



The MARRIAGE
IN SOCIETY

Report

A Research Project
of the Oregon Family Council
Education Foundation

INTRODUCTION

We offer this report to contribute to the ongoing public dialogue about the importance of marriage and family. This report summarizes some of the vast data that has been compiled about the marriage of men and women and its impact on adults, children, families and society. This report is in no way exhaustive; it's simply a snapshot of a collective body of social research over time.

Our aim is to help policy makers, opinion leaders, community activists and concerned citizens gain a broader understanding of marriage and the role it plays in individual, family and community life.

Most of the data you'll review casts a positive light on traditional marriage and a cautionary light on other family arrangements like divorce, single parenting or cohabitation. Please don't misinterpret these findings to suggest that the Oregon Family Council is critical or unsympathetic to these other family arrangements. We believe every family needs support.

Furthermore, as encouraging as the following statistics are, we recognize that marriage is not a magical doorway to a better life. These are statistical findings and they don't hold true in every individual case.

With those important caveats and disclaimers out of the way, this report will demonstrate the following:

- When marriage works, it works very, very well.
- Virtually every sector of society benefits from healthy marriages, especially children.
- Non-married families levy a heavy social and economic cost to society.
- Many members of society, especially young adults, are poorly informed and therefore disenchanted with the idea of marriage, choosing statistically less desirable family arrangements.
- There are reasonable steps that policy makers, community leaders, educators and the faith community can take to strengthen marriage.

Our hope is that this report will be a step toward building stronger and healthier Oregon families.

Sincerely,
Oregon Family Council

Definition of Marriage:

Marriage is the union of a man and a woman who make a permanent and exclusive commitment to each other of the type that is naturally (inherently) fulfilled by bearing and rearing children together.

Obligations of Marriage:

Marriage is unique in its obligations, which include sexual fidelity, permanence, mutual care and support of each other and the children of their union. It holds the potential to permanently unite children with their biological mother and father.

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EDUCATION FOUNDATION

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SECTION **1.**

Trends in Marriage

Where have all the commitments gone?

Marriage in America

For our first two hundred years as a nation, marriage was the expected norm. Economic realities, cultural mores and public policy made marriage, family and community life into near synonymous terms. As a result, most adults got married and most marriages lasted a lifetime.

Times have changed. Rather than being the first option for sexual fulfillment and creating a family, marriage is just one choice among several. Many marriages today have amended the "until death do us part" portion of their wedding vows with an exit strategy called a prenuptial agreement.

Fewer people are entering into marriage and they are years older when they eventually do. And more than 40% of children are born to unmarried mothers. (See statistics on the opposite page.)

What does it all mean? As the pages that follow will demonstrate, society's retreat from marriage carries with it a host of unintended consequences. And those consequences pose some serious challenges for our nation. The question that remains is, "can we restore the commitments of marriage as a cultural norm in our nation, and if we can, should we?"

