

**Marriage and the Family in the United States:  
Resources for Society**

*A review of research on the benefits generated from  
families rooted in marriage.*



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# The Family in the United States: A Resource for Society Review of the Research

## Introduction

*The family generates important social virtues and many benefits for individuals and society. The following is a review of the research that shows the married family's positive influence on individual and societal well-being. Also briefly discussed are some of the negative outcomes generated by non-married families.*

Research on marriage and the family in the United States demonstrates that many individual and social benefits are rooted in the permanent union of one man with one woman.<sup>1</sup>

Studies consistently show what Catholic Church teaching has always affirmed, namely, that

The well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family. (*Gaudium et spes*, no.47)

Despite the evidence of the benefits of marriage, currently in the United States more couples are choosing not to marry and, at the same time, are accepting of a variety of non-marital and alternative sexual relationships (including homosexual relationships).<sup>2</sup>

What follows, therefore, is an overview of the social science research on the benefits of marriage along with some mention of the adverse outcomes generated by the non-married family.

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<sup>1</sup> For a summary of research on the benefits of marriage, see Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*, (New York: Doubleday, 2000); see also The Witherspoon Institute, *Marriage and the Public Good: Ten Principles*, (Princeton, New Jersey: The Witherspoon Institute, 2008), especially pp. 9-15; W. Bradford Wilcox et al., *Why Marriage Matters, Second Edition, Twenty-Six Conclusions from the Social Sciences*, (New York: Institute for American Values, 2005); Robert G. Wood, Brian Goesling and Sarah Avellar, *The Effects of Marriage on Health: A Synthesis of Recent Research Evidence*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Office of Human Services Policy, June 2007).

<sup>2</sup> See for example, The National Marriage Project, *The State of Our Unions, Marriage in America 2010. When Marriage Disappears: The New Middle America*, (Charlottesville, VA: The National Marriage Project, 2010), pp. 104-106.

The review is organized into three subject areas treating marriage and the family: (1) psychological development and emotional well-being; (2) physical health; and (3) economic benefits. Please note, both primary sources and secondary sources are used in this review. The secondary sources chosen are authored by leading experts on marriage and the family. Finally, many of the following studies combine two or more of these subjects in their investigations.

## Psychological Development and Emotional Well-Being of Family Members

Mental health care professionals often distinguish psychological and emotional well-being as consisting of “feeling happy, hopeful, and good about oneself. Those in good emotional health feel energetic, eager to get going, and connected to others.”<sup>3</sup> Marriage, especially a good marriage, supports mental health. Research demonstrates that a healthy family life, especially where the quality of the husband and wife’s relationship is high, contributes to emotional well-being of both the spouses and children. For example, men and women in conflict-ridden marriages “take longer than the happily married to heal from all kinds of wounds, from minor scrapes or athletic injuries to major surgery; hostile couples healed the slowest, taking 40% longer to heal.”<sup>4</sup>

Evidence from many studies indicates that “marriage improves emotional well-being in part by giving people a sense that their life has meaning and purpose.”<sup>5</sup> This is especially important for children in the family. In fact, research suggests that the best source of emotional stability and good physical health for children is the stable, happy marriage of their mother and father.<sup>6</sup> There are other psychological benefits for spouses and children as well. The following are examples of this body of research.

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<sup>3</sup> Gallagher and Waite, *Case for Marriage*, (2000), p. 66.

<sup>4</sup> Janice Kiecolt-Glaser and Ronald Glaser, American Psychosomatic Society Meeting, Vancouver, BC, March 2005, quoted in Patty Howell, *Healthy Marriages, Healthy Lives, Research on the Alignment of Health, Marital Outcomes and Marriage Education*, (California Healthy Marriages Coalition, 2008), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Gallagher and Waite, *Case for Marriage*, p. 75.

<sup>6</sup> See, B. Burman and G. Margolin, “Analysis of the association between marital relationships and health problems. An interactional perspective,” *Psychological Bulletin* 112 (1992): pp. 39-63. A 2002 report by Child Trends (an American nonpartisan research organization) summarized the current scholarly consensus on marriage as clearly demonstrating that “family structure matters for children, and the family structure that helps children the most is a family headed by two biological parents in a low-conflict marriage.” Kristin Anderson Moore, Susan M. Jekielek, and Carol Emig, “Marriage from a Child’s Perspective: How Does Family Structure Affect Children, and What Can be Done about It?” *Research Brief*, (Washington, DC: Child Trends, June 2002), p. 6.

