weddings. Since 1990, some 30-60,000 people per year have married overseas. Assuming most of these are couples, a conservative adjustment of half this number boosts the total number of 'England & Wales weddings' by 6% to 17% per year. This produces a slightly lower, but more realistic, estimate of divorce rates.
- The biggest reason is falling divorce rates. Back in 2010, ONS projected that 21% of couples would divorce within 10 years, for example. Adjusting for overseas weddings would reduce that by 2%. But with eight years data on these couples, actual divorce rates are 4% lower still. So the final divorce rate figure for 2010 couples over their first decade of marriage is likely to be 15%.
- With couples doing so much better early on, lifetime projections for divorce have also fallen as a result. The original ONS projection for 2010 couples was 42%. Adding in overseas weddings reduces this to 39%. My latest estimate for 2010 couples is now 34%.
- So for couples marrying in 2010, the projected length of time at which half of all marriages have ended through either divorce or death has thus increased from an original projection of 30 years to 35 years, or from 33 years to 38 years if I adjust for overseas weddings.
- For couples marrying in 2017, the average length of marriage is now 38 years if I don't take overseas weddings into account and 40 years if I do, which I should.

### DIVORCE RATE PROJECTIONS

% ending in divorce	First 10 years Adjusted for overseas weddings		Lifetime	
	Without	With	Without	With
2010 marriages				
ONS original	21%	19%	42%	39%
MF estimate now	18%	15%	38%	34%
2017 marriages				
MF estimate now	15%	13%	35%	31%

### MEDIAN LENGTH OF MARRIAGE

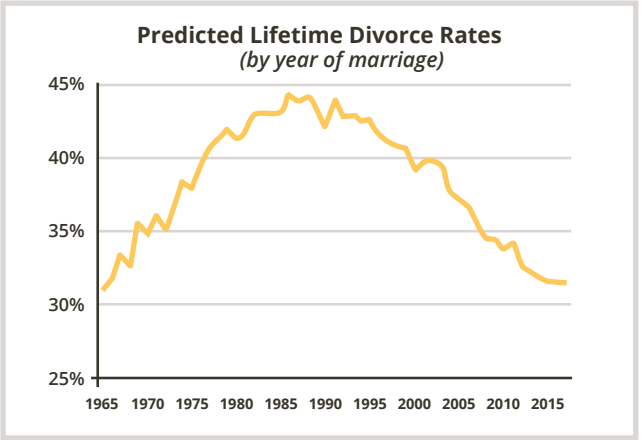
Number of years	Adjusted for overseas weddings	
	Without	With
2010 marriages		
ONS original	30 years	33 years
MF estimate now	35 years	38 years
2017 marriages		
MF estimate now	38 years	40 years



Falling divorce rates

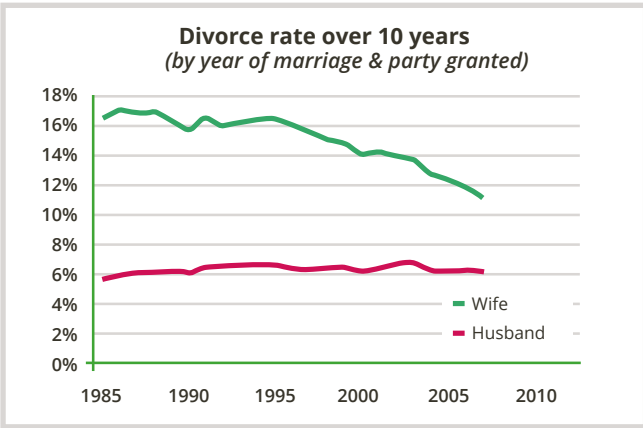
Divorce rates are falling fast (Benson 2012,2013, 2019a, 2019b).

I now estimate that projected lifetime divorce rates have fallen from a peak of 44% for couples marrying in the late 1980s to 31% for couples marrying today.



In my previous papers for Marriage Foundation, I have shown that almost all of this fall in divorce is due to fewer wives filing for divorce in the first decade of their marriage. Remarkably enough, divorce rates attributable to husbands has barely changed since the 1970s

This highly gendered shift in divorce is not adequately explained by changes in economics or social patterns, which ought to cause husbands and wives together to become both more or less divorce prone together.



My explanation for this gender shift is that reducing social pressure to marry means those men who do marry are more intentional about it.

This fits with commitment theory research showing that men’s commitment tends to be related more to decision making than women’s commitment (Rhoades et al 2006, 2009).

In short, the proportion of newlywed men who are less committed ‘sliders’ – rather than more committed

‘deciders’ – has reduced. More committed men means fewer unhappy wives filing for divorce.

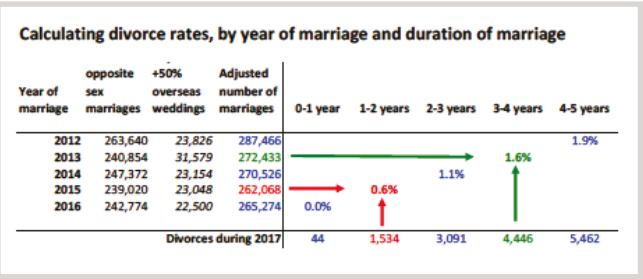
Methodology

I calculate divorce rates using the same ‘year of marriage’ method as ONS.

One problem is that there have been large numbers of overseas weddings since the late 1980s. Because these data are less reliable than for domestic weddings, ONS do not include them in their annual figures (ONS 2008, 2017).

Excluding them causes official divorce rates to be overstated. In my model, I therefore make a conservative adjustment to England & Wales wedding numbers by adding 50% of ONS’s estimated overseas wedding numbers. The effect is that my

figures for divorce rates are slightly lower than those from ONS.



A few years back, ONS published a detailed projection of marriage survival rates for couples who married in the year 2010 (ONS 2012).

In order to update their model, I have assumed mortality rates remained much the same but inserted my projections on cumulative divorce rates for the 2010 and 2017 wedding cohorts.

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Projection for 2017 marriages that end in divorce or death

Duration of marriage in exact years, x (anniversary number)	Probability of divorce in interval to next anniversary	Probability of death of one partner in interval to next anniversary	Number of marriages surviving to anniversary x	Number of marriages ended in divorce in interval to next anniversary	Number of marriages ended in death in interval to next anniversary	Cumulative % of marriages ended in divorce before next anniversary	Cumulative % of marriages ended in death before next anniversary
0	0001	0.0025	100,000	13	250	0.0	0.3
1	0.0046	0.0027	99,737	456	269	0.5	0.5
2	0.0096	0.0029	99,011	955	287	1.4	0.8
3	0.0135	0.0030	97,768	1,331	293	2.8	1.1
4	0.0167	0.0032	96,144	1,624	308	4.4	1.4
5	0.0199	0.0033	94,212	1,901	311	6.3	1.7
6	0.0203	0.0035	92,000	1,900	322	8.2	2.0
7	0.0182	0.0037	89,778	1,670	332	9.9	2.4
8	0.0181	0.0039	87,775	1,628	342	11.5	2.7
9	0.0178	0.0037	85,805	1,575	317	13.1	3.0
10	0.0173	0.0037	83,913	1,501	310	14.6	3.3
11	0.0171	0.0039	82,101	1,464	320	16.0	3.7
12	0.0172	0.0041	80,317	1,448	329	17.5	4.0
13	0.0151	0.0044	78,540	1,249	346	18.7	4.3
14	0.0137	0.0047	76,945	1,112	362	19.8	4.7
15	0.0131	0.0048	75,471	1,053	362	20.9	5.1
16	0.0130	0.0051	74,056	1,032	378	21.9	5.4
17	0.0114	0.0053	72,646	891	385	22.8	5.8
18	0.0107	0.0056	71,369	829	400	23.6	6.2
19	0.0101	0.0058	70,141	771	407	24.4	6.6
20	0.0093	0.0061	68,963	703	421	25.1	7.1
21	0.0089	0.0065	67,839	668	441	25.8	7.5
22	0.0082	0.0069	66,731	611	460	26.4	8.0
23	0.0077	0.0071	65,660	568	466	27.0	8.4
24	0.0069	0.0077	64,625	508	498	27.5	8.9
25	0.0066	0.0080	63,620	478	509	27.9	9.4
26	0.0060	0.0086	62,632	432	539	28.4	10.0
27	0.0053	0.0091	61,662	376	561	28.8	10.5
28	0.0046	0.0096	60,724	329	583	29.1	11.1
29	0.0042	0.0101	59,812	301	604	29.4	11.7
30	0.0037	0.0107	58,907	263	630	29.6	12.3
31	0.0032	0.0114	58,014	227	661	29.9	13.0
32	0.0029	0.0122	57,125	202	697	30.1	13.7
33	0.0026	0.0128	56,227	182	720	30.3	14.4
34	0.0022	0.0135	55,325	151	747	30.4	15.2
35	0.0022	0.0142	54,427	150	773	30.6	15.9
36	0.0019	0.0152	53,504	130	813	30.7	16.8
37	0.0017	0.0157	52,561	119	825	30.8	17.6
38	0.0014	0.0168	51,617	96	867	30.9	18.4
39	0.0011	0.0169	50,653	74	856	31.0	19.3
40	0.0011	0.0176	49,723	75	875	31.0	20.2
41	0.0010	0.0188	48,773	71	917	31.1	21.1
42	0.0007	0.0202	47,785	51	965	31.2	22.1
43	0.0006	0.0220	46,769	44	1,029	31.2	23.1
44	0.0005	0.0241	45,696	37	1,101	31.3	24.2
45	0.0005	0.0266	44,558	32	1,185	31.3	25.4
46	0.0004	0.0294	43,341	30	1,274	31.3	26.6
47	0.0003	0.0325	42,037	23	1,366	31.3	28.0
48	0.0003	0.0356	40,647	19	1,447	31.4	29.5
49	0.0002	0.0390	39,182	17	1,528	31.4	31.0
50	0.0002	0.0428	37,637	15	1,611	31.4	32.6



# Newlyweds now stay married longer than Victorian couples

The Sunday Times, 15 December 2019

Nicholas Hellen, Social Affairs Editor

Half of couples tying the knot today will enjoy a marriage lasting 40 years or more, according to an analysis of official statistics.