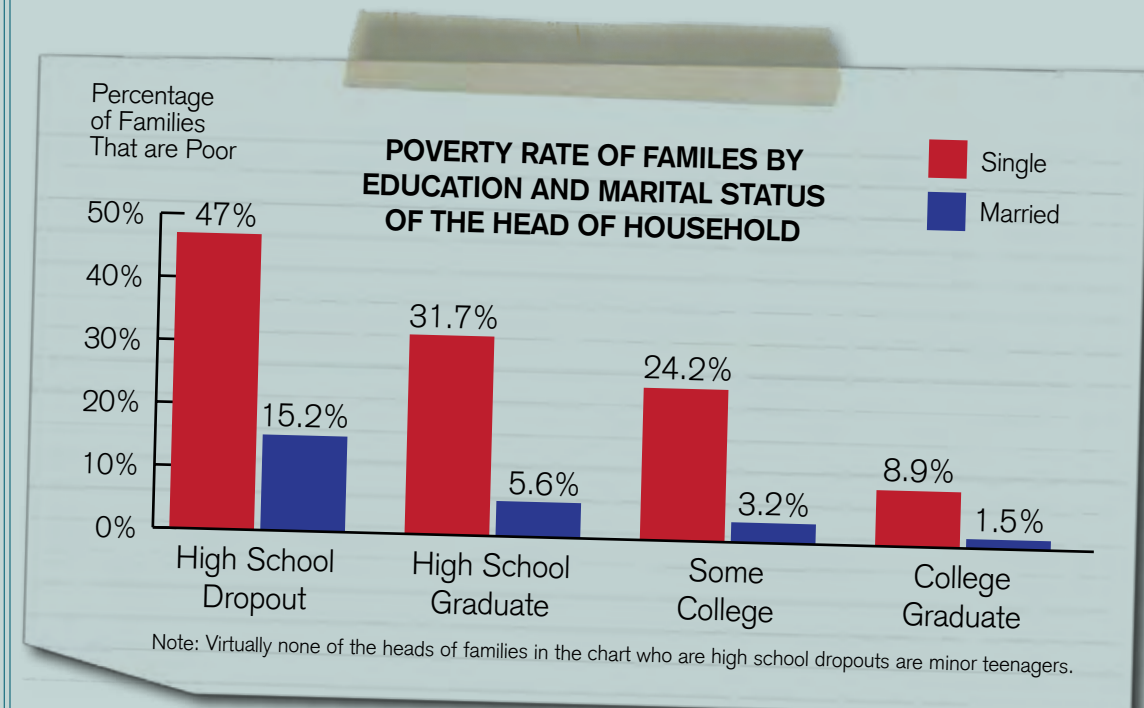
Why would a couple that lives and sleeps together every night need dates and rituals? Precisely because they live and sleep together.
Dr. Bill Doherty

As for the secret to staying married: "My wife tells me that if I ever decide to leave, she is coming with me."
Jon Bon Jovi

PERSPECTIVE

"Marriage plays a key role in fostering the social, economic and emotional bonds between husband and wife, parents and children, and the family and larger community. It prescribes a set of norms, responsibilities and binding obligations for its members. It shapes family identity, creates a context for intimacy and builds a sense of belonging among its members."

Testimony of Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, PhD, co-director, National Marriage Project Rutgers University before the Subcommittee on Children and Families US Senate



Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. Data compiled by Heritage Foundation, Marriage and Poverty in the US, Fall 2010

I DO!

(I REALLY DO!)

THE MARRIAGE FILES:

THE SHIFTING TRENDS OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Who's Getting Married?

Percentage of adults who are married	52% (2008)	72% (1960)
Percentage of college graduates who are married	64% (2008)	76% (1960)
Percentage of adults with only a HS diploma who are married	48% (2008)	72% (1960)
Median age at which men marry	27.7 (2008)	22.8 (1960)
Median age at which women marry	26.0 (2008)	20.3 (1960)
Percentage of adults who have cohabited	44% (2008)	24% (1990)
Percentage of total births born to unmarried women	41% (2008)	5% (1960)
Percentage who believe marriage is becoming obsolete	39% (2008)	28% (1978)

Source: Pew Research Center, "The Decline of Marriage and Rise of New Families," 2010.



FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO DIVORCE. [5]

- Early marriage. Those who marry before age 18 have a 48% likelihood of divorce within ten years. The likelihood of divorce drops to 24% for those who marry at or over age 25.
- Individuals who were raised in a single parent home or divorced home.
- Individuals who had a child prior to marriage.
- Couples who cohabited before marriage.
- Couples who have no religious affiliation.
- Couples who have no college education.
- Couples who have an annual household income below \$25,000.



SECTION 2.

Trends in Divorce

The painful, expensive way to find regret fast.

Divorce to like an amputation. Sometimes it's necessary but it should be avoided if at all possible because it brings about a permanent disability.
Dr. Bill Doherty

PERSPECTIVE I Wish We'd Tried Harder

Studies across different states report that between 46% and 66% of divorced people wish that they had tried harder to work through their differences.