## *Well-Being of Husband and Wife*

- “Happily married adults report fewer depressive symptoms than all other marital groups.”<sup>7</sup>
- A review of 130 studies about the relationship between marriage and well-being found “an intimate link between marital status and personal well-being.”<sup>8</sup>
- Married couples have more meaningful sexual relationships (including higher emotional satisfaction) than non-married people.<sup>9</sup>
- The majority of classic studies demonstrate that the lowest rates of mental disorder are found among the married and that cohabitation does not replicate these benefits of marriage.<sup>10</sup> “Longitudinal evidence from studies across a variety of literatures indicates that marriage makes people far less likely to suffer psychological illness.”<sup>11</sup>
- “The norms of adult maturity and fidelity associated with marriage encourage men and women to avoid unhealthy or risky behaviors—from promiscuous sex to heavy alcohol use.”<sup>12</sup>
- For women, marriage combats depression, provides particularly high psychological benefits and significantly lowers the risk of suicide.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Howell, *Healthy Marriages, Healthy Lives*, (2008), p. 3, citing “Marital Status: Links to physical and mental health,” MIDUS (Midlife in the United States)—A National Study of Health and Well-Being; available at, [www.midus.wisc.edu](http://www.midus.wisc.edu); accessed 7/14/11.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Coombs, “Marital Status and Personal Well-Being: A Literature Review,” *Family Relations* 40 (1991): 98.

<sup>9</sup> Linda Waite, *Does Marriage Matter?* *Demography* 32 (1995): 491.

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Malzberg, “Marital Status in Relation to the Prevalence of Mental Disease,” *Psychiatric Quarterly* 10 (1936): 245-261.

<sup>11</sup> Howell, *Healthy Marriages, Healthy Lives*, (2008), p. 9, citing, Chris M. Wilson and Andrew J. Oswald, “How Does Marriage Affect Physical and Psychological Health? A Survey of the Longitudinal Evidence,” (University of East Anglia, UK and Harvard University, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Witherspoon Institute, *Marriage and the Public Good* (2008), p. 20, referencing Waite and Gallagher, *Case for Marriage*, (2000), pp. 53-55. See also, Alan V. Horwitz, Helene Raskin White and Sandra Howell-White, “Becoming Married and Mental Health: A Longitudinal Study of a Cohort of Young Adults,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58 (1996): 895-907; Nadine F. Marks and James D. Lambert, “Marital Status Continuity and Change among Young and Midlife Adults: Longitudinal Effects on Psychological Well-Being,” *Journal of Family Issues* 19 (1998): 652-686.

<sup>13</sup> See, Wilcox et al., *Why Marriage Matters*, (2005), p. 28. Wilcox references a number of classic and current studies, notably, Susan L. Brown, “The Effect of Union Type on Psychological Well-Being: Depression Among Cohabitators Versus Marrieds,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 41 (September 2000): 241-255.

- For men, marriage plays a critical role in their healthy socialization. “Married men are less likely to commit a crime, to be sexually promiscuous or unfaithful to a longtime partner, or to drink to excess.”<sup>14</sup>

### *Well-being of Children*

An abundance of research demonstrates that healthy psychological and social development is found among children who grow up in a home headed by the husband and wife in a healthy marriage. In fact, the best source of emotional stability and good physical health for children is the stable, happy marriage of their mother and father.<sup>15</sup> Children raised in intact married families are more likely to attend college, and are physically and emotionally healthier than their peers raised in non-married families.<sup>16</sup> Additional psycho-social benefits for children include

- Children receive gender specific support from having a mother and a father. Research shows that particular roles of mothers (e.g., to nurture) and fathers (e.g., to discipline), as well as complex biologically rooted interactions, are important for the psychological development of boys and girls.<sup>17</sup>
- 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.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Witherspoon Institute, *Marriage and the Public Good* (2008), pp. 20-21, referencing, George Akerlof, “Men Without Children,” *The Economic Journal* 108 (1998): 287-309; Stephen L. Nock, “The Consequences of Premarital Fatherhood,” *American Sociological Review* 63 (1998): 250-263; and Waite and Gallagher, *Case for Marriage* (2000).

<sup>15</sup> See, Burman and Margolin, “Analysis of the association between marital relationships and health problems. An interactional perspective,” *Psychological Bulletin* 112 (1992): 39-63.

<sup>16</sup> See, Wilcox et al., *Why Marriage Matters*, (2005).

<sup>17</sup> See, Witherspoon Institute, *Marriage and the Public Good*, (2008), pp. 10-13; see also Paul Amato, “More Than Money? Men’s Contributions to Their Children’s Lives,” in Alan Booth and A. C. Crouter, (eds.), *Men in Families: When Do They Get Involved? What Difference Does It Make?* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998); J. Belsky, L. Youngblade, M. Rovine, B. Volling, “Patterns of Marital Change and Parent-Child Interaction,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53 (1991): 487-498; Eleanor Maccoby, *The Two Sexes: Growing Up Apart, Coming Together*, (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1998); David Geary, *Male, Female: The Evolution of Human Sex Differences*, (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1998); Wade Horn and Tom Sylvester, *Father Facts*, (Gaithersburg, MD: National Fatherhood Initiative, 2002); David Popenoe, *Life Without Father*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Thomas G. Powers et al., “Compliance and Self-Assertion: Young Children’s Responses to Mothers Versus Fathers,” *Developmental Psychology* 30 (1994): 980-989.

