**Press Release from Marriage Foundation**

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Married poor more stable than unmarried rich, finds major new study

• Nearly nine in 10 parents still together with children aged 13-15 are married

• Cohabiting parents three times more likely to break-up

• Stability gap between marriage and cohabitation present in all five income groups

Poor married couples with children are more stable and likely to stick together than rich unmarried couples with children, according to a major new study from the Marriage Foundation.

The study, Married Poor More Stable that Unmarried Rich – Why marriage is still the best way to find reliable love analyses data from the UK Longitudinal Household Survey, (Understanding Society), grouping parents into the five socio-economic groups and comparing the relative stability between married and unmarried couples in each category over five alternate one year periods, from 2009 to 2010, from 2011 to 2012, from 2013 to 2014, from 2015 to 2016, and from 2017 to 2018. It found that cohabiting parents were 3.4 times more likely to split up compared to married parents (6.5 per cent versus 1.9 per cent) and that this “gap in stability runs across all five income quintiles”.

“The evidence is that this stability gap has remained pretty constant throughout the ten year period of this study. Even after taking into account mothers age, education, ethnicity, household income and relationship happiness, the odds of cohabiting parents splitting up are consistently twice as high as those of married parents” it says.

“The consequence of high levels of breakup among cohabiting parents is that few parents remain as unmarried cohabiting couples as their children grow older. Most split up or marry. Our analysis shows that 86 per cent of all intact couples with 13-15 year old children are married.”

The report which is being released on the eve of the think-tanks 10th Anniversary says: “Amongst the very richest parents, 2.9 per cent split up if cohabiting versus 1 per cent if married. Amongst the very poorest, 8.9 per cent split up if cohabiting versus 2.8 per cent if married. Remarkably, the very poorest married couples are slightly more likely to remain together than the very richest cohabiting parents. The only cohabitees who do better are the second richest group who split at a rate of 2.3 per cent.”

Harry Benson, Marriage Foundation’s Research Director commented: “These figures demonstrate, yet again that marriage remains the most stable form of relationship especially for raising children and is more important than income on couples sticking together. Even once we controlled for mothers age, education, ethnicity, relationship happiness and income, the odds of cohabiting parents splitting up are consistently twice as high as married parents. This explains why our analysis shows that nearly nine in ten of all intact couples with 13-15 year children are married.”

The report, while upbeat about the benefits and importance of marriage acknowledges that marriage rates have plummeted since 1973, the all-time peak for marriages in England and Wales.

“Not only are fewer couples marrying but they are doing it later, if at all. The average age at first marriage is now 30 for brides and 32 for grooms, some nine years later than their 1973 peers (ONS, 2021)”, it says.

“These declines are reflected, and possibly even driven, by the apparent indifference towards marriage from our politicians and policy makers.

“Whereas a tax allowance for married couples accounted for a very meaningful 4 per cent of GDP in the late 1970s (Lindsay, 2000), the current tax allowance is worth a relatively meaningless and poorly targeted £250 per couple.”

The report continues: “Marriage is also neglected in public policy documents… Worse, the overwhelming majority of policy- makers, as members of the highest income quintile, are married. In 2017 for example, 89% of the British cabinet were married. Apparently marriage is important for them but not for everyone else (Benson, 2017).

“And yet by some measures, marriage is in good health.

• Population data shows that 60 per cent of parents are married and 80 per cent of couples with or without children are married.

• Divorce rates are now at the lowest levels since the 1960s.

• Couples who marry are more likely to stay together than those who do not.

• Their children are less likely to experience teenage mental health problems.”

Mr Benson continued: “This list of benefits also helps to explain why, despite fewer people tying the knot, the desire to marry remains incredibly high. When we surveyed 2,000 young unmarried adults aged 18-30, even among those using Tinder and Grindr, nine in 10, (89 per cent) said they wanted to marry and four in five (80 per cent) expected to marry ‘at some point’. The same study found the ambition to marry was almost universal regardless of income.”

The report concludes: “Once again this finding demonstrates that the idea of long-term stable relationships outside of marriage are a rarity.”

Notes to editors

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.

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