"In a careful analysis of nationally representative data with extensive measures of psychological well-being, we could find no evidence that divorce or separation typically made adults happier than staying in an unhappy marriage. Two out of three unhappily married adults who avoided divorce reported being happily married five years later." [6]

One of the strongest criticisms about marriage is the high divorce rate and there's good reason for this. Divorce is a painful and expensive experience and in most instances, leaves lifelong scars on couples, children and extended families. Divorce seldom has a winner.

Sadly, there are times when divorce is the only viable solution. But in many instances, maybe even most, the proper guidance and assistance can turn a less than fulfilling marriage into a relationship that is satisfying and meaningful. Like the decision to marry, the decision to divorce is one that is complex and deeply personal. But as a society, there must be more we can do to point struggling couples to the support and resources available to help them more thoughtfully weigh the decision to dismantle their family, especially when children are involved.

A survey of divorced Oregon men found that three out of four wished they'd worked harder to preserve their first marriage. This was true even in men who stated they were happily remarried.

The good news is that for the past 20 years, the divorce rate has been declining and the percentage of first time marriages remaining intact has been increasing. With coordinated efforts by the public and private sectors, it's possible to fan the flame of these positive trends.

THE MARRIAGE FILES:

DIVORCE MYTHS

MYTH #1: 50% of marriages end in divorce.

REALITY: The divorce rate in recent years has been declining. The percentage of first time marriages that end in divorce is now well below 50%. For example, the overall 20-year divorce rate for couples married in the 1980s is 39% and trending less for couples married in the 1990s. While still disappointingly high, the fact that nearly six out of ten marriages do last offers hope that, with the right steps, even more can avoid divorce. [2]

MYTH #2: It's better for the kids.

REALITY: It's believed by many that children are better off if their parents divorce in their pursuit of happiness rather than remain

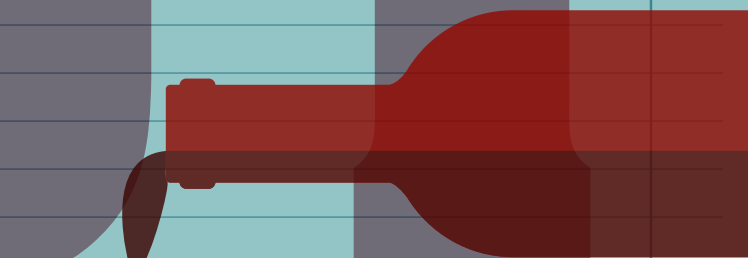
unhappily married. Statistically, children of divorced parents suffer. Big time. Even into adulthood, "children with divorced parents tend to obtain less education, less income, have more troubled marriages and report more symptoms of psychological distress." [3]

MYTH #3: Irreconcilable differences.

REALITY: Every close relationship encounters turmoil. Certainly parents and children can attest to this. Fortunately, it's extremely difficult for parents to divorce their kids. Most marriages too experience seasons of relationship stress and turmoil. But the fact is two out of every three divorces occur in what relationship experts classify as low-conflict marriages. Many of these marriages could be repaired with proper assistance. [4]

I LOVE YOU, BABY!

BUZZ



NOT

THAT MUCH.



SECTION 3.

Trends in Cohabitation

No wonder you can't get no satisfaction.

"If you don't have a commitment, you don't have a relationship."

David Viscott

PERSPECTIVE

"Figures on the outcomes for children born to and raised by unmarried couples do not match up with those for children raised by their married, biological parents. This is true for everything from juvenile delinquency rates, to educational outcomes, to relationship stability and marital happiness when these children become adults. The best gift that parents can give their children is still the witness of lifelong married love, or at minimum a lifetime working at it."

Chuck Donovan, Senior Fellow, Heritage Foundation

"The highest family breakup rates in the world today may be found in Scandinavia, which not only has relatively high divorce rates but also the highest percentage of cohabiting couples."