And of those who get to celebrate their ruby wedding anniversary, 99% will go on to fulfil the traditional wedding vow, staying together “for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until death us do part”.

It means that in our era of dating apps and no-fault divorce, marriage is lasting longer than it did in the late Victorian age.

Sir Paul Coleridge, chairman of the Marriage Foundation, which conducted the study, said: “The story quoted to me over and over again by highly intelligent people is that people get divorced nowadays because we live so much longer we are bound to get bored.

“The figures show this is totally wrong. The divorce statistics among people who have been married a long time are minuscule.”

People who have lived through “horror and pain” when their parents divorced get married in a more mature and intelligent way, he said: “They know the disposable society hasn’t worked.”

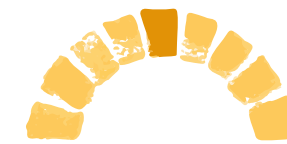
Only a decade ago the Office for National Statistics predicted that the average couple marrying in 2010 would stay together for 30 years. One reason for the change is that fewer women are filing for divorce in the first decade of marriage — possibly because their husbands are behaving better and are more committed to making their marriages work.

It has led Harry Benson, research director of the Marriage Foundation, to predict just 31% of today’s newlyweds will eventually divorce, down from 44% of those married in the late 1980s. Official figures paint a slightly more negative picture because they do not include weddings held overseas but do measure all UK divorces.

Samantha Callan, director of the Family Hub network, which helps couples in conflict, said: “This shows that we are not on a hiding to nothing: people are not treating their relationships as disposable.”

Susanna Abse, a consultant psychotherapist who chairs the British Psychoanalytic Council, said that while previous generations might have felt compelled to stay together because of moral codes, the incentive now was greater awareness of the psychological impact of actions on others. “People are much more conscious of the potential damage that divorce and separation do to their children and to themselves,” she said. “They are not under the illusion that you can break up and there is no cost.”

According to Les Mayhew, professor of statistics at Cass Business School in London, our Victorian ancestors did not live long enough for more than a minority to aspire to being together for 40 years. In 1896 a typical bride was 23 and the groom 25 at her first wedding. One or the other would, on average, die within 36 years.



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# Divorce rates are falling across Europe – and the UK is leading the way

Marriage Foundation, 2 January 2020

- The first working Monday of the New Year – Monday 6 January in 2020 – is often known as ‘Divorce Day’, when lawyers typically see a spike in couples considering divorce.
- But new research by Marriage Foundation shows divorce rates in the first 15 years of marriage are falling across Europe – and the UK is leading the way, with the biggest fall in divorce rates over the last 25 years.
- During the earliest five years of marriage, divorce rates have now fallen in 15 of the 20 countries surveyed.
- The analysis uses data from Eurostat to build a far more accurate assessment of divorce rates than has previously been available.

The Christmas holidays is a special time for many families as they spend quality time together. However, for some couples, the intensity of spending so long with each other highlights the tensions in their relationship, leading to a considerable number of people to make enquiries about divorce when the working year begins again in January. This has led the first working Monday of January – which falls on 6 January in 2020 – to be known as ‘Divorce Day’.

**Divorce rates across Europe**  
MF analysis of Eurostat data  
First 15 years of marriage, by year of marriage

	1992 Actual	2002 Actual	2017 Projected	25 year Change
Sweden	33%	38%	36%	3%
Finland	32%	31%	33%	2%
Latvia	25%	34%	33%	7%
Belgium	27%	38%	31%	4%
Denmark	30%	29%	31%	1%
Czech	29%	27%	29%	-0%
Norway	28%	33%	29%	1%
Spain	21%	25%	27%	7%
Austria	30%	36%	27%	-3%
France	24%	27%	26%	1%
Lithuania	25%	30%	25%	0%
Netherlands	25%	23%	25%	-0%
Hungary	28%	29%	24%	-4%
UK (E&W)	31%	28%	23%	-8%
Germany	27%	27%	22%	-5%
Switzerland	27%	27%	22%	-6%
Slovakia	20%	22%	18%	-2%
Poland	13%	17%	17%	4%
Italy	6%	7%	16%	10%
Romania	16%	17%	14%	-1%

However, a new report released by Marriage Foundation, using data from Eurostat, shows that divorce rates in Europe are continuing to fall – with the UK leading the way. UK couples

marrying in 1992 had an actual divorce rate of 30.7% during the first 15 years of their marriage - the 3rd highest rate out of the 20 countries surveyed. A decade later, for UK couples marrying in 2002, this rate had fallen to 28.1%. For UK couples who married in 2017, the projected divorce rate is 22.5%.

Interestingly, divorce rates are overall higher in Scandinavia and Northern Europe (with Sweden, Finland, Latvia, Belgium and Denmark heading up the table) whereas Catholic countries generally have the lowest divorce rates (with the exception of Spain). Slovakia, Poland, Italy and Romania show the lowest divorce rates, with Romania showing a projected divorce rate of just 14% for couples marrying in 2017 – Sweden has the highest projected divorce rate of 36%

Harry Benson, research director for Marriage Foundation, commented:

‘Our analysis provides the most accurate picture of European divorce rates ever seen. We have long claimed that lower divorce rates in the UK are due to the relaxation of social pressure to marry. The result is that those who do marry are more committed and hence more likely to stay together. We are just beginning to see this trend ripple across Europe in the earliest years of marriage. But over the first fifteen years of marriage, Britain clearly leads Europe.’

Sir Paul Coleridge, founder of Marriage Foundation and former High Court judge, added:

‘To be in gold medal position in the European race to reduce divorce rates is an accolade for which we can, as a nation, justifiably be proud. It is consistent with all the recent statistical data showing that marriages are being undertaken nowadays with a degree of serious commitment not seen for decades. By comparison with their parents, couples are marrying later, more thoughtfully and thus more enduringly. Hopefully they are also taking notice of the constant stream of data showing the qualitative advantages to married relationships. Now the challenge is to persuade those who do not marry that their informal cohabiting relationships are inherently far less stable or beneficial, which is not at all good for them and disastrous for their children.’

# Divorce rate falls as couples get serious

The Times, 3 January 2020

Jonathan Ames, Legal Editor

Divorce rates in England and Wales are forecast to fall faster than those in the rest of Europe because couples face less social pressure to marry and do so later, after more careful consideration.

Research found that 31 per cent of couples who married in 1992 separated within 15 years. However, the divorce rate after 15 years for those who tied the knot in 2017 is projected to drop to 22.5 per cent.

The report was published yesterday by the Marriage Foundation, a group set up by Sir Paul Coleridge, a former senior family court judge.

"To be in gold medal position in the European race to reduce divorce rates is an accolade for which we can, as a nation, justifiably be proud," he said.

The findings were "consistent with the latest statistical data showing that marriages are being undertaken with a degree of serious commitment not seen for decades", he added. The study said that modern couples, compared with the previous generation, were marrying later and "more thoughtfully and thus more enduringly".

The closest country to England and Wales is Switzerland, where the divorce rates are forecast to fall by 6 percentage points over the same period, from 27 per cent in 1992. Overall, the projected rate fell in 15 of the 20 countries surveyed.

Sweden has the highest projected divorce rate for couples who married in 2017, of 36 per cent. Researchers found that predominantly Catholic countries, such as Italy, Poland and Romania, had the lowest divorce rates. Romania had a projected divorce rate of 14 per cent for couples marrying in 2017. In Italy the rate is forecast to have risen from 10 per cent to 16 per cent by 2032.

The exception among Catholic countries was Spain, where the rate has increased by 7 percentage points over the 25 years to a projected rate for couples who married in 2017 of 27 per cent.

Sir Paul said that the "challenge is to persuade those who do not marry that their informal cohabiting relationships are inherently far less stable or beneficial, which is not at all good for them and disastrous for their children".

Civil partnerships are available since New Year's Eve for heterosexuals after a couple from London succeeded at the Supreme Court last year in overturning the ban on allowing the status to mixed-sex couples.

The Marriage Foundation and The Times jointly ran the Family Matters campaign for reform of divorce law to remove the need to attribute blame if couples wanted a fast resolution.

The Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Bill was in the Queen's Speech and is expected to be enacted with cross-party support. It will allow for so-called no-fault divorces and remove the ability of one party to trap the other in a marriage by contesting an application for divorce.



# New report proves truth of 'Happy Wife, Happy Life' slogan (especially if she is happy as a new mum).

Marriage Foundation, 15 September 2019

- New analysis of data from up to 13,000 UK families show that a mum's level of happiness has a direct effect on her children's mental health, the stability of her relationship with the children's father, and her closeness to her children when teenagers.
- A mum's happiness level is nearly twice as important as a dad's happiness level as an indicator of whether a couple will stay together.
- Mums who report a high level of happiness when their child is 9 months old are more likely to maintain a good level of happiness when their child is a teenager.

'Happy Wife, Happy Life' has become a well-known phrase – with plaques, T-shirts, socks, mugs, hats and cushions available, all of which bear the slogan, as well as an American TV show. But opinion has been divided – sometimes leading to heated debate – as to how accurate this 'truth' actually is.

Now a new report released by Marriage Foundation – using data from the Millennium Cohort Study – argues that the happiness of a mother has considerably more impact on the subsequent outcome and stability of her family than the father's happiness.

The report by Harry Benson, research director for Marriage Foundation, and Professor Steve McKay of the University of Lincoln analysed Millennium Cohort Study data from up to 13,000 UK couples (married or co-habiting) with a child born in 2000 or 2001.

They looked at the link between how happy each parent was with their relationship when the child was 9 months old and (1) their subsequent happiness with their relationship 14 years later, (2) whether they stayed together during this period, (3) whether their teenagers displayed high levels of mental health problems, and (4) how close parents reported their relationship with their teenage children.

The results showed that all four outcomes were predicted more strongly by the mum's initial happiness than by the dad's.

In particular, mum's happiness was twice as important as dad's happiness for predicting whether parents would stay together. And whereas mum's happiness was also twice as important for predicting the presence of subsequent mental health problems in their teenage boys, only mum's happiness was linked to the subsequent mental health of their teenage girls.

*"I've always argued that the key to happy family life is for dad to love mum and she will love him right back, in that order. Previous research has supported this idea but it's been bitty," says Harry Benson, also co-author with his wife Kate of the bestseller What Mums Want and Dads Need to Know. "We think this is the first serious attempt to test the truth of the saying Happy Wife Happy Life across four different family outcomes."*

The findings sit well with the idea that as a new mother's attention shifts automatically to her child, it is the father who needs to take prime responsibility for the parental relationship. When he does and the mother is happy with her relationship, the stage is set for family outcomes to prosper.

*"Equality has been excellent for encouraging women into work and men into childcare. But many men now struggle to find a unique role for themselves in family life," adds Benson, himself married for 33 years and father of six. "This research suggests a compelling solution. Men, the best thing you can do for your family is to love the mother of your children. Happy wife, happy life."*

Sir Paul Coleridge, former High Court judge and chairman of Marriage Foundation adds: *"As with so many traditional family myths, there is more than a grain of truth in this one as the evidence demonstrates. In all the contemporary discussion about the appropriate roles for mums and dads in today's well adjusted family it is still crucial not to forget the vital role of wife/mother as the lynch pin. Dads would do themselves and theirs children a favour if they bore in mind that being supportive and kind to the mother of their children is not a sign of weakness but strength and self confidence."*



# Happy wife, happy life: mother's happiness makes nearly twice as much difference to family life

The Sunday Times, 15 September 2019

*Nicholas Hellen, Social Affairs Editor*

## Bad news, fathers: your contentment is marginal to ensure children and relationships succeed, new research shows

As a piece of relationship advice, the adage “happy wife, happy life” has begun to grate in an era of gender equality.

But research has found that the saying may actually be true: a mother's happiness is nearly twice as important as a father's when it comes to family life and the chances of the couple staying together, according to a study by the Marriage Foundation.

The findings are based on the campaign group's analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study, which tracked 13,000 married and cohabiting couples, starting nine months after the birth of their child in 2000-1. They were interviewed again when the child was 14.

It found that if a mother was happy, she was more likely to have children who did not develop mental-health problems; more likely to remain close to her daughters when they were teenagers; and more likely to have a stable relationship with her partner. A father's happiness had no bearing on his offspring's mental health.

Sir Paul Coleridge, founder of the Marriage Foundation, which conducted the study with Linclon University, said: “Despite all the social changes of the last 50 years, whether we like it or not, there is an ingredient for keeping the whole family happy, which is only available from the mother or mother figure.”

Coleridge, a former High Court judge in the Family Division, added that his professional life had shown him that successful people tended to have a successful family life and that was “because the wife or mother is a powerful figure”.

Although millions of men have become much more heavily involved in their children's lives — particularly compared with their own fathers and grandfathers, who were often not present

at their birth — the research shows that women still provide the emotional centre of gravity of a family.

Harry Benson, research director of the Marriage Foundation, said: “Women's happiness is so much more important than men's happiness in a family's success.”

The study comes after figures last week revealed that the proportion of women who are married has fallen below half for the first time, according to the Office for National Statistics. The number of cohabiting couples has jumped, up by 1.6m since 2008 to 3.4m.

For feminists, phrases such as “happy wife, happy life” and “she's the boss”, are derogatory because they imply that a man will be nagged if he does not defer to his wife or partner.

But Benson argues that a new mother's attention switches automatically to her child, and it is the father who must then take prime responsibility for maintaining the couple's relationship.

He said: “The transition to parenthood is the single most important stage in a marriage or a relationship, because it sets the stage for how a marriage turns out.

“It becomes very easy for the mother to be focused on the child. The husband feels excluded and stops taking responsibility for the relationship. The neglected wife micromanages and that comes across as nagging.”

*Research also cited in Daily Mail, Daily Express, BBC Sunday Morning Live, Premier Radio, Spirit Radio, Lancashire Post, Irish Catholic, Institute for Family Studies, Portsmouth News, BBC London, BBC Cambridge, BBC Tees, BBC Lincoln*

# Happy wife, happy life - but who really holds the power on the home front?

The Telegraph, 16 September 2019

*Celia Walden*

“Happy wife, happy life.” Most old wifely adages will earn men a slap these days - but in our current confused and contorted climate, the slap you'll get for quoting this one is likely to sting more than most. After all, no woman in history has ever relished the notion of being a nag, and feminists now consider “henpecking” to be a particularly derogative term. So neither sex will be pleased to hear that according to a study published by the Marriage Foundation on Sunday, “happy wife, happy life” isn't just a trite little dictum – but fact.

Based on the campaign group's analysis of a Millennium Cohort Study – which tracked 13,000 married and cohabiting British couples from nine months after the birth of their first child to the child's 14th birthday – it discovered that a mother's happiness is nearly twice as crucial as a father's when it comes to keeping the family together. It added that, while a happy mother also meant the children would be less likely to develop mental health problems and more likely to enjoy stable relationships of their own in adulthood, a father's happiness had absolutely zero bearing on his kids' mental wellbeing. Which is another slap in the face for men, isn't it? The kind that leaves fingerprints on cheekbones for days.

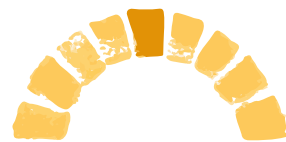
Because after all that New Man love and support – the sympathetic weight gain during the missus's pregnancy, the papoose-wearing, 3am breast-milk-warming, nappy-changing, male post-natal depression (don't laugh: it's a thing, a 24-50 percentile thing if you listen to research urging women to be more supportive of men at this difficult time) and the career setbacks prompted by that extended paternity leave – it turns out that men didn't matter. Not to rub it in, given your own father was likely not even in the delivery suite to begin with, but nobody even noticed the ‘This Is What A Feminist Looks Like’ T-shirt you were wearing: they were looking right through you. “Despite all the social changes of the last 50 years, whether we like it or not, there is an ingredient for keeping the whole family happy, which is only available from the mother or mother figure,” confirms the Marriage Foundation's founder Sir Paul Coleridge, who as a former High Court judge in the Family Division, also maintains that successful family lives are largely possible, “because the wife or mother is a powerful figure.”

Hurrah for us! We've got all the power! Only it's hard to suppress a chuckle when this is precisely the kind of domestic power many women have been trying to reject for decades – or at least delegate to their other halves. We don't want to be the CEOs of our own households, but Nasdaq-listed companies. We don't want the pressure of being single-handedly responsible for everyone's mental wellbeing. I mean, it was hard enough being lumbered with the responsibility of buying milk for everyone's morning tea, but now they're telling us that the future of the planet's mental health depends on us? Plus have you ever tried being a nucleus? It's really un-fun; being positively charged 24/7 is knacker.

And there's a bigger problem: if everybody's lives depend on happy wives, then women had better work out what makes them happy, quick smart. Yet, never has this been less clear. Because according to every other study and statistic you care to read – and despite the political, economic and social freedoms we've gained over the past half century – women are more dissatisfied than ever. I wonder how much of that dissatisfaction is down to confusion. We know what's supposed to make us happy: being a perfect wife and mother whilst achieving everything we've fought so hard for in the professional arena; maintaining a perfect size 10 figure, ageless physique and inner poise, thanks to the aeons of ‘me time’ we now know it's crucial we indulge ourselves with. Which all sounds less like deliverance than a life-long to-do list. Little wonder that, now we are allowed to ‘have it all’ many of us are secretly asking ourselves whether we want it.