- Children who live with their biological parents have, “on average, higher reading achievement scores than peers living with cohabiting parents or in stepfamilies.”<sup>19</sup> Children of intact families also perform better in math and other academics as well.<sup>20</sup>
- “The rate of virginity among teenagers at all ages is highly correlated with the presence or absence of married parents.”<sup>21</sup>
- For girls, sexual intercourse will likely be delayed until marriage if the girl experiences the “love of a father who places her well-being above his own and who acts as a natural protector. . . . If she is denied such fatherly love, then the girl is likely to try to seek it elsewhere-often inappropriately and often at very young ages.”<sup>22</sup>
- For boys who are raised by their own biological fathers and mothers, they are “less likely to get in trouble than boys raised in other family situations.”<sup>23</sup>
- Use of illegal drugs is low among children from married families.<sup>24</sup>

The psychological benefits of marriage and the family can be better understood when reviewing the research on the adverse effects of divorce, cohabitation and broken or “stepfamilies” on spouses and children. Here only a brief sketch is provided.

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<sup>18</sup> Witherspoon Institute, *Marriage and the Public Good*, (2008), p. 10, referencing, Bradford Wilcox et al., *Why Marriage Matters*, (2005). See also, Elizabeth Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce*, (New York: Crown, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> Patty Howell, *Healthy Marriages, Healthy Children, Research on the Alignment of Marital Outcomes, Children’s Psycho-Social Development and Marriage Education*, (California Healthy Marriages Coalition, 2009), p. 3 referencing Julie Artis, “Maternal Co-Habitation and Child Well-Being Among Kindergarten Children,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69 (2007): 222-236. See also, Jim Stevenson and Glenda Fredman, “The Social Correlates of Reading Ability,” *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 31 (1990): 689-690.

<sup>20</sup> See, Sandra L. Hofferth, “Residential Father Family Type and Family Well-Being,” *Demography*, 43 (2006): 53-57. See also, Barry D. Ham, “The Effects of Divorce on the Academic Achievement of High School Seniors,” *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 38 (2003): 167-185.

<sup>21</sup> Howell, *Healthy Marriages, Healthy Children*, (2009), p. 7, citing Deborah M. Capaldi, Lynn Crosby and Mike Stoolmiller, “Predicting the Timing of First Sexual Intercourse for At-Risk Adolescent Males,” *Child Development* 67 (1996): 344-359.

<sup>22</sup> Wade F. Horn, *The Importance of Being Father*, cited by Family Research Council, *The Family Portrait*, (Washington, DC: Family Research Council, 2002), p. 145.

<sup>23</sup> Witherspoon Institute, *Marriage and the Public Good*, (2008), p. 17, referencing: Elizabeth Marquardt, *Family Structure and Children’s Educational Outcomes*, (2005); Paul Amato, “The Impact of Family Formation Change on the Cognitive, Social, and Emotional Well-Being of the Next Generation,” *The Future of Children* 15 (2005): 75-96.

<sup>24</sup> See, Robert A. Johnson et al., *The Relationship Between Structure and Adolescent Substance Use*, (Rockville, Maryland: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administrations, Office of Applied Studies, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 1996).

## Divorce

In study after study, divorced adults report greater psychological distress than married couples. Divorced women in particular report “more of an increase in depression, more hostility, more of a decline in self-esteem, less personal growth, and less self-acceptance and environmental mastery (than divorcing men).”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, divorced fathers are more likely to be depressed than married fathers.<sup>26</sup> Due to the strained parental role, divorced fathers of minor children especially “struggle with issues of personal and social identity.”<sup>27</sup>

Significant negative outcomes can be identified among children of divorced parents. The breakup of a marriage alters the relationships between father and child, as well as mother and child.<sup>28</sup> This change typically adds new emotional and even physical stressors to the family member’s role. For example, in some families, the oldest child, or the oldest daughter, “may become a confidant of the mother and act as a surrogate parent for her younger siblings. While such an arrangement may provide comfort to the mother and may reinforce parental authority, it is unlikely to be as effective as having two parents in the household.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, this can be beneficial to the structure or restructuring of a household, and even better when the oldest child

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<sup>25</sup> Nadine F. Marks and James D. Lambert, “Marital Status Continuity and Change among Young and Midlife Adults: Longitudinal Effects on Psychological Well-being,” *Journal of Family Issues* 19 (1998): 652-86, cited by Gallagher and Waite, *Case for Marriage*, (2000), p. 70.

<sup>26</sup> Adam Shapiro and James David Lambert, “Longitudinal Effects of Divorce on the Quality of the Father-Child Relationship and on Fathers’ Psychological Well-Being,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 61 (May 1999): 397-408, cited by Family Research Council, *The Family Portrait*, (2002), p. 105.

<sup>27</sup> Debra Umberson and Christine L. Williams, “Divorced Fathers: Parental Role Strain and Psychological Distress,” *Journal of Family Issues* 14 (September 1993): 378-400, cited by Family Research Council, *The Family Portrait*, (2002), p. 106.