"Cohabitation, Marriage and Child Wellbeing," David Popenoe, National Marriage Project, 2008

The pain of divorce in recent decades and the context of today's financial uncertainties has caused many younger adults to approach marriage with a healthy dose of caution. No right thinking person wants to enter a marriage that has a high likelihood to fail.

So the "trial-run" of living together first has become many couple's investment in marriage insurance. What better, surer way to explore life together than to just do it before making the ceremonial final commitment? After all, if the in-home test works great for mattresses, the same approach should work for marriage, right?

Curiously, the outcomes of cohabitation have been, for the most part, disappointing. Cohabitation neither results in a higher percentage of marriages, nor longer lasting marriages when compared to couples who didn't live together before marriage. In fact, couples who follow the traditional (many would say antiquated) approach which "saves" something for marriage attain a markedly higher avoidance of divorce than couples who first lived together. In the end, what cohabitation does produce are children ... the vast majority of whom will not be raised in a home with both their mother and father. Cohabitation also produces a lot of older single adults. Neither of these outcomes is statistically ideal.

THE MARRIAGE FILES:

HOW DOES LIVING TOGETHER DIFFER FROM MARRIAGE?

Formal Commitment. Cohabiting partners tend to have a weaker sense of couple identity, less willingness to sacrifice for the other and a lower desire to make the relationship last. [7]

Longevity. "Cohabiting couples break up at a far higher rate than married couples. By one estimate in the US, the rate is five times higher." [7]

Higher Divorce Risk. The risk of divorce is 50% higher for cohabitators than for non-cohabitators. The divorce rate is even higher with those who have had several cohabiting experiences. [8]

Less Satisfaction. Cohabiting couples report lower levels of happiness, lower levels of sexual exclusivity and sexual satisfaction, and

poorer relationships with their parents than their married counterparts. [7]

Wealth Accumulation. Married parents are significantly less likely to be poor. For example, according to a study by economist Robert Lerman, the poverty rate for married couples is half that of cohabiting couple parents and one third that of non-cohabiting single parents in households with other adults. [9]

Child Rearing. A massive British study reports that "nearly one in two cohabiting couples with children split up before their child's fifth birthday, compared to one in twelve married parents." [7]

Child Well-Being. Fully three-quarters of children born to cohabiting parents will see their parents split up before they reach age 16. Only one-third of children born to married parents face a similar fate. [7]

My dearest Susan, you're so wonderful. You complete me.
Dear Paul, as usual, your judgment of character is impeccable.



SECTION 4.

Benefits of Marriage for Couples

Happier, healthier, wealthier.

"Marriage is not a noun; it's a verb. It isn't something you get. It is something you do. It's the way you love your partner every day."
Barbara DeAngelis

PERSPECTIVE
"...Despite its acknowledged problems and imperfections, marriage remains an indispensable source of social goods, individual benefits, mutual care giving, affectionate attachments, and longterm commitments. And people who are married, though not saints, tend to behave in ways that benefit themselves, their children, families and communities."

Testimony of Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, Ph.D., co-director, National Marriage Project Rutgers University before the Subcommittee on Children and Families US Senate

The institution of marriage has taken quite a beating over the past few decades. A recent Pew Research opinion study featured marriage's fall from grace with its revelation that 39% of surveyed Americans feel marriage is becoming obsolete.

But just because people are uncertain about the future of marriage doesn't mean people don't desire marriage. Among younger adults (aged 18-29) eight in ten expect to marry someday. And while most people are aware of marriage's shortcomings, few know the great benefits enjoyed by the typically married couple. Research shows married people are happier, healthier and wealthier than non-married people.

It's not unreasonable to conclude that if the unmarried were more aware of the benefits that accompany marriage and steps that contribute to a lasting marriage, not only would attitudes toward marriage change, but that more men and women would confidently enter into marriage. And as the research below conveys, these marriages would greatly enhance the lives of these couples and their children.