Because, judged against the complex and optimistic expectations foisted upon us by studies, social media and feminist diktats, reality is always going to fall short. Had you asked a Fifties housewife how happy she was, the answer would probably only have depended on two things: how well things were going at home – and how many of ‘mother's little helpers’ she'd taken that day. Nowadays, the answer depends on how badly we feel we've failed at any number of the roles we're aiming to excel at simultaneously. And, of course, Valium is seriously hard to get hold of. So perhaps the answer doesn't lie in any study or set of societal rules; maybe a happy home is simply the sum of its defiantly individual parts.





Marriage  
Foundation

# Family breakdown top cause of poor child mental health, new report finds

Marriage Foundation, 2 November 2017

Family breakdown is the biggest factor behind the UK's child mental health crisis, a new Marriage Foundation report has found.

More than a third (36 per cent) of children whose parents had split up reported poor mental health, compared to only a fifth (22 per cent) with parents who were still together.

The Marriage Foundation report, the first UK analysis to compare children's mental health to their parents' marital status, happiness and stability, has found the mere fact of having married parents acts as a buffer against poor mental health.

The report, which analysed Millennium Cohort Study data on 10,929 mothers with 14 year old children, found that children whose parents were married had reduced odds of suffering mental health problems, regardless of whether the parents split or not.

In a comparison of children from both two parent and one parent households, 32 per cent of children of unmarried parents exhibited problems compared to only 23 per cent of married parents. Among parents who had no formal relationship – neither married nor cohabiting – 40 per cent of children had problems.

Harry Benson, research director of Marriage Foundation, the think tank dedicated to promoting stable families, commented: "Mental health problems during childhood cast a long shadow over future life chances, affecting work, relationships and well-being on into adulthood.

"Current advice to government is that conflict between parents is the main family influence on children's mental health. Our analysis blows this narrow view out of the water. Whether parents are married, stay together, are happy and remain close to their children all make a unique difference.

"Despite the heroic efforts of lone parents, children need and benefit most from two parents who commit to one another and plan for the future. Family breakdown has the biggest negative impact of all. Parents who are the most uncertain about the

quality of their relationship – who were neither very happy nor very unhappy – are the most likely to be unstable and subsequently break up.

"Much of what passes for early intervention is really about managing the fallout from family breakdown. Genuine early intervention means encouraging couples to make a clear commitment to their future before having children, to give their children the best possible chance of a happy and healthy upbringing."

Sir Paul Coleridge, founder and chairman of Marriage Foundation commented: "Children's mental ill health is quite rightly near the top of the list of national social concerns. Children often carry its effects around with them well into adulthood and it can blight their lives.

"Many causes are cited (excessive use of social media, the sexualisation of children and school pressures) but while these exacerbate the problem, we seem to insist on turning a blind eye to the greatest underlying reason; family instability and breakdown. Unless and until we, as a mature society grasp this nettle we will not address the main cause and will never get on top of the epidemic.

"However many child psychotherapists we train there will simply never be enough to meet the scale of the problem. You cannot stem the flood of child mental health problems unless we sort out the main cause; family breakdown. And whether it is popular or not the simple fact is that marriages are three times more likely to endure than less formal cohabitation.

"In the 44 years I spent working in the family courts, the sheer scale of the misery caused by family breakdown to the fragile emotional state of children was plain for all involved to see. In virtually every case I dealt with as a lawyer and a judge, the one thing the children wanted above all else was to see their parents and family reunited.

"Of course not all relationships can last, but many more could be made more secure through the formal commitment of marriage or saved. Invariably, it's the children who suffer most when they fail."



# Family Matters: Divorce, the broken family time bomb

The Times, 18 November 2017

Greg Hurst, Social Affairs Editor

Family breakdown poses the single biggest risk to children's mental health once they reach their teens, research suggests.

An analysis of almost 11,000 families found that having parents who split up was the strongest single influence on girls' mental health, particularly on emotional problems. It was the joint strongest factor in boys' mental health, with strong links to behavioural problems.

The study has been published as The Times launches a campaign for sweeping reforms to family law.

Family Matters has won support from senior judges, barristers, peers and MPs in its demand for fairer, modernised laws to encourage marriage, make divorce less painful and protect the mental health of children whose parents break up.

Bob Neill, chairman of the Commons justice committee, said: "This campaign is very welcome. Our divorce laws are out of date and in need of reform. The concept of having to show fault is outmoded, makes the process needless, antagonistic and confrontational for the parties and their families, especially children. It also adds to cost and delay. It should be scrapped."

The new study will be controversial as it seeks to refocus debate on family structure. One expert urged caution, saying it challenged international research that suggests that parental infighting is the primary influence on children's wellbeing and life chances, regardless of relationship status. It found that boys whose parents lived together outside of marriage were 1.3 times more likely to have behavioural problems in their teens, whereas children who did not live with their father were 1.6 times more likely to do so.

For girls with cohabiting parents the odds of developing poor mental health were slightly lower, at 1.2 times, but for girls whose parents have separated the effect was larger and they were 1.6 times more likely to exhibit emotional problems.

The study, by Harry Benson, research director of the Marriage Foundation, and Stephen McKay, a professor of social research at the Lincoln University, also suggests that mental health problems in teenagers are much higher than recorded in official data.

They looked at 10,929 mothers with children born between 2000 and 2002 who took part in the Millennium Cohort Study, which followed the lives of 19,000 children born in Britain at the start of the millennium.

Participants filled out a series of detailed questionnaires at intervals about their circumstances and researchers looked in particular at questions answered by each mother once their children had reached 14, which asked for detailed responses about health, temperament, behaviour and friendships.

They found that 20 per cent of children whose parents remained married exhibited a high level of mental health problems of some kind.

However, this rose to 27 per cent among children whose parents were unmarried but cohabiting, 32 per cent among those whose parents divorced and 38 per cent for children whose parents lived together but had split up.

These figures are much higher than research published by the Office for National Statistics in 2015, which suggested that 12 per cent of children aged between 10 and 15 reported high scores for mental ill-health. They also challenge previous studies by arguing that the quality of parents' relationships had been misunderstood as a risk factor.

Mr Benson said: "Current advice to government is that conflict between parents is the main family influence on teenage mental health. This explanation falls a long way short of accounting for the scale of the problem. The reality is that how parents form and sustain their relationships matters every bit as much as, or more than, how they get on."

Gordon Harold, a professor of psychology at Sussex University, urged caution over the study's findings, saying that it measured only mothers' reports of relationship happiness.

"Studies that measure parental conflict rigorously show that in the context of parental separation and divorce, discord and conflict between parents . . . substantially affects differences in children's mental health," Professor Harold said.

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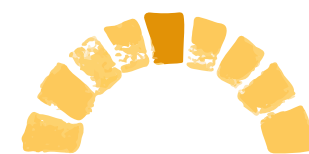
“Divorce and parental separation is a recognised source of stress for children but when we measure the level of conflict between adults we consistently can show that it plays a substantial role in long-term mental health outcomes, whether parents are living together or not.”

Marc Bush, the chief policy adviser at YoungMinds, a children’s mental health charity, said: “Parents, family and carers play a big part in promoting the wellbeing of young people, and small things like doing an activity together and talking about their feelings can make a big difference.”

#### The Times’ five-point plan for change

- Scrapping fault-based divorce laws, allowing divorce within a year where both sides agree, and two where they do not — as in Scotland.
- Ending the outdated “meal ticket for life” that can result from laws on splitting assets and awarding maintenance after divorce, except where hardship would be caused.
- Giving prenuptial contracts the force of statute. At present they are non-statutory, which leads to uncertainty and bitterness when marriages fail.
- Extending civil partnerships to heterosexuals so that they can have the same security as married couples. Civil partnerships are offered only to same-sex couples at present.
- Creating rights for long-term unmarried couples. This would remove injustices that occur when one partner is left without any right to financial award or maintenance if they break up, possibly after many years of living together.

Research also cited in Institute for Family Studies



Marriage  
Foundation



# For better, for worse: staying in an unhappy marriage could be the best thing you do

## Marriage Foundation and Marriage Week, 7 February 2017

With rates of family breakdown at an all-time high in the UK, new research shows unhappiness in a marriage is often just a short-term and fixable problem

New Marriage Foundation research reveals the majority of couples who are unhappy when their first child is born are happy ten years later if they stay together.

Of parents who are unhappy at the time of the birth of their first child, seven in ten stay together and of these the majority (68 per cent) are happy ten years later.

Twenty seven per cent of unhappy parents who stay together end up ‘extremely happy,’ rating happiness with their relationship a top mark of seven out of seven.

With rates of family breakdown at record levels in the UK, the research suggests too many couples are giving up on their marriages before they have given them a chance to succeed.

Harry Benson, research director of Marriage Foundation, commented: “Contrary to popular belief, staying in an unhappy marriage could be the best thing you ever do.