<sup>28</sup> One foundational study from 1997 “found that divorced mothers provide less emotional support to their children than do married mothers.” Jane E. Miller and Diane Davis, “Poverty History, Marital History, and Quality of Children’s Home Environments,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 59 (November 1997): 996-1007, as cited by Family Research Council, *The Family Portrait*, (2002), p. 105.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Weiss, “Growing Up a Little Faster: The Experience of Growing Up in a Single-Parent Household.” *Journal of Social Issues* 35 (1979): 97-111, cited by Sara McLanahan and Gary D. Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 28-29.

is already at the end of their teenage years. However, this “does not provide [parental] authority or protection for the eldest child.”<sup>30</sup> Not surprisingly, children from divorced parents experience high levels of stress and become anxious and depressed more frequently than children of intact marriages.<sup>31</sup>

Since divorce separates the child from at least one parent and creates inadequate emotional support from either one (or sometimes both parents), this leads to the child’s experience of feelings that include “rejection, loneliness, anger, guilt, anxiety, fear of abandonment by their parents and a deep yearning for the absent parent.”<sup>32</sup> Consequently, the majority of research demonstrates that children (including adolescents) of divorced parents will face more psycho-social risks than children living in a two parent married household. These include

- lower levels of academic achievement (less likely to graduate from college)<sup>33</sup>
- increased risky behavior (e.g., alcohol, smoking, illegal drugs, etc.)<sup>34</sup>
- teenage pregnancy for girls<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> McLanahan and Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent*, (1994), p. 29.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>32</sup> Judith Wallerstein and John B. Kelly, *Surviving the Breakup: How Children and Parents Cope with Divorce* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), pp. 46-50, 211, cited by Family Research Council, *The Family Portrait*, (2002), pp. 99-100.

<sup>33</sup> See, Paul R. Amato and Jacob Cheadle, “The Long Reach of Divorce; Divorce and Child Well-Being across Three Generations,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67 (2005):191-206; Barry D. Ham, “The Effects of Divorce on the Academic Achievement of High School Seniors,” *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 38 (2003): 167-185; N. Long and R. Forehand, “The effects of parental divorce and parental conflict on children: An overview,” *Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics* 8 (1987): 292-296.

<sup>34</sup> See, K. Breivik and D. Olweus, “Adolescent’s Adjustment in Four Post-Divorce Family Structures: Single Mother, Stepfather, Joint Physical Custody and Single Father Families,” *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 44 (2006): 99-124; Shanta R. Dube, Vincent J. Felitti, Maxia Dong, Daniel P. Chapman, Wayne H. Giles and Robert F. Anda, “Childhood Abuse, Neglect and Household Dysfunction and the Risk of Illicit Drug Use: The Adverse Experiences Study,” *Pediatrics* 11 (March 2003): 564-572; Kathleen B. Rodgers and Hilary A. Rose, “Risk and Resiliency Factors Among Adolescents who Experience Marital Transitions,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 64 (2002): 1024-1037; William J. Doherty and R. H. Needle, “Psychological Adjustment and Substance Use Among Adolescents Before and After a Parental Divorce,” *Child Development* 62 (1991): 328-337.

- increased behavioral problems (e.g., truancy, violence, physical fighting, carrying a weapon, etc.)<sup>36</sup>
- increased risk for depression, emotional problems and suicide.<sup>37</sup>

### Cohabitation<sup>38</sup>

Although cohabitation seems to imitate marriage, research indicates that it fails to deliver the multiple benefits of marriage.<sup>39</sup> In fact, cohabitation appears to imitate single life more than married life.<sup>40</sup> “People who are cohabiting are less happy generally than the married and are less satisfied with their sex lives. In America, long-term cohabiting relationships are far rarer than successful marriages.”<sup>41</sup> Research also demonstrates that couples who cohabit:

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<sup>35</sup> See Bruce Ellis et al., “Does Father Absence Place Daughters at Special Risk for Early Sexual Activity and Teenage Pregnancy?” *Child Development* 74 (2003): 801-821; and McLanahan and Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent*, (1994).

<sup>36</sup> See, Marcia J. Carlson, “Family Structure, Father Involvement, and Adolescent Behavioral Outcomes,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 68 (2006): 137-154; John P. Hoffman, “Family Structure, Community Context, and Adolescent Problem Behaviors,” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 35 (2006): 867-880; Cynthia Harper and Sara McLanahan, “Father Absence and Youth Incarceration,” *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 14 (2004): 369-397; Rodgers and Rose, “Risk and Resiliency Factors Among Adolescents who Experience Marital Transitions,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 64 (2002): 1024-1037.

<sup>37</sup> On depressive disorder, as well as dependency disorder see, Health A. Turner and Kathleen Kopiec, “Exposure to Interparental Conflict and Psychological Disorder among Young Adults,” *Journal of Family Issues* 27 (2006): 131-158. On the topic of suicide, see, Gregory R. Johnson et al., “Suicide Among Adolescents and Young Adults: A Cross-National Comparison of 34 countries,” *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* 30 (2000): 74-82; see also David M. Cutler et al., “Explaining the Rise in Youth Suicide,” Working Paper 7713 (Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2000).

<sup>38</sup> For a comprehensive review of the research on cohabitation see: Pamela J. Smock, “Cohabitation in the United States: An Appraisal of Research Themes, Findings and Implications,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 1-20; David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *Should We Live Together? What Young Adults Need to Know About Cohabitation Before Marriage—A Comprehensive Review of Recent Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: The National Marriage Project, Rutgers University, 2002); Anne-Marie Ambert, “Cohabitation and Marriage: how Are They Related? (Ottawa, Ont.: The Vanier Institute of the Family, 2005).