THE MARRIAGE FILES:

MARRIAGE WITH BENEFITS

Greater Happiness. Married Americans were more than twice as likely as divorced or separated Americans to say they were very happy with life in general. The reported happiness of cohabiting, never-married and widowed individuals resembled that of divorced and separated people. [11]

Economic Benefits. Continuously married households had about double the income and four times the net worth of the continuously divorced and never-married, on average. Additionally, married men earn between 10 percent and 40 percent more than singles with similar educational and job histories. [12]

Improved Health. Marriage is associated with better health and lower rates of injury, illness and disability for both men and women. Married people enjoy better health on average than single or divorced individuals. [13]

Longevity. Married people, especially married men, have longer life expectancies than similar singles. Married people live longer on average, even after controlling for race, income, and family background. [13]

Improved Mental Health. Married people report fewer symptoms of mental illness and psychological distress than similar individuals who are not married. Longitudinal research shows it isn't merely that mentally healthy people are more likely to get or stay married. Instead, marriage itself appears to boost mental health. [11]

Improved Lifestyle Choices. Married people have lower rates of alcohol consumption and abuse than singles. Children whose parents marry and stay married also have lower rates of substance abuse, even after controlling for family background. [13]

Supported Motherhood. Compared to cohabiting or single mothers, married mothers are more likely to receive cooperation, help, emotional support, and positive involvement from their child's father and his kin. [14]

Connected Fathers. Marriage increases the likelihood fathers will have good relationships with their children. 65% of young adults whose parents divorced had poor relationships with their fathers, compared to 29% from non-divorced families. [13]

THE MARRIAGE FILES:

WHAT MARRIAGE MEANS FOR CHILDREN

Economic Advantages. Children from intact families are far less likely to be poor or to experience persistent economic insecurity. In fact, if it were not for the demographic shift from married parent families to other kinds of family structures in recent decades, the child poverty rate would be significantly lower. [3]

Educational Advantages. Children of married parents are about twice as likely to graduate from high school, compared to children from single-parent or step-families. [17] One study found that 37% of children born outside of marriage and 31% of children with divorced parents dropped out of high school, compared to 13% of children from intact families with a married mother and father. [18]

Behavioral Advantages. Children of married parents have fewer behavioral or school attendance problems and higher levels of educational attainment, and they are better able to withstand peer pressures to engage in early sexual activity. [18] One study found that boys from single-parent and step-families were more than twice as likely to go to prison, compared to boys from intact families. [19]

Life Achievement Advantages. Children from married families are significantly more likely to achieve higher education, and to do better

occupationally than children from divorced or single parent families. [16]

Mental Health Advantages. Children from stable, married families are significantly less likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, alcohol and drug abuse, and thoughts of suicide compared to children from divorced homes. [20] One recent study found that Swedish children from two-parent homes were about 50% less likely to suffer from suicide attempts, alcohol and drug abuse, and mental illnesses compared to children of single-parents. [21]

Family Connectedness Advantages. A married mom and dad tend to augment one another's strengths, balance one another's weaknesses, and reduce the risk that a child will be mistreated by an exhausted or angry parent. The trust and commitment associated with marriage also give couples a sense of security together and with their children. This in turn motivates them to invest in their children practically, emotionally, and financially at higher levels than cohabiting or single parents. [18]

Future Family Advantage. Children of married parents have more satisfying dating relationships, more positive attitudes toward future marriage and greater success in forming lasting marriages. In addition, young men from married parents have more positive attitudes toward women, children and family life than men who grew up in non-intact families. [22]



SECTION 5.

Benefits of Marriage for Children

The evidence is in. Children of married parents fare better.

"Married life can never be what it ought to be while the husband or wife makes personal happiness the main object."

J.S. Kirtley

PERSPECTIVE

"Adults and children fortunate enough to live in an intact, married family are much more likely to succeed in school and the work place, to acquire a home of their own, and to experience upward mobility. The retreat from marriage in Middle America means that all too many Americans will not be able to realize the American Dream."

