



Marriage Foundation

Press Release from the Marriage Foundation

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Celebrity divorce rate 67 per cent higher than other couples, finds new report

- Glitzy 'Hello' style celebrity weddings more likely to end in failure
- Divorce rate among musicians, worse than other celebrity groups
- Celebrities make poor marriage role models, says Marriage Foundation
- Ego and opportunity blamed for higher divorce rates

The divorce rate among celebrity couples is 67 per cent higher than other couples during the early years of their marriage, finds a new report from the Marriage Foundation.

The report, *Celebrity Divorce: First and Second Marriages*, looks at 484 celebrity couples whose marriages were covered in glossy magazines such as Hello and OK! between 2001-2010. It found that during the first 16 years of marriage, just over half (52 per cent) ended in divorce, compared with 31 per cent for non-celebrities.

Celebrity first marriages fare worse than subsequent marriages with 57 per cent ending in divorce within 16 years, compared to just under half (47 per cent) of second and subsequent marriages.

Harry Benson, the Marriage Foundation's Research Director and the report's author commented: "We look up to celebrities because they have achieved fame and success. And we love their glamorous weddings because it's love and it's forever and it's the dream. But the harsh truth is that in their marriages, most celebrities are not good role models.

"This study shines a spotlight on the 'Hello' style wedding. Our study shows that these glitzy and expensive weddings that we all like to read about are much more likely to fail than those of ordinary people. Unrealistic expectations created by these fairy tale weddings, a failure to understand the work, commitment and compromise it takes to make a marriage work, long periods of separation, and frequent opportunity may all play a part.

"But I suspect ego and opportunity are the main culprits. Being constantly told how wonderful you are is bound to boost ego, undermining the need to put others, your

husband or wife first - a pre-requisite for a successful relationship. Being surrounded by attractive starlets presents an obvious opportunity.

“As a consequence, the divorce rate among celebrity couples is significantly higher than ordinary people, during the first 16 years of marriage making them very poor role models.”

The report found the highest celebrity divorce rates among musicians with an overall divorce rate of 60 per cent, ranging from 69 per cent for first marriages to 51 per cent for second marriages.

Actors and actresses fare marginally better, divorcing at an overall rate of 52 per cent. While sporting and other celebrity marriages fare best at 39 per cent, though still substantially worse than the rest of us.

Mr Benson continued: “The lesson from the report is clear. If you are looking for a celebrity couple to follow, look at those who have been married for a long time such as Sarah Lancashire (19 years), Tina Fey (19 years), Gabby Logan (19 years) and Alexander Armstrong (17 years), rather than Katie Price (4 years to Peter Andre), Britney Spears (55 hours to Jason Alexander) and Katy Perry (2 years to Russell Brand).

This new report from the Marriage Foundation follows their recent publication of how the COVID lockdown has impacted married and cohabiting parents.

That study looked at 2,559 parents who completed the recent UK Household Longitudinal Coronavirus survey, carried out by the University of Essex. Overall the data found one in five (20 per cent) of couples reported an improved relationship as they were forced to spend more time together, but there were wide variations between different groups.

Cohabiting mums fared worse in almost every category. They had more than treble the odds of a worse relationship, four times the odds of getting on each other’s nerves ‘most’ or ‘all’ of the time, five times the odds of quarrelling ‘most’ or ‘all’ of the time, double the odds of ever regretting living together, and less than half the odds of thinking household chores were divided fairly, compared to married mothers.

The data clearly showed that Britain's three and a half million cohabiting mums have had the toughest time, with one in five (22 per cent), saying their relationship had got worse and an almost identical number (20 per cent), saying they had 'got on each other's nerves most or all of the time' during lockdown. Inequalities in the division of household chores, such as cooking and cleaning were a major cause of conflict. Put another way, a third (34 per cent), of cohabiting women think their partners still aren’t pulling their weight around the home.

The picture was compounded when age and income were added to the picture. The study found 27 per cent of cohabiting parents with no earnings reported a worse relationship. Worryingly, one in ten cohabiting mums said they had considered or were considering separating. Married couples and those in Civil Partnerships fared significantly better."

By contrast, the report found significant numbers of married couples, those in civil partnerships and those over the age of 50, had benefited from lockdown and spending more time together. In particular married parents who were self-employed showed the greatest gains with three in 10 (29 per cent,) reporting a better relationship.

Sir Paul Coleridge, founder of the Marriage Foundation commented: "Once again research would seem to show clearly that serious, forward-looking, formal commitment i.e. marriage, adds a crucial ingredient to long term relationships which is very often absent with mere informal cohabitation. So, when these informal relationships are stress-tested by outside events, as they have been by COVID and lockdown, they are more liable to buckle under the added strain. Why is that? The answer is surely that ambiguity is the very antithesis of long-term stability and security, two vital objectives for all satisfying, loving relationships"

Mr Benson concluded: "Our COVID lockdown study debunks the myth that we should be braced for a tsunami of divorces when life returns to normal. The data shows for a majority of the UK's 12.8 million couples who are either married or in a civil partnership, spending more time with their husbands or wives and children has been a positive experience, or at worse neutral. Compare and contrast this with the experience of cohabiting mums, where a significant number felt their relationship had got worse. These findings accord with 'Commitment Theory', which measures relationships against two factors, dedication and constraints. Using this model, we can explain why some couples have prospered under the lockdown and other less committed ones are struggling.

"In short it confirms why marriage and civil partnerships matters and why the Government should be doing more to support this institution and actively encourage those in unmarried cohabiting relationships to make their commitment to one another crystal clear. "

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About Marriage Foundation

The list of celebrity weddings was put together following an analysis of all the weddings covered by leading glossy magazines such as Hello, Take a Break, Woman's Weekly, OK! and Cosmopolitan. All the weddings took place between 2001-2010.

Marriage Foundation was founded in 2012 by Sir Paul Coleridge, a High Court judge who was moved by his personal experience in 40 years as a barrister and judge specialising in family law. The think tank seeks to improve public understanding of marriage and to reduce the numbers of people drawn into the family justice system – some 500,000 children and adults each year. It has established itself as a leading voice on marriage issues in the UK.

Sir Paul Coleridge, Harry Benson and Michaela Hyde from the Marriage Foundation are available for comment and for interviews linked to these new findings.

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