“Most marriages have their unhappy moments, but apart from the fortunately extremely rare cases where the relationship involves abuse, most couples can work through the difficulties to be happy later on.

“There is much a couple can do to get through a rocky patch in their relationship together. My own marriage faced such a crisis and twenty years on my wife and I have written a book, *What Mums Want and What Dads Need to Know*, to help other couples to avoid the unnecessary quagmire of misunderstandings we went through.

“A simple change a couple can make is to go on regular – but not routine – date nights. Previous research by Marriage Foundation showed that married couples who go on date nights every month have 14 per cent lower odds of their relationship breaking down than those who did not.

“Next month is Marriage Week, the perfect time to kick off the good habit of a regular time together dedicated to your marriage.”

Sir Paul Coleridge, former High Court judge and founder of Marriage Foundation commented: “With family breakdown especially in the first ten years at peak levels, this is really important, myth busting research.

“This study shows that because a couple is having a tough time adjusting to the demands of children, does not mean they will not come through it and end up with a really high quality, high satisfaction relationship in the long term.

“This study shows that because a couple is having a tough time adjusting to the demands of children, does not mean they will not come through it and end up with a really high quality, high satisfaction relationship in the long term.

“The problem lies in the misconceptions around the nature of long-term relationships. They do not just happen. Just because each party is passionate about the other at the start does not automatically mean they will remain for ever at that high octane level without effort and without periods of unhappiness.

“Talk to anyone who has a satisfying relationship twenty years on and they will tell you that it has had to be forged by sensitive, hard work by both sides over time. And success brings a reward beyond price which the whole family benefit from, especially the children.

“Keeping your relationship working and going forward is the far and away the best and most important ingredient in your child’s development.”



## Staying in an unhappy marriage could be the best thing you do, new study suggests

The Telegraph, 8 February 2017

Rozina Sabur

Having a child puts a strain on relationships, but staying in an unhappy marriage is the best thing you can do for its long-term success, according to a study.

Researchers found the majority of couples who are unhappy when their first child is born feel fulfilled a decade later.

Seven in ten couples stay together following the birth of their first child despite being unhappy, according to the Marriage Foundation.

Research commissioned by the organisation found that 68 per cent of these couples report being happy 10 years on.

Moreover 27 per cent said they were “extremely happy”, giving their relationships a score of seven out of seven .

At current levels, a child born today only has a 50 per cent chance of living with both parents by the time they reach 15, but the research suggests a “grin and bear it” approach may well prove fruitful in the long run.

Harry Benson, from the Marriage Foundation, said: “Contrary to popular belief, staying in an unhappy marriage could be the best thing you ever do.

“Most marriages have their unhappy moments, but apart from the fortunately extremely rare cases where the relationship involves abuse, most couples can work through the difficulties to be happy later on.”

Relationship experts confirm the findings of previous studies that suggested that couples who regularly had a night out with their partner were less likely to suffer from a relationship breakdown.

Sir Paul Coleridge, a former High Court judge and the founder of Marriage Foundation said: “With family breakdown – especially in the first ten years – at peak levels, this is really important, myth-busting research.

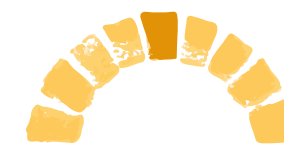
“This study shows that because a couple is having a tough time adjusting to the demands of children, does not mean they will not come through it and end up with a really high-quality, high-satisfaction relationship in the long term.

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“Keeping your relationship working and going forward is the far and away the best and most important ingredient in your child’s development.”

*Research also cited in the Daily Mail, BBC Newsnight, Record TV Brazil, Times, Guardian, BBC Oxford, BBC Solent, Newstalk Ireland, BBC Tees, BBC Newcastle, BBC Sheffield, BBC Guernsey, BBC Lancs, BBC Leicester, BBC Hereford, BBC Cornwall, BBC Cumbria, BBC Kent, BBC Warwick, BBC Bristol, BBC Jersey, BBC Derby, Institute for Family Studies, New York Post.*



## Date nights make for longer-lasting relationships – but only if you’re married

Marriage Foundation, September 2016

*Marriage Foundation research finds couples who go on occasional date nights have 14 per cent lower odds of their relationship breaking down – but only among those who are married.*

Made famous by high-profile fans such as US President Barack Obama and former UK Prime Minister David Cameron, date nights are now firmly established entries in the relationship guru’s handbook as a technique to keep a relationship away from the rocks.

Marriage Foundation, the think tank created to promote stable families, has compiled the first ever research into the effectiveness of date nights as a way to strengthen relationships. The report has revealed that only married couples reap the benefits of date nights.

In an analysis of Millennium Cohort Study data from 9,969 couples with nine-month-old children, 30 per cent went on date nights once a month. This group had 14 per cent lower odds of splitting up than couples who rarely or never spent an evening together without their children.

Cohabiting couples with a similar date night arrangement saw no change to their odds of splitting up.

Remarkably, the research showed when date nights became a weekly event they lost their benefit. Eleven per cent of couples who had date nights once a week or more often were no more likely to stay together than those who never made time for date nights at all, suggesting a degree of spontaneity is a key ingredient in a successful date night.

Harry Benson, research director of Marriage Foundation commented: “Couples are understandably keen to find the magic recipe for a long-lasting relationship. Date nights seem an obvious answer in an age where we are busier than ever and couples struggle to spend quality time together away from the

constraints of family and home.

“However, date nights come below a number of factors affecting the longevity of a relationship, which include education and age. The single most successful way of staying together remains getting married. The odds of married parents splitting up are 57 per cent lower than for cohabiting parents.

“A marriage is a contract, a public commitment to make a relationship work for the long term. We are geared to make more effort and to compromise more readily to make such an arrangement work.

“An occasional date night seems to be a useful tool in the box for married couples to show each other that their relationship remains a top priority. But it must not be used as an opportunity for one partner to vent their grievances; our research shows sensitivity and an awareness of the needs of the other is highly important to relationship success.”

Sir Paul Coleridge, chairman of Marriage Foundation commented: “We as a society are at risk of trivialising the importance of family stability and the critical condition it is currently in. Family breakdown is now at near-epidemic levels. Forty-five per cent of today’s teenagers do not live with both natural parents.

“Every child who goes through the breakup of their family is likely to suffer educationally, materially and psychologically to some degree.

“There is no lack of advice out there for couples in terms of how to make their relationship last, some of which is a product of groundless fads and fashions. Our report gives the statistics. If you want to keep your family together for life, get married.”

# Experts claim that having regular date nights can help to keep married couples together

The Sun, 25 September 2016

George Harrison

**COUPLES who have regular date nights are more likely to stay together, a new study has claimed.**

The Sunday Times reports that married partners who set time aside for a monthly date night are 14% more likely to still be together a decade later.

But whilst a spot of monthly “us time” is essential for relationships to flourish, weekly dates have no extra benefits, according to researchers at the Marriage Foundation.

The group, which is dedicated to working out why relationships fail, also found that dedicated date nights are more important for married couples than they are for couples who are just living together.

Further research by the foundation also painted a bleak picture for young couples, who were found to be struggling to keep the spark alive despite the pressures of their hectic, everyday lives.

And date nights could be the solution for many of Britain’s miserable married couples, with the Office for National Statistics claiming that over 1 million Brits are stuck in “deeply unhappy” relationships.

But squeezing in the monthly time together is proving to be difficult for many couples - even though the Obamas and the Camerons famously manage to slot in frequent date nights.

Of the 9,969 couples surveyed, just 11% managed a weekly date night, whilst 30% slotted in a monthly date.

Meanwhile a depressing 36% of couples struggled to find time for date nights at all.

Clare Perendergast, from relationship counselling service Relate, said that making time for your partner was important for a happy marriage, and suggested that date nights are one way to keep the spark alive.

She added: “What we are always clear about, though, is that you don’t have to spend lots of money on fancy meals and theatre tickets to have a date night.

“You could just as well stay in and cook a meal together, go for a walk or play a game - the important thing is that you spend time together without any distractions.”

*Research also cited in Sunday Times, Guardian, Daily Mail, BBC Radio 4 Today, TalkRadio, Premier Radio, BBC Three Counties, BBC Bristol.*



# Two thirds of divorces come ‘out of the blue’ for children

Marriage Foundation, 26 October 2015

New research from Marriage Foundation has found that the majority (60 per cent) of divorced couples were happy with their relationship only a year prior to their separation.

Only 40 per cent of married couples reported they were unhappy before their split and just nine per cent could be described as frequently arguing, high-conflict couples.

Among non-married couples, the proportion of happy couples before separation was even higher at 80 per cent.

Harry Benson, research director of Marriage Foundation, compiled the research using the latest data from Understanding Society. Mr Benson expressed his concern at the growing readiness of couples to abandon their relationships too easily.

He commented: “A solid majority of couples are satisfied with their marriages a year before they separate. Then something happens – a big row, financial pressure, wider family tensions – and they decide to call it a day and call the lawyers.

“No-one has ever claimed staying married is straightforward. My own marriage almost came tumbling down before my eyes. Marriage takes a huge willingness to listen, to negotiate and to compromise.