W. Bradford Wilcox,
University of Virginia

"Evidence suggests that the influence of father love on offspring's development is as great as and occasionally greater than the influence of mother love."

Review of General
Psychology

Children do best when raised by their married mother and father. No brainer, right? Certainly in generations past this statement would have been easily accepted. But today, with four out of ten children born apart from marriage, it bodes the question, "Does having married parents make a difference to children, and if so, how much?"

According to virtually every sociological study, children raised with married parents do best in every measurable dimension including academic achievement, physical and mental well-being, economic stability, lower incidences of criminal behavior, substance abuse and themselves having a child out-of-wedlock. Because children from non-married households are at a statistical disadvantage, society should take steps to help these kids. But the same data suggests the best investment we can make into the lives of the next generation is a resurgence of committed, healthy marriages.

According to some researchers, growing up with both married parents in a low-conflict marriage is so important to child wellbeing that it is replacing race, class and neighborhood as the greatest source of difference in child outcomes. [16] Over the past few decades, we have experimented with various alternatives to marriage, and the evidence is now clear: Children raised in married, intact families generally do better. Those who care about the well-being of children should work toward the health of modern marriage. [18]

THE IRREPLACEABLE ROLE OF FATHERS

Fathers Parent Differently. A father, as a male biological parent, brings unique contributions to the job of parenting a child that no one else can replicate.

Fathers Play Differently. Mom's softness as well as dad's roughhousing provide security and confidence in their own ways by communicating love and physical intimacy.

Fathers Build Confidence. Mothers protect and dads encourage kids to push the limits. Joined together, they keep each other in balance and help children remain safe while expanding their experiences and confidence.

Fathers Communicate Differently. A major study showed that when speaking to children, mothers will simplify their words and speak on the child's level. Men are not as inclined to modify their language for the child.

Fathers Discipline Differently. Educational psychologist Carol Gilligan tells us that fathers stress justice, fairness and duty, while mothers stress sympathy, care and help.

Fathers and Mothers Teach Respect for the Opposite Sex. Research consistently shows married fathers are substantially less likely to abuse their wives or children than men in any other category. This means that boys and girls with married fathers in the home learn, by observation, how men should treat women

As noted sociologist David Popenoe explains, "Fathers are far more than just 'second adults' in the home. Involved fathers – especially biological fathers – bring positive benefits to their children that no other person is as likely to bring." [15]



POLICY CONSIDERATIONS TO STRENGTHEN MARRIAGE

School Education. School districts could be encouraged to consider some of the available marriage education curriculum designed for school use. It's a disservice to the coming generation to provide twelve years of public education without including some instruction on the benefits of marriage, especially for those who hope to have children.

Pre-marriage Education. It's been demonstrated that couples who complete marriage education courses prior to marriage have better outcomes. Engaged couples could be encouraged to complete such courses through information, vouchers or discounted marriage license fees.

Economic Advantages. Where possible, public programs such as economic assistance, tax benefits, and inheritance could show a preference for marriage.

Divorce Reform. Studies show that divorce is seldom mutual and more than half occur in low conflict marriages. Offering counseling or

THE MARRIAGE FILES:

educational options to struggling couples in a lower conflict marriage prior to proceeding with divorce could result in reconciliation of some relationships.

Marriage and Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs. Simply warning teens not to get pregnant until they are older doesn't address the concerns of unmarried parenting. These programs could include a marriage message for teens who desire to have children.

State Marriage Initiative. Several states have marriage initiatives. These initiatives can include providing a "Marriage Handbook," online resources, regional marriage seminars and workshops and incentives to encourage healthy marriage and parenting.

Keep a Marriage Distinction. Generally domestic partnership policies and tax codes show little distinction between the married and unmarried. Marriage is unique in its obligations which include sexual fidelity, permanence, mutual care and support of each other and children of their union. It also offers clear benefits. As a result some policies should recognize marriage as unique and distinct.