<sup>39</sup> See for example, S. M. Stanley, H. J. Markman, and S. Whiton, “Maybe I Do: Interpersonal Commitment Levels and Premarital or Non-Marital Cohabitation,” *Journal of Family Issues* 25 (2004): 496-519.

<sup>40</sup> See, Susan L. Brown, “The Effect of Union Type on Psychological Well-Being: Depression Among Cohabitors Versus Marrieds,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 41 (2000): 241-255; Allan V. Horwitz and Helene Raskin, “The Relationship of Cohabitation and Mental Health: A Study of a Young Adult Cohort,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60 (1998): 505-514.

<sup>41</sup> Waite and Gallagher, *Case for Marriage*, (2000), p. 74, referencing, Bumpass and Sweet, “National Estimates of Cohabitation,” *Demography* 26 (1989): 615-625.

- have a 46% greater risk of divorce than couples who do not live together before marriage.<sup>42</sup>
- [experience] “more frequent depression .... than those of married people. [And] cohabitants who live with biological children or stepchildren are depressed more frequently than are married couples with children.”<sup>43</sup>
- have higher rates of domestic violence with women cohabitators being at greater risk for physical abuse.<sup>44</sup>

Children in cohabitating households face an increase of negative psycho-social outcomes

including:

- an increase in emotional and behavioral problems<sup>45</sup>
- greater experience with educational difficulties.<sup>46</sup>
- greater risk for being victims of abuse, especially when the biological father is missing.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Alfred DeMaris and K. Vaninadha Rao, “Premarital Cohabitation and Subsequent Marital Stability in the United States: A Reassessment,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 54 (1992):178-190. Cohabiting relationships are greatly unstable. One study found that 50% of children born to a cohabiting couple will see their parent’s relationship end by age five, compared to only 15% of children born to a married couple. See Wendy D. Manning, Pamela J. Smock and Debarum Majumdar, “The Relative Stability of Cohabiting and Marital Unions for Children,” *Population Research and Policy Review* 23 (2004):135-159; Pamela J. Smock and Wendy D. Manning, “Living Together Unmarried in the United States: Demographic Perspectives and Implications for Family Policy,” a prepublication working paper from the Population Studies Center (PSC) at the Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, Michigan: PSC, 2004).

<sup>43</sup> Family Research Council, *The Family Portrait* (2002), p. 85, referencing Brown, “The Effect of Union Type on Psychological Well-Being: Depression Among Cohabitators Versus Marrieds,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 41 (2000): 241-255.

<sup>44</sup> See, Susan L. Brown and Jennifer Roebuck Bulanda, “Relationship Violence in Young Adulthood: A Comparison of Daters, Cohabitators, and Marrieds,” *Social Science Research* 37 (2008): 73-87; Jan E. Stets, “Cohabiting and Marital Aggression: The Role of Social Isolation,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53 (1991): 669-680.

<sup>45</sup> Susan L. Brown, “Child Well-Being in Cohabiting Families,” in Alan Booth and Ann C. Crouter (eds.), *Just Living Together: Implications of Cohabitation on Families, Children and Social Policy*, (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), pp. 73-187; Susan L. Brown, “Family Structure and Child Well-Being: The Significance of Parental Cohabitation,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66 (2004): 351-367.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. See also, Julie Artis, “Maternal Cohabitation and Child Well-Being Among Kindergarten Children,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69 (2007): 222-236; Sandra Hofferth, “Residential Father Family Type and Family Well-Being,” *Demography* 43 (2006): 33-57; William H. Jeynes, “The Effects of Several of the Most Common Family Structures on the Academic Achievement of Eighth Graders,” *Marriage and Family Review* 30 (2000): 73-97.

<sup>47</sup> Children living in households with a single mother and a male partner who is not the biological father have an increased risk for abuse including: physical harm and even death from intentional injuries, see Carol D. Siegel et al., “Mortality from Intentional and Unintentional Injury Among Infants of Young Mothers in Colorado, 1982 to 1992,” *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* 150 (1996): 1077-1083. See also, A. Radhakrishna et al., “Are Father Surrogates a Risk Factor for Child Maltreatment?” *Child Maltreatment* 6 (2001): 281-289; Leslie Margolin,

- many of the same adverse outcomes for boys as described previously under divorce. This includes higher rates of violence, juvenile delinquency and incarceration.<sup>48</sup>

### Physical Health of Family Members

Research demonstrates that a variety of physical and health benefits result for married couples and their families.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, as the California Healthy Marriage Coalition indicates, a “comprehensive review of research since 1990 by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services shows that ‘married people are healthier than those who are not married across a wide array of health outcomes.’”<sup>50</sup> This is especially true for spouses who are in good quality marriages.<sup>51</sup> Classic literature reviews show married men and women to be generally healthier and to live longer lives than their single peers.<sup>52</sup> Other benefits include:

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“Child Abuse by Mothers’ Boyfriends: Why the Overrepresentation?” *Child Abuse and Neglect* 16 (1992): 541-551. Children living without their biological father also have an increased risk of being sexually abused, see David Finkelhor, et al., “Sexually Abused Children in a National Survey of Parents: Methodological Issues,” *Child Abuse and Neglect* 21 (1997): 1-9.