“The advantage of making the often considerable effort is that the children do not have their lives torn apart. For the parents too, divorce is rarely the sweet release some imagine it to be. 54 per cent of divorcees regret their break up.

“This research suggests the majority of divorces are salvageable. We need a shift away from this consumer, if-it’s-difficult-throw-it-out culture. Good, strong relationships are the surest way to make us happy and healthy, but they do require hard work.”

Former High Court judge Sir Paul Coleridge set up Marriage Foundation as a result of his concern about the impact of divorce on children. In a career spanning four decades, he saw hundreds of children suffering the consequences of their parents’ decisions.

Previous Marriage Foundation research has countered the prevailing opinion that low conflict divorce is less harmful for children. Children who have not experienced their parents arguing frequently before the separation are left more confused as to why their family is breaking up.

Sir Paul Coleridge commented: “This is more highly significant and myth-busting research. It exposes and highlights two groundless myths. The first is that people’s marriages and other long term relationships end because they are inconsolably miserable. In fact the research shows that is just not so. Much more likely is that they are fed up and bored and would like change. The relationship is neglected, withers and dies over time, sex dwindles to nothing and in the end one or other party wants out. And I would confirm that this attitude largely accords with my own anecdotal experience in the Family Court over four decades.”

“The other myth it reinforces is the one that pretends that children do not suffer if the break up is more or less peaceful. That should not be allowed to be a source of consolation because of our earlier research which finds that low conflict divorce is potentially every bit as harmful to children as the more colourful and noisy kind.”

“The reason is that children just cannot process the breakdown of their parents’ relationships when they have no opportunity to see it coming. At least when the plates and the curses are flying their young minds can make sense of ‘why Daddy and Mummy cannot go on living together’.

“Children involved in this sort of divorce can also inherit a skewed view of relationships. They are driven to conclude that all relationships, even the apparently stable ones, are profoundly unpredictable and this sabotages their own future prospects of a loving, committed relationship.

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“There are two clear conclusions which flow from these new findings. The first is that many more marriages are salvageable especially with a bit of real effort and especially with professional help. Or as Marriage Foundation likes to say many more can be ‘mended rather than ended’.

“The second essential conclusion is that parents should major on saving and enhancing their own relationship. By that route their children have the best possible chance of thriving and reaching their full potential.

“Keeping your and your partner’s relationship fresh, enjoyable and fulfilling is the single most important aid to your child’s development . On the other hand breaking up the family is single-handedly the most destructive event a child can experience.

“Children often blame themselves for their parents’ split. This is magnified when they can find no other explanation for why their family unit is falling apart.

“In decades gone by there was a social stigma about getting divorced. Obviously, we are well rid of that form of pressure. But something needs to take its place; a recognition by parents of their primary responsibility towards their children , but also the wider family – grandparents, uncles, aunts – all of whom are hurt in the process of a family breaking down.”

# No marital tiffs last year? Then divorce looms

**The Sunday Times, 1 November 2015**

*Nicholas Hellen, Social Affairs Editor*

DO NOT give yourself a hard time when a couple you considered content say they are divorcing: a new study shows almost two-thirds were happy in their relationship a year before their split.

The research by the Marriage Foundation think tank also found that 80% of co-habiting couples who split had reported 12 months earlier that they were generally happy.

The findings, based on “real time” verdicts by couples on the quality of their relationship, show only a small fraction of marriages (9%) and co-habitations (4%) fail after a period of high conflict, involving serious unhappiness.

Sir Paul Coleridge, a former High Court judge who set up the foundation, said the findings exposed the “myth” that marriages and long-term relationships ended because they were “inconsolably miserable”.

“Much more likely is that people are fed up and bored and would like change,” he said. “The relationship is neglected, withers and dies over time, sex dwindles to nothing and in the end one or other party wants out.”

Harry Benson, research director of the foundation, said: “A solid majority of couples are satisfied with their marriages a year before they separate. Then something happens — a big row, financial pressure, wider family tensions — and they decide to call it a day.”

The research is based on data from Understanding Society, a rolling study of 40,000 households. Couples were asked in 2009-

10 and again in 2011-12 how happy their relationship was and how often they argued.

Coleridge believes “low conflict” splits are the most damaging for children because they tend to blame themselves and wrongly conclude that apparently stable relationships can collapse without warning.

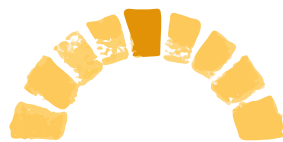
“Children cannot process the breakdown of their parents’ relationship when they have no opportunity to see it coming,” he said. “At least when the plates and the curses are flying their young minds can make sense of why Daddy and Mummy cannot go on living together.”

He also argues the findings show “many more marriages are salvageable”.

Susanna Abse, chief executive of the Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships, agreed that there were relatively few “high conflict” couples but said those heading for a split often had “Babes in the Woods complex”.

“They become too fearful of conflict. People need to know how to handle conflict in their relationship and to develop the ability to make up afterwards,” she said.

*Research also cited in The Telegraph.*



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

Marriage Foundation, 21 August 2015

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."

CONTINUED...



# Poor couples turning backs on marriage

The Times, 24 August 2015

Rosemary Bennett

A dramatic “marriage gap” has opened up between rich and poor couples, with the wealthy four times more likely to tie the knot than those on low incomes.

Almost 90 per cent of mothers with young children in households earning over £45,000 are married, compared with fewer than one in four with incomes under £14,000, research found.

The gap has opened up since the 1970s, when marriage rates were at about 90 per cent for both groups.

Research carried out by the Marriage Foundation also found that middle earners on between £21,000 and £30,000 are increasingly turning their backs on marriage. The vast majority (84 per cent) were still marrying in 1994, but only 59 per cent were married in 2012.

The trend is significant because couples with children who cohabit are far more likely to break up than those who marry, previous research has suggested. Cohabiting couples make up only 19 per cent of parents but half of all family breakdowns.

Harry Benson, research director at the Marriage Foundation, said it was a huge concern that marriage was fast becoming a privilege of the rich.

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

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

*Research also cited in Sunday Telegraph, BBC Radio 4 Today, BBC Leeds, BBC Oxford, Guardian, Telegraph and Marie Claire.*



# First comes love, then comes marriage... tying the knot before first baby is a key ingredient for marriage success

Marriage Foundation, 8 March 2015

In the first ever UK study of its kind, new research from Marriage Foundation, a think tank dedicated to building stronger families, has found that the recipe for relationship success lies in making the decision to commit before starting a family.

Marriage Foundation, which was set up in 2012 by former High Court judge Sir Paul Coleridge, has found that 76 per cent of mothers who married before giving birth remained intact, compared to 44 per cent of those who married after they had their first child.

The difference between tying the knot before children and after was found to have a greater impact on a couple's chance of success than their level of education.

Among women who married before their first child, 82 per cent with a degree stayed together, only marginally above the 74 per cent of non-degree educated women.

The research, by Harry Benson, research director of Marriage Foundation with analysis by Stephen McKay, a professor in social research at Lincoln University, used the latest data from Understanding Society, a UK longitudinal study that regularly surveys 40,000 households.

Harry Benson commented: “This is really exciting new research which shows that education and age do not dictate the success of relationships as was previously thought.

“It barely seems to matter if women are younger or older, degree educated or not; so long as they make a plan for their future and marry before starting a family, they have a really good chance of making that relationship last.

“It stands to reason that there’s one system that works best. It’s one that worked for years.

“While it is right that we have done away with the social shame of having children outside marriage, we should not lose confidence in the value of crystallising commitment before starting a family.

“The message of this research is clear. For any couple thinking of having children, their best chance of staying together in the long

run is by getting married first.”

In line with previous Marriage Foundation research, 92 per cent of the couples surveyed who remained intact after fifteen years were married.

Of the mothers who were cohabiting at the time of their first child’s birth and never took the decision to marry stayed together, only 31 per cent had avoided family breakdown by the time their child took their GCSEs.

Marriage Foundation is launching a manifesto, which urges the Government to overcome their trepidation in championing marriage as the best chance families have to stay together.

Sir Paul Coleridge, chairman of Marriage Foundation, said, “The next government has a real chance to reduce the marriage gap between the haves and the have-nots. There is a serious and growing cause of real social inequality.

“The myths and misperceptions, such as that cohabitation is as stable as marriage should be eradicated by clear public statements and education.

“Governments cannot legislate directly for stronger families but they can foster the right environment and so make a real difference.

“They spend £46 billion a year on family breakdown, mostly due to the increased tax credits and benefits awarded to single parents, and even more on the increased rates of truancy, juvenile delinquency and crime among people from broken homes.

“It is therefore firmly in the Government’s interests, as well as individuals’, to tackle the worrying rise in family instability in the UK.”

The Marriage Foundation manifesto also calls for a cabinet level Minister for Families, a tax and benefit system that supports marriage and sustained relationships, a fund to promote relationships for both children and adults and a complete modernisation of the family law system.

## What a surprise! Marry before having kids and you're less likely to split: Three quarters of couples who wed before their first child are still together 15 years later

Daily Mail, 9 March 2015

By Steve Doughty

- Research found those who had children after marrying stayed together
- Less than half of couples who had baby before marriage kept it in tact
- Age of a couple when they married or had children did not have impact

Couples who want to stay together should marry before they have their first child, according to research published yesterday.