SECTION 6.

Unmarriage and Society

The social and domestic effects are staggering.

They say it takes a village to raise a child. That may be the case, but the truth is that it takes a lot of solid, stable marriages to create a village.

Diane Sollee,
smartmarriages.com

All children have the right to live in a two-parent, married family. Talk about a Head Start Program - it's the kids with married parents that get the real head start.

Diane Sollee, Head Start
Conference, 2001

It doesn't take a university study to understand that divorce and non-married child bearing levies a huge cost on society. Court costs, increased poverty and accompanying welfare costs, tracking dead-beat parents, loss of productivity and more. One study compiled by the Institute for American Values put the annual cost of divorce and non-married parenting at \$112 billion dollars.

These figures become even more sobering when we consider current trends regarding marriage and parenting. Today, more children are born outside of marriage than at any other time in our nation's history. Concurrently, the percentage of adults marrying has leveled off at historically low rates. When we play these trends out over time, the consequences for government, education, criminal justice, healthcare and the rest of society is sobering. This should sound an alarm to take steps to shift these trends. If we don't, the eventual burden on society could be catastrophic.

The risks of unmarriage, especially when children are involved, surpass the risks associated with obesity, smoking or riding bikes without a helmet. Law makers have taken steps to help individuals and society with these. It seems reasonable, therefore, that we make similar policy efforts where possible to strengthen marriage. *(Please see Policy Considerations on the left side.)*

THE IMPACT OF UNMARRIAGE

Unmarriage Puts Children at Risk. Children in single parent families, children born to unmarried mothers, and children in stepfamilies or cohabiting relationships face higher risks of poor outcomes.... There is thus value for children in promoting strong, stable marriages between biological parents." [23]

Unmarriage Creates Measurable Inequalities for Children. Today many American children, through no fault of their own, are deprived of the significant social, educational, economic, spiritual, emotional, and psychological advantages enjoyed by children of functioning, intact married families. [24]

Unmarriage Puts Women at a Disadvantage. While it takes both a man and a woman to create a child, it is most often the divorced or single parenting mother who bears a disproportionate burden of the financial and emotional cost of parenting.

Unmarriage Elevates Social Problems and Costs. Some of the social problems linked to divorce and unwed childbearing include higher rates of crime, drug abuse, education failure, illness, child abuse, domestic violence, and poverty. These social woes levy a significant cost on governments and society. [25]

IT IS NOT GOOD FOR THE MAN TO BE ALONE



SECTION 7.

"Love is blind, it's marriage that's the eye-opener."
Irish Proverb

PERSPECTIVE

"Churches supply moral norms like sexual fidelity and forgiveness, family-friendly social networks that lend support to couples facing the ordinary joys and challenges of married life, and a faith that helps couples make sense of the difficulties in their lives—from unemployment to illness—that can harm their marriages."

W. Bradford Wilcox, sociologist, University of Virginia

Marriage and the Faith Community

Helping marriages and families with practical support.

Churches and faith leaders play an influential role when it comes to marriage. The majority of couples entering marriage still seek the involvement of a minister and many marry in a house of worship. Social research indicates that couples who involve themselves in a faith network have happier, longer lasting marriages. (*Some of the reasons church involvement helps marriages are listed below.*)

When faith leaders work with the intention to strengthen marriages and help struggling marriages find solutions apart from divorce, the impact is measurable. One notable example can be found in Oregon's Clackamas County. Beginning in 2001, some 170 Clackamas County churches agreed to a set of principles to help marriages that was detailed in a document called the *Community Marriage Policy*. Participating churches now require thorough pre-marriage counseling before performing a marriage ceremony, offer counseling and mentoring for troubled marriages and several have hosted marriage enhancement activities that are open to the community. According to ABC's World News, "The plan seems to be working. The divorce rate in Clackamas County dropped by 15 percent in the first five years under the policy."^[26]

While the declining divorce rate cannot be directly linked to these church activities, religious leaders feel the community marriage policy is saving marriages and protecting children from the pain of divorce.