<sup>48</sup> See Cynthia Harper and Sara McLanahan, “Father Absence and Youth Incarceration,” *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 14 (2004): 369-397.

<sup>49</sup> See, Wood, Goesling and Avellar, *The Effects of Marriage on Health: A Synthesis of Recent Research Evidence*, (2007); Charlotte A. Schoenborn, “Marital Status and Health: United States, 1999-2002,” *Advance Data from Vital and Health Statistics* 351 (Atlanta, Georgia: Centers for Disease Control, 2004); Paul R. Amato, “The Consequences of Divorce for Adults and Children,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62 (2000): 1269-1287; Linda J. Waite and Mary Elizabeth Hughes, “At the Cusp of Old Age: Living Arrangements and Functional Status Among Black, White and Hispanic Adults,” *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences* 54b (1999): S136-S144.

<sup>50</sup> Howell, *Healthy Marriages, Healthy Lives*, (2008), inside cover, quoting Wood, Goesling and Avellar, *Effects of Marriage on Health* (2007), p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> Research is clear that marriages filled with tension and continuous conflict adversely affects the health of spouses. In fact, the risk for illness can increase by as much as 35% among unhappy spouses. See for example the foundational research of Lois M. Verbrugge, “Marital status and health,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 41 (1979): 267-285.

<sup>52</sup> See, K. A. S. Wickrama, Frederick O. Lorenz, Rand D. Conger and Glen H. Elder, Jr., “Marital Quality and Physical Illness: A Latent Growth Curve Analysis,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 59 (1997): 143-155; Catherine E. Ross, John Mirowsky and Karen Goldstein, “The Impact of the Family on Health: Decade in Review,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 52 (1990): 1059-1078. The increased benefit for a married woman’s longevity is related to the length of marriage, see for example, Lee A. Lillard and Linda J. Waite, “Till Death Do Us Part: Marital Disruption and Mortality,” *American Journal of Sociology* 100 (1995): 1131-1156.

- high levels of immune function among spouses who have good quality marriages.<sup>53</sup>
- lower risk for death from heart attacks and longer life expectancy among married men and women with heart disease.<sup>54</sup>
- reduction of unhealthy behavior such as smoking, illegal drug use and abuse of alcohol.<sup>55</sup>

Research clearly indicates that married couples seek better medical care<sup>56</sup> and that the “emotional support and monitoring of spouses,” which is typical of normal married life, “encourages healthier behavior which affects both emotional and physical well-being in regular sleep, a healthy diet, and moderate drinking.” As authors Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher note in their summary of marriage research, *The Case for Marriage*: “the key seems to be the

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<sup>53</sup> See, Janice K. Kiecolt-Glaser, Ronald Glaser, John T. Cacioppo, Robert C. MacCallum, Mary Syndersmith, Cheongtag Kim and William B. Malarkey, “Marital Conflict in Older Adults: Endocrinological and Immunological Correlates,” *Psychosomatic Medicine* 59 (1997): 339-349. See also, Sehtdon Cohen, William J. Doyle, David P. Skoner, Bruce S. Rabin, Jack M. Gwatltney, “Social Ties and Susceptibility to the Common cold,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 277 (1997): 1940-1944. Conversely, a poor quality and even stressful marriage that is filled with conflict adversely affects the immune system of spouses. See for example, Janice K. Kiecolt-Glaser, William B. Malarkey, MaryAnn Chee, Tamara Newton, John T. Cacioppo, Hsiao-Yin Mao and Ronald Galser, “Negative Behavior During Marital Conflict Is Associated with Immunological Down-Regulation,” *Psychosomatic Medicine* 55 (1993): 395-409.

<sup>54</sup> See, Janice K. Kiecolt-Glaser and Tamara L. Newton, “Marriage and Health: His and Hers?” *Psychological Bulletin* 127 (2001): 472-503; Zhenmei Zhang and Mark D. Hayward, “Gender, the Marital Life Course, and Cardiovascular Health in Late Midlife,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 68 (2006): 639-657. Marital quality continues to play a role in heart health. For example, seriously ill patients in good quality (low conflict) marriages live significantly longer than patients in poor quality marriages. See, James Coyne, Michael J. Rohrbaugh, Varda Shoham, John S. Sonnega, John M. Nicklas and James A. Cranfors, “Prognostic importance of marital quality for survival of congestive heart failure,” *American Journal of Cardiology* 88 (2001): 526-529; Michael J. Rohrbaugh, Varda Shoham and James C. Coyne, “Effect of Marital Quality on Eight-Year Survival of Patients with Heart Failure,” *The American Journal of Cardiology* 98 (2006): 1069-1072.