It found that more than three-quarters of couples who were wed before their first child were still together 15 years later.

But less than half of those who had a baby before marrying kept their marriage intact.

The research, which was carried out for the Marriage Foundation think-tank, showed that marrying before starting a family was a major factor in keeping parents together.

The age of a couple when they became parents was also found to have no impact.

The foundation's research chief Harry Benson said the findings indicated marriage is a bigger influence on parents having a solid relationship than education, which is often cited with wealth as a key driver in encouraging couples to marry and stay married.

The study was based on 1,783 mothers with teenage children who took part in the state-financed survey called Understanding Society.

It found that 76 per cent of mothers who married before becoming a parent were still with the father when the child was 14 or 15 years old.

By contrast, of those who married after the birth of their first baby, only 44 per cent were still with their husband when their first-born reached the age of 14 or 15.

While more than eight out of ten women with a degree were still married as their child approached 15, so were 74 per cent of

women without.

The age of couples, the report said, 'had no effect whatsoever' on their chances of staying together. Mr Benson said: 'This shows that education and age do not dictate the success of relationships as was previously thought.'

'It barely seems to matter if women are younger or older, degree-educated or not; so long as they make a plan for their future and marry before starting a family, they have a really good chance of making that relationship last.'

'It stands to reason that there is one system that works best. It is one that worked for years. While it is right that we have done away with the social shame of having children outside marriage, we should not lose confidence in the value of crystallising commitment before starting a family.'

'The message of this research is clear. For any couple thinking of having children, their best chance of staying together in the long run is by getting married first.'

Out of all the couples still together 15 years after the birth of their first child, 92 per cent were married. With cohabitee mothers who never married, less than a third were still in their relationship with the father 14 or 15 years later.

Sir Paul Coleridge, the former High Court judge who heads the Marriage Foundation, said: 'The next government has a real chance to reduce the marriage gap between the haves and the have-nots.'

'There is a serious and growing cause of real social inequality. The myths and misperceptions, such as that cohabitation is as stable as marriage, should be eradicated by clear public statements and education.'

'Governments cannot legislate directly for stronger families but they can foster the right environment and so make a real difference.'

Research also cited in *The Times*, *Telegraph*, *BBC Radio 5 Live*, *Independent*, *Guardian*, *Mirror*, *BBC London*, *BBC Solent*, *BBC Tees*.



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

Marriage Foundation, 1 December 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 cohabitees. 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.'



## Most family break-ups involve unmarried parents: Co-habiting couples four times as likely to separate

Daily Mail, 1 December 2013

*By Steve Doughty*

- Unwed cohabiting couples four times more likely to split than those married
- Economic hardship and higher stress levels negatively impact children
- Breakdowns estimates to cost the taxpayer directly £46 billion per year

Unmarried parents are four times more likely to split up than those who have wed, research revealed yesterday.

It also indicated that co-habiting couples with children under 16 are now responsible for the majority of family breakdowns.

On average, 5.3 per cent of these relationships ended each year from 2009-12, according to the study.

But among those who had taken their vows, the average rate was only 1.3 per cent, said the Marriage Foundation think-tank and university academics.

The high rate of co-habiting parents in family splits comes despite these couples making up only a fifth of those with children.

The figures were gathered from the findings of a £50million state-sponsored research project, the Understanding Society survey.

Over the last 20 years, it has gathered information on the progress of families and now tracks events in 40,000 homes.

Results were compared with findings from the official Labour Force Survey, which asks questions in around 15,000 households.

Harry Benson, of the Marriage Foundation, said: 'This marks a tipping point for society.

'We have an epidemic of family breakdown because so few people realise how badly the odds of success are stacked against unmarried co-habitees.

'If you're living together as unmarried parents, you're four times more likely to split up than married parents.

'It is frequently said that low income and poor education are the main reasons behind family breakdown. But, if anything, the average income and level in education has improved since the 1980s while family breakdown has doubled.

'We haven't been getting poorer or less well-educated 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.' According to calculations by the foundation, which worked with academics from the University of Lincoln, the figures indicate that 116,800 couples with children under 16 separated in 2010.

Of these family breakdowns, 60,400 involved married parents and 56,400 co-habiting couples. The study's figures are a close match with those from the Office for National Statistics, which said there were 59,309 divorces involving children under 16 in 2010.

Researchers applied these break-up rates to population data for 2013 and suggested that co-habiting parents may now account for more than half of family breakdowns.

Last month, the Institute for Fiscal Studies said it was wrong to suggest two years ago that marriage had no bearing on whether or not couples break up.

The think-tank admitted that money, education and social factors do not explain family failure.

More than 2.5million lower-income married couples are in line for a tax break of up to £200 a year.

But increasing evidence that being wed helps keeps families united is adding to pressure on David Cameron to do more.

*Research also cited in Sunday Times and Premier Radio.*



Marriage  
Foundation

# PROJECTS






**Marriage Week**  
CELEBRATING COMMITMENT

**The UK National Marriage Week is an annual focus on and celebration of marriage which takes place in May. Its purpose is to highlight the benefits of a healthy marriage to society, the media and the government and to encourage couples to reflect on and invest in their relationship.**

The first Marriage Week took place in 1997 and is now celebrated in many countries across Europe, New Zealand, South Africa and America. In 2017, UK Marriage Week became a project of Marriage Foundation. It is endorsed and supported by many other established charities and organisations who contribute resources for the annual campaign.

Each Marriage Week has a theme and encourages couples to reflect, have fun and specifically to carve out time for their relationship during that week. Across the UK larger events are also organised at a local level for couples by Marriage Week supporters and since 2017 a Westminster Hall debate has been held each year, around the time of the campaign with marriage and family stability as the central subject of the debate.

**In the lead up to Marriage Week, more resources, blogs and information are made available at: [marriage-week.org.uk](https://marriage-week.org.uk) and on social media**   





HOWARD KENNEDY

## Relationship breakdown and the workplace

How personal relationship difficulties  
affect work amongst high earners



## HOWARD KENNEDY Relationship breakdown and the workplace

How personal relationship difficulties affect work amongst high earners

505

respondents  
completed our  
survey, 362 male  
and 143 female,  
across industries  
and regions of  
Great Britain



69%  
of those surveyed  
have experienced  
serious relationship  
difficulty in their  
current or a  
similar role

as opposed to 20%  
within Great Britain  
as a whole



71%

of them agree  
that it has had  
a serious impact  
on their work



62% thought their  
employer  
was unaware

35% thought their  
employer knew



Half of respondents said general  
high pressure and stress at work  
affected their relationship



62% said relationship problems  
made them **more distracted**  
and **less productive** at work



46%  
long working  
hours



38%  
spending time  
away from  
home



Despite this tangible impact  
62% didn't tell the employer  
what was happening



And there is a real split in opinion as to  
whether or not employers should be told  
or give weight to the situation...

45%  
say yes

46%  
say no



48% said their employer  
offered no help, 33%  
were offered time off,  
38% would not prefer  
any type of support  
from their employer



A staggering 36% of people did nothing to resolve  
the relationship issues



Communication, quality time, work/life balance and  
prioritising the relationship were the most cited steps  
that people are taking to stop problems happening again





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# NEWSLETTERS



## February 2020 News

Some interesting reads this month:

- UK has the fastest falling divorce rates in Europe
- Half of Britain's highest earners have problems at home that have affected their productivity at work.
- A great new app is launched that helps couples resolve money issues
- Why Number 10 needs a Family Policy Unit - 'Commit or Quit' is coming soon ...

**Harry Benson**

*Research Director, Marriage Foundation*

### Divorce rates across Europe

MF analysis of Eurostat data

First 15 years of marriage

By year of marriage

	1992	2002	2017	25 year
	Actual	Actual	Project	Change
Sweden	33%	38%	36%	+10%
Finland	32%	31%	33%	+5%
Latvia	25%	34%	33%	+29%
Belgium	27%	38%	31%	+15%
Denmark	30%	29%	31%	+2%
Czech	29%	27%	29%	-2%
Norway	28%	33%	29%	+3%
Spain	21%	25%	27%	+32%
Austria	30%	36%	27%	-9%
France	24%	27%	26%	+5%
Lithuania	25%	30%	25%	+1%
Netherlands	25%	23%	25%	-1%
Hungary	28%	29%	24%	-14%
UK (E&W)	31%	28%	23%	-27%
Germany	27%	27%	22%	-17%
Switzerland	27%	27%	22%	-22%
Bulgaria	18%	21%	20%	+8%
Slovakia	20%	22%	18%	-8%
Poland	13%	17%	17%	+26%
Italy	6%	7%	16%	+151%
Romania	16%	17%	14%	-7%

### High flyer problems at home affect work



A new YouGov survey of 500 high flyers, earning £100k plus, finds that 69% admit they have had significant relationship problems at home. Of these 62% said it affected their attention or productivity at work. A parallel survey found that just 20% of the general population had significant problems.

