



# Marriage Foundation

Press Release from the Marriage Foundation

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## Good news for marriage as new study debunks claims of a COVID lockdown divorce boom

Good news for marriage as a new study debunks claims that there is a divorce boom as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions.

The report from the Marriage Foundation looked at 2,559 parents who completed the recent UK Household Longitudinal Coronavirus survey. It found that twice as many marriages improved during lockdown than worsened. Overall the data found one in five (20 per cent) of married couples reported their relationships had strengthened compared to just nine per cent who said it had worsened. Meanwhile the proportion of parents who were considering divorce more often than not fell by two thirds from 'normal' pre-COVID levels in 2017 - 2019.

Harry Benson, the Marriage Foundation's Research Director and one of the report's authors commented: "Our study debunks claims that lockdown is leading to a divorce boom. The data strongly suggests the opposite – spending more time with your husband or wife has been beneficial for large numbers of the UK's 12.8 million married couples.

"These findings for UK marriages are further strengthened when set alongside a similar recent analysis of US marriages. Analysis of a national survey last week found half of married adults said their appreciation of their partner had increased and commitment had deepened. Moreover, data from four of the five states that publish the actual number of divorces in real-time have shown fewer divorces during lockdown."

An earlier analysis found that a quarter (26 per cent) of parents reported improved relationships with their children, while just one in 25 (four per cent) reported worse relationships.

The report was not all good news, as it found clear signs that lockdown had "caused friction in some marriages".

Compared to pre-COVID levels between 2017-19, slightly more married fathers than normal said they were “fairly” or “extremely unhappy”. Saying that they were more likely to be “getting on each other’s nerves”, “quarrelling often”, or often regretted “getting married”.

However, just 0.7 per cent of married fathers were considering divorce, two thirds down on pre-COVID levels. More married mothers than normal also reported being unhappy, but fewer said they were quarrelling. Two thirds fewer were considering divorce.

Mr Benson continued: “Although stress levels in parental relationships have risen with so much uncertainty about jobs, money, and being unable to go out or socialise, lockdown appears to have affirmed the commitment of married parents. In short many seem to have found spending more time with the partner has been a positive experience.”

The report also found a significant gender gap between cohabiting parents. Although cohabiting fathers reported similar results to married parents, cohabiting mothers appear to have found lockdown especially difficult – although . They had more than treble the odds of a worse relationship (22 per cent), 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.

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 mums think their partners don’t pull their weight around the home.

Sir Paul Coleridge, founder of the Marriage Foundation commented: “Covid has spawned a plethora of inaccurate predictions and a divorce explosion was just one such. In fact, as with so many other areas of life under covid, the law of unintended consequences has ruled the day. On the whole marriages have blossomed through lockdown, no doubt because of the extra TLC spouses have been able to invest in their relationships freed from the terrible pressures generated by having to spend a lot of the working week at, or travelling to and from work. This is all of a piece with earlier Marriage Foundation research which showed clearly that couples who make extra investment in their marriages – eg via occasional date nights – benefit from a more enduring and satisfying relationship. Unexpectedly this new finding has not impacted unmarried couples in the same way. When these relationships have been stress-tested by the covid lockdown the mothers especially have suffered. No doubt the absence of formal commitment has generated insecurity and ambiguity at a time when the need for complete unambiguous unity was essential.”

Mr Benson concluded: “This report shows that even though lockdown had caused friction in some marriages, the data suggests that for most British married couples it had nevertheless been broadly positive, even allowing for variations across different demographics. Worryingly it did expose the insecurity faced by cohabiting mothers in particular and the need for the Government to stop pretending that living together is the equivalent of marriage. For some it can be. But whereas stability is the norm for married couples, it is the exception for cohabiting couples. And it is cohabiting mothers who pay the price. It is long overdue that the government gets serious about backing marriage.”

**ENDS**

**About Marriage Foundation**

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.

For all media enquiries, please contact Alistair Thompson on 07970 162225