<sup>55</sup> See, Wood, Goesling and Avellar, *The Effects of Marriage on Health: A Synthesis of Recent Research Evidence*, (2007); Robin W. Simon, “Revisiting the Relationships among Gender, Marital Status and Mental Health,” *American Journal of Sociology* 107 (2002):1065-1096; Jerald G. Bachman, Katherine N. Wadsworth, Patrick M. O’Malley, Lloyd D. Johnson and John E. Schulenberg, *Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use in Young Adulthood*, (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997); Carol Miller-Tutzauer, Kenneth E. Leonard and Michael Windle, “Marriage and Alcohol Use: A Longitudinal Study of ‘Maturing Out,’” *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 52 (1991): 434-440; Catherine E. Ross, John Mirowsky and Karen Goldstein, “The Impact of the Family on Health: Decade in Review,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 52 (1990): 1059-1078; Debra Umberson, “Family Status and Health Behaviors: Social Control as a Dimension of Social Integration,” *Journal of Health and Social behavior* 28 (1987): 306-319.

<sup>56</sup> See, Eugene Litwak and Peter Messeri, in collaboration with Samuel Wolfe, Sheila Gorman, Merrill Silverstein and Miguelo Guilarte, “Organizational Theory, Social Supports, and Mortality Rates: A Theoretical Convergence,” *American Sociological Review* 54 (1989): 49-66.

marriage bond itself: Having a partner who is committed for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, makes people happier and healthier.”<sup>57</sup>

### *Health Benefits for Children in Married Households*

Marriage is not only good for the health of husband and wife, but it is also good for children. Children from intact marriages have better physical health over their life-span and live longer than children from one-parent homes.<sup>58</sup> Children born to married parents have lower rates of infant mortality<sup>59</sup> and suffer less intentional and unintentional fatal injuries.<sup>60</sup> In addition, as they grow into adolescents, they will be less likely to engage in unhealthy behavior such as smoking or drug abuse.<sup>61</sup> Studies also show that adolescents who have been raised by both parents from birth, “have lower probabilities of having sex ... than teens who grew up in any other family situation.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Waite and Gallagher, *Case for Marriage*, (2000), p. 77.

<sup>58</sup> See, David F. Warner and Mark D. Hayward, “Early-Life Origins of the Race Gap in Men’s Mortality,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 47 (2006): 209-226; Samuel H. Preston, Mark E. Hill and Greg L. Drevenstedt, “Childhood Conditions that Predict Survival to Advanced Ages Among African-Americans,” *Social Science and Medicine* 47 (1998): 1231-1246; John S. Tucker, Howard S. Friedman, Joseph E. Schwartz, Michael H. Criqui, Carol Tomlinson-Keasey, Deborah L. Wingard, and Leslie R. Martin, “Parental Divorce: Effects on Individual Behavior and Longevity,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 73 (1997): 381-391;

<sup>59</sup> See, J. Schuman, “Childhood, Infant and Perinatal Mortality, 1996: Social and Biological Factors in Deaths of Children Aged Under 3,” *Population Trends* 92 (1996): 5-14; Trude Bennett, Paula Braveman, Susan Egarter and John L. Kiely, “Maternal Marital Status as a Risk Factor for Infant Mortality,” *Family Planning Perspectives* 26 (1994): 252-256, 271.

<sup>60</sup> Carol D. Siegel, Patricia Graves, Kate Maloney, Jill M. Norris, B. Ned Calonge, and Dennis Lezotte, “Mortality from Intentional and Unintentional Injury Among Infants of Young Mothers in Colorado, 1986 to 1992,” *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* 150 (1996): 1077-1083.

<sup>61</sup> See, Brian M. D’Onofrio, Eric Turkeimer, Robert E. Emery, Wendy S. Slutske, Pamela A. Madden, Nicholas G. Martin and Andrew C. Heath, “A Genetically Informed Study of Marital Instability and Its Association with Offspring Psychopathology,” *Developmental Psychology* 42 (2006): 486-499; John P. Hoffman and Robert A. Johnson, “A National Portrait of Family Structure and Adolescent Drug Use,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60 (1998): 633-645; Robert A. Johnson et al., *The Relationship Between Family Structure and Adolescent Substance Use* (Rockville, Maryland: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administrations, Office of Applied Studies, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996); Robert L. Flewelling and Karl E. Baumann, “Family Structure as a Predictor of Initial Substance Use and Sexual Intercourse in Early Adolescents,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 52 (1990): 171-181.

<sup>62</sup> Kristin Moore and Anne Driscoll, *A Statistical Portrait of Adolescent Sex, Contraception and Childbearing*, (Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, March 1998), p. i.

## *Adverse Health Outcomes for Non-Married, Divorced and Cohabiting Family Members*

As already implied in the section above, the majority of research on marriage also reveals the adverse health benefits for the divorced, non-married and any children who live with them.

