



Marriage Foundation

Press Release from Marriage Foundation

Release Date: Embargoed until 00.01 Saturday 14th December 2024

Marriage rates down by 30 per cent since 1960s among young couples, finds new study

Marriage rates are down by a "deeply troubling" 30 per cent since 1960 among young couples, with less than six in 10 men and women predicted to marry in their lifetime, finds a new study.

The study, *The collapse of marriage among Gen Z*, predicts on the current trends, just 58 per cent of Gen Z women and 56 per cent of Gen Z men will ever marry, compared to 56-67 per cent of millennials (born 1981-1996), 62-82 per cent of Gen X (born 1965-1980), and 77-96 per cent of boomers (born 1946-1964).

The report, using the latest ONS data, warns that the effects of the Covid lockdown, "has yet to run its full course...". Saying, "We have previously identified that weddings in 2021 and 2022 have not yet made up for the cancellations and postponements forced by our draconian restrictions. Fully 115,000 weddings, equivalent to half a year, have simply disappeared," and "the biggest drop has been among those aged 30, whose marriage rate is 16 per cent lower than it should have been."

Harry Benson, Marriage Foundation's Research Director commented: "Our study paints a deeply troubling picture and that if nothing is done to boost marriage rates in the UK, less than six in 10 young people will ever tie the knot, denying them the benefits of reliable love and family stability. This is a real tragedy as this report demonstrates, fewer marriages – equals - more family breakdown."

The report warns that the UK already has the highest level of breakdown since records began with nearly half of all children not living with both natural parents. Adding, "It's no coincidence that this matches the trend away from marriage."

It says: "Why does any of this matter? Put simply, the trend away from marriage has profound consequences for stability & children's outcomes.

"Couples who marry before their child is born are more likely to stay together while bringing up their child compared to couples who marry later or not at all. Whereas 80 per cent of

couples stay together if they were married before their child was born, 68 per cent stay together if they married later on and 39 per cent if they never marry.”

It goes on: “Couples who split up are then far more likely to experience poverty and need higher levels of state support. For example, 60 per cent of lone parents receive housing benefits compared to just 10 per cent of couple parents.

“Whether through the drop in income, loss of contact with one parent, or psychological impact of parental divorce, children living in lone-parent families tend to fare worse on almost any negative social indicator.

“Today, we already have the highest level of family breakdown in recorded UK history. Nearly half of all teenagers are not living with both natural parents. The source of more than two-thirds of this family breakdown is not from couples divorcing but from the break-up of couples who never married in the first place.”

Marriage Foundation has previously highlighted how the desire to marry among young people remains strong, with both men and women recognising it as the gold standard of relationships.

In a previous study, which asked over 2,000 young people (18 – 30 years old) who were in a relationship, nearly nine in 10 (87 per cent) said they wanted to marry, this included those who had met using so-called hook apps such as Tinder and Grindr.

Mr Benson continued: “The real scandal here, is that while young people want to marry, so few will. Our previous study found incredibly high levels of support for the institution, but when we asked the same young people if they would marry this figure dropped to around four in five who expected to marry ‘at some point’.

“Add in socioeconomic data of those who actually marry, a deeply troubling gap opens between rich and poor, with the wealthiest couples nearly twice as likely to marry as the poorest – a marriage gap of 39 per cent. Yet no Government over the last 30 years has stood up for marriage. Ministers so often tell us about their wedded bliss and the majority of both the Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet are married, yet they continually fail to bring forward policies to help more people benefit from tying the knot. Specifically, Governments of all colours have perpetuated the regressive and discriminatory couple penalty in the tax and benefits system that deters those on low or fixed incomes and the young from marrying.”

He concluded: “It is not all doom and gloom for marriage as 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. And couples who marry are more likely to stay together than those who do not. Yet these benefits are being denied to the next generation.”

Sir Paul Coleridge, founder of Marriage Foundation added: “In one sense the conclusions from this new report, predicting the continuation of the long established downward trajectory for those expecting to marry in their twenties, present a worrying picture .

“However that is far from the whole picture of current state of marriage. In fact the relentless reports about the imminent death of marriage are probably deliberate and undoubtedly premature. Consider some of the latest marriage stats. In 2022 247,000 couples married (ie almost half a million individuals in one year). That is a lot of people of both sexes taking the trouble every year to tie a lifelong knot. And those figures are 16 per cent up on the precovid figure of 213,000 marriages. Marrying in your twenties, the habit of the boomers, is indeed now quite unusual but that is because the average age of marriage is currently the mid thirties, for both men and women. Older and wiser? I think so. Consider also the divorce stats which have been on a strong downward slope for many years and are now at the level they were at in the 1960s. So there may be fewer marriages but they tend to be stronger and more long lasting. And the aspirations of the unmarried also remain consistently very high, nearly 90 per cent want to marry at some point.

“The real tragedy lies in the fact that successive governments of both main parties refuse to acknowledge these figures or advocate for marriage as the securest environment in which to rear children even though the research is totally one way and uncontroversial. They also insist on turning a blind eye to the fact that ‘the marriage gap’ just gets bigger. The better off (including most politicians) marry at very high rates without a backward glance. The less well off marry far less often and they and their children accordingly suffer much higher rates of family separation with all its well known consequences. If the current government really wants to improve the lot of ‘working people’ this is the area they should focus on. The effect would be very significant for individual couples, children and also on the Exchequer.”

ENDS

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.

For all media enquiries, please contact Alistair Thompson of Team Britannia PR on: 07970 162225 or via email: alistair@teambritanniapr.com