Personally I'm quite surprised. Higher income generally cushions couples. But maybe, like celebs, high flyers have special pressures. The survey was sponsored by the law firm Howard Kennedy with input from us and others, and of course begs a whole load more questions, which we hope to explore. Results were covered in the Sunday Times.

### UK has fastest falling divorce rate in Europe



For some years, we've been tracking the strengthening of Britain's marriages. But until now, we've not been able to make any meaningful comparison with what's happening in Europe.

However new data allows us to calculate European divorce rates in exactly the same way as we do for the UK, by year of marriage.

As social pressure to marry disappears, Britain's marriages have become stronger. Our findings show that we lead the pack and can now see evidence of this trend beginning to spread across Europe. Our findings were covered in the Daily Mail and Times.





## Toucan: New app to help couples talk money

We all know how hard it can be to talk about money. Money is so much more than just stuff. It reflects our expectations, values, hopes and fears. So no surprise that it's the subject couples tend to argue about with most intensity. So well done Family Life for developing the Toucan online app to help couples talk about the stuff. The relationship tools and videos are well put together, fun and motivating.

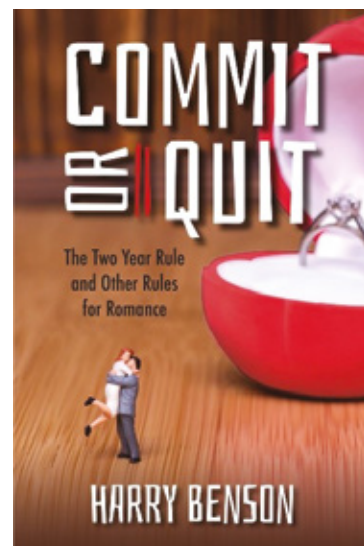


## Number 10 needs a Family Policy Unit

With new management at Number 10, I wrote an article for the leading political blog ConservativeHome.

### A Number 10 Family Policy Unit should:

- encourage the development of UK research into mainstream family stability, instability, and its consequences.
- look at how government policy encourages or discourages couples to make clear decisions about their future and to formalise those decisions.
- give senior ministers the confidence to promote clarity of commitment – and therefore marriage and civil partnerships – as the centrepiece of a bold new family policy that boosts the odds of stability.



## Commit or Quit - my new book coming soon

Cohabitation is the new social norm for couples. But it is not risk free. It can encourage ambiguity and drift in a promising relationship and can make it harder to end an unpromising one.

Accepting that it is here to stay, I introduce the Two Year Rule and other Rules for Romance to help couples find the reliable love they seek.

Research-based and road-tested on my own kids, it's out in May in time for the launch of Marriage Week. Find it on Amazon and Twitter.

# January 2020 News

## A very happy new year and new decade to you!

The well-being of the '20s generation of children will depend greatly on how much their parents have regained confidence in the importance of marriage and commitment.

We welcome the new decade with encouraging news about marriage and discuss the arrival of civil partnerships for heterosexual couples.

Look out for our new research on how Britain's marriages compare to Europe, out tomorrow 2 January.

Welcome to the roaring '20s!

**Harry Benson**

*Research Director, Marriage Foundation*



## The average marriage can now expect to last at least 40 years

Whenever the annual divorce stats come out, it's easy for the casual reader to think that the average marriage lasts just 12 years - i.e. not very long.

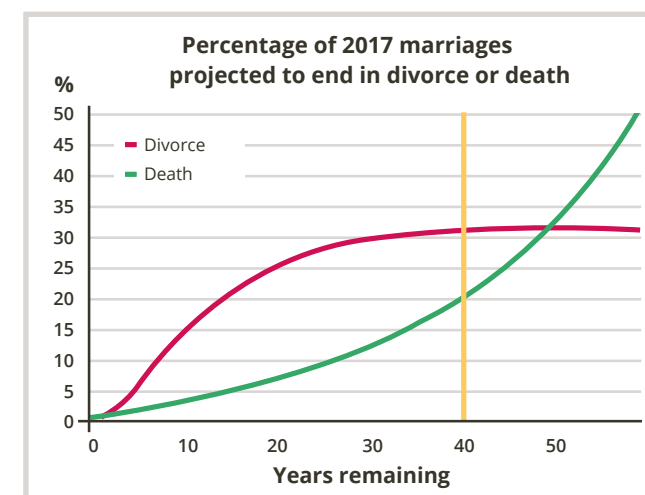
But this is hugely misleading. All this figure means is that half of divorces happen before 12 years and half afterwards. It excludes marriages that last until one spouse dies. Quite an important point!

What we really want to know is how long the average marriage lasts before ending in either divorce or death.

A while back, the Office for National Statistics did exactly this and concluded - based on trends at the time - that half of all marriages beginning in 2010 would last 30 years before ending in either divorce or death.

Well, those 2010 couples have already done a great deal better than expected. In their first eight years of marriage ONS predicted 16% of them would divorce. In fact only 12% have done so. About two thirds of that fall comes from doing better than expected. The other third comes because I adjust for the extra 20,000 or so weddings that take place overseas.

Amazingly, for couples who have got past their first decade of marriage, divorce rates have changed little since the 1970s. As a result, I can say with confidence that the average marriage that began in 2010 will actually last 38 years.



But divorce rates are still falling in the early years of marriage. Hence my updated estimate that half of all couples who marry today should expect to celebrate their ruby anniversary of 40 years together. Not a bad start to the decade!

Our report was covered in the Sunday Times.

## Enter civil partnerships

From New Year's Eve, heterosexual couples now have the same opportunity as same sex couples to formalise their relationship through either civil partnership or marriage.



The introduction of civil partnerships is an anomaly, stretching back to 2004 when a legal equivalent to marriage was introduced for same sex couples without actually calling it 'marriage'. Subsequently the right to marry was extended to same sex couples in 2014.

In theory there should no longer be the need for same sex civil partnerships and they could have been phased out. But the Supreme Court decided otherwise, ruling that heterosexual couples should have the same choice. So here we are.

What do I think about civil partnerships? I support them. Marriage Foundation supports them.

For those who really can't cope with the idea of marriage, a civil partnership contains similar ingredients to a marriage in terms of commitment. It requires a clear decision, a plan for the future, an active step, and involves family and friends. In years to come, I expect civil partners to look pretty similar to married couples in terms of stability.

Will it undermine marriage? I very much doubt it.

There's an interesting parallel in France where the PACS civil union system was introduced in 1999. Since then, marriage rates have continued their slow decline in much the same way as they have in the UK. But today there are now nearly as many couples signing a PACS as getting married. The net effect has been to increase the overall number of new formalised relationships from about 300,000 per year in 2000 to about 400,000 per year today. And, in terms of stability, that must be a good thing.

So will CPs take off as in France? Again, I very much doubt it (although I'm ready to be proved wrong).

The French tax system gives couples a massive incentive to formalise their relationship through marriage or PACS. As I have pointed out many times, our UK system penalises couples for living together ... but that's another story!

# Marriage Foundation in the News

## Times letters:

### Sir Paul Coleridge on civil partnerships

*Sir, Although many will no doubt think that the legal arrival this week of the heterosexual civil partnership is another nail in the coffin of "traditional marriage", those fears are misplaced. Marriage Foundation has always, while regarding marriage as the gold standard, been supportive of this alternative arrangement for those who regard marriage as "not for them". There is no doubt that, in theory at least, a civil partnership does not automatically import into its corpus the idea of exclusivity or of lifelong commitment as marriage (whether religious or civil) does. However, much more importantly, civil partnerships involve an almost identical psychological and legal commitment and there is no reason to believe that, entered into thoughtfully, they will not be as enduring. Family breakdown with its acknowledged effects on children is the scourge of our time. At a time when the divorce rate has been declining significantly for eight years the biggest cause of family breakdown is thoughtless and ill-considered child-bearing cohabitation, which collapses at three times the rate of marriage. We are confident that civil partnerships will lead to more stability for families overall.*



**Sir Paul Coleridge,**  
*Marriage Foundation*

## Sunday Times : Our story about marriages lasting 40 years

*'Sir Paul Coleridge, chairman of the Marriage Foundation, which conducted the study, said: "The story quoted to me over and over again by highly intelligent people is that people get divorced nowadays because we live so much longer we are bound to get bored. The figures show this is totally wrong. The divorce statistics among people who have been married a long time are minuscule."*

## Sky News: Harry talks about civil partnerships

*'It's a bit of an anomaly. It's there because civil partnerships and marriage are available to same sex couples. The government could have chosen to phase out civil partnerships but they chose to extend them to heterosexual couples, which is fine with us because we think that civil partnerships and marriage essentially amount to similar things ... and that's a good thing'*



# How you can help our work?

This booklet provides just a snapshot of the in-depth research and work that we do. To read all of our reports, research, press coverage and updates, please visit our website.

To maintain and further our vital work, we need more supporters to help us with funding. Why not become a regular supporter or give us a one-off donation to help continue our work to see better outcomes for couples, children and our society as a whole. Please go to our website and click donate, or get in touch with us via email where we will be pleased to provide you with further information.



Marriage  
Foundation

[info@marriagefoundation.org.uk](mailto:info@marriagefoundation.org.uk)  
PO Box 3014, Romford, RM7 1TX

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



@marriagef



marriagefoundation