In general, divorced people have poorer physical health than their married peers. This is especially true for low-income divorced people.<sup>63</sup> They are more likely to become problem drinkers and to die of cirrhosis of the liver.<sup>64</sup>

Non-married people experience shorter life expectancy, have lower immune systems, take longer to heal from sickness and engage in more unhealthy behaviors (e.g., smoking, abusing drugs and alcohol). In fact, evidence of four decades of research shows that

... unlike getting married, merely moving in together did not seem to motivate young men and women to reduce unhealthy behavior. During their twenties, young men and women who lived together showed very high and increasing rates of health-destroying and dangerous behaviors. ... Only on heavy alcohol use does cohabitation seem to provide some protection, yet still far less than marriage.<sup>65</sup>

Finally, divorced and unmarried adults are at higher risks for injuries, especially intentional injuries, than married people. On this last point, cohabitation does not reduce the risk of unhealthy outcomes for its practioners. In fact, the majority of research shows that “living with a man outside of marriage—is associated with a considerably higher risk of domestic violence for women.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> See, Charlotte Schoenborn, “Marital status and health,” *CDC Advance Data from Vital and Health Statistics* 351 (Washington, DC: National Center for Health Statistics, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2004).

<sup>64</sup> See, Coombs “Marital Status and Personal Well-Being: A Literature Review,” *Family Relations* 40 (1991): 97-102.

<sup>65</sup> Waite and Gallagher, *Case for Marriage* (2000), pp. 63-64.

<sup>66</sup> Howell, *Healthy Marriages, Healthy Lives*, (2008), p. 6, referencing, Richard J. Gelles, *Intimate Violence in Families*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1997). See also, Alan Booth and David R. Johnson, “Premarital Cohabitation and Marital Success,” *Journal of Family Issues* 9 (1992): 255-272; Kazuo Yamaguchi and Denise B. Kandel, “Dynamic Relationships between Premarital Cohabitation and Illicit Drug Use: An Event-History Analysis of Role Selection and Role Socialization,” *American Sociological Review* 50 (1985): 530-546

With regard to overall health, the bottom line for unmarried people is that they “spend twice as much time as patients in hospitals as their married peers.”<sup>67</sup> And, a “married man with heart disease can be expected to live, on average, 1,400 days longer (nearly four years) than an unmarried man with a healthy heart.”<sup>68</sup> The research is the same for women as well.

The group of people most adversely affected by divorce and cohabitation are, of course, children. Children are especially at risk for the many negative health outcomes following the divorce of their biological parents. They suffer higher risk for infant mortality and, on average, have a shorter life expectancy by an average of four years.<sup>69</sup> They double their risk of becoming asthmatic<sup>70</sup> and engage in higher rates of unhealthy behavior when adolescents such as smoking, drinking, and using illegal drugs.<sup>71</sup> They also engage in non-marital sex at early ages<sup>72</sup> and are more likely to have a teenage pregnancy.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Howell, *Healthy Marriages, Lives*, (2008), p. 5, citing, Lois Verbrugge and Donald Balaban, “Patterns of Change, Disability and Well-Being,” *Medical Care* 27 (1989): S128-S147.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5. Howell cites Waite, “Does Marriage Matter?” *Demography* 32 (1995): 483-507.

<sup>69</sup> See, D. A. Dawson, “Family structure and children’s health and wellbeing, Data from the 1988 National Health Interview Survey on Child Health,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53 (1991): 573-584; J. S. Tucker, H. S. Friedman, et al., “Marital history at midlife as a predictor of longevity: Alternative explanations to the protective effect of marriage,” *Health Psychology* 15 (1996): 94-101; A. J. Cherlin, F. F. Furstenberg, et al., “Longitudinal studies of effects of divorce on children in Great Britain and the United States,” *Science* 252 (1991):1386-1389; W. J. Doherty and R. H. Needle, “Psychological adjustment and substance use among adolescents before and after a parental divorce,” *Child Development* 62 (1991): 328-337.

<sup>70</sup> See, Gopal K. Singh and Stella M. Yu, “U. S. Childhood Mortality, 1950 through 1993: Trends and Socioeconomic Differentials,” *American Journal of Public Health* 86 (1996): 505-512.

<sup>71</sup> See, K. Breivik and D. Olweus, “Adolescent’s Adjustment in Four Post-Divorce Family Structures: Single Mother, Stepfather, Joint Physical Custody and Single Father Families,” *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 44 (2006): 99-124; Shanta R. Dube, Vincent J. Felitti, Maxia Dong, Daniel P. Chapman, Wayne H. Giles and Robert F. Anda, “Childhood Abuse, Neglect and Household Dysfunction and the Risk of Illicit Drug Use: The Adverse Experiences Study,” *Pediatrics* 11 (March 2003): 564-572; Kathleen B. Rodgers and Hilary A. Rose, “Risk and Resiliency Factors Among Adolescents who Experience Marital Transitions,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 64 (2002): 1024-1037; John P. Hoffman and Robert A. Johnson, “A National Portrait of Family Structure and Adolescent Drug Use,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60 (1998): 633-645; William J. Doherty and R. H. Needle, “Psychological Adjustment and Substance Use Among Adolescents Before and After a Parental Divorce,” *Child Development* 62 (1991): 328-337; Robert L. Flewelling and K. E. Baumann, “Family Structure as a Predictor of Initial Substance Use and Sexual Intercourse in Early Adolescents,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 52 (1990): 171-181.

<sup>72</sup