THE MARRIAGE FILES:

WAYS CHURCH* INVOLVEMENT HELPS MARRIAGES

Supportive Culture. Helping and encouraging marriages and family is a core value of virtually every church. The teachings, staff and congregation members share this value. Couples who connect to a church surround themselves in this supportive environment.

Pre-Marriage Counseling. Most churches require couples to complete several marriage preparation sessions with a seasoned advisor before saying "I do." Pre-marriage counseling has been demonstrated to help couples succeed in marriage.

Crisis Counseling. In the supportive faith environment marriage problems are usually recognized earlier and skilled advisors are available to provide guidance in forgiveness, understanding and relationship skills.

Couple Friends. Relationship success and fulfillment is closely linked to meaningful friendships. Churches provide a variety of ways for married couples to connect with and enjoy friendships with other couples.

Children and Youth Ministries. The programs and ministries that churches provide for children and teenagers can be a tremendous help for parents. Here children learn values, life skills and develop friendships that complement the guidance they receive at home.

Spiritual Support. Often the challenges of life and marriage require resources beyond our natural strength and abilities. The primary mission of a house of worship is to deepen people's relationship with God. It's this spiritual connectedness that often enables couples to endure life's difficulties.

*The word "church" is used in the broadest sense.

CONCLUSION

This report is not intended to suggest that marriage is a miracle cure for society's ills. Nor should it be interpreted that marriage comes with the ironclad promise of health, wealth and happiness. We've simply presented credible data demonstrating that married men and women report being healthier, happier and better off financially than adults who are unmarried. And an even greater statistical advantage exists for children raised by their married moms and dads.

But establishing convincing statistical data does not ensure that these advantages hold true in every individual case. We all know single mothers who have reared healthy, high achieving children and married couples who've failed miserably in their finances or parenting. Still, we can't ignore the dramatic shift in the past five decades when it comes to marriage and family. More than 40% of children are now born outside a married family, and while the divorce rate has fallen in recent years, it still leaves far too many families fractured.

There is no single solution to our fragile family condition. But we are a smart, compassionate and industrious society. Together, we can see more marriages last a lifetime and more children enjoy their birthright of living in a home with their own mom and dad.

Marriage and Public Policy

For the past number of years the currents of family law and policy have buffeted the institution of marriage. No-fault divorce, domestic partnerships, tax policies and public welfare have equalized family arrangements and in some instances provided incentives not to marry.

A number of states have begun to recognize the value of marriage in society and have taken steps to strengthen marriage through marriage initiatives, divorce reform and policy adjustments. To date, Oregon would be among the states that have done little in this regard. We would encourage our policy-making community to consider the work of other

states and take positive steps to help fortify this important institution.

Adoption and Foster Families

For space purposes, this report does not specifically address the research or unique challenges associated with adoption and foster families. God bless those who serve this vital role in caring for children.

Same-Sex Families

Nothing in this report is intended to disparage same-sex households. It's no secret that *Oregon Family Council* has resisted the move toward same-sex marriage. We will continue to do so. But we've offered little resistance to extending family benefits to same-sex families. The reason for this is that often a child in a same-sex household is still living with either their own mother or father.

With that said, the goal of this report is to strengthen marriage. And while we acknowledge that marriage is not perfect, it is the only family arrangement with the unique potential to permanently unite children with their natural parents for a lifetime. This is a condition that is simply not possible in a same-sex family.

Marriage and Churches

Religious leaders recognize that marriage is much more than a civil contract. And regardless of how the law and public policy defines marriage, the faith community honors a definition that transcends the winds of culture.

We therefore encourage each house of worship to prayerfully consider how they can better educate and strengthen their own congregation regarding the obligations, rewards and roles of marriage. And beyond that, we ask that churches consider how those same resources can be openly extended to the communities they are called to serve. As a faith centered organization, Oregon Family Council is committed to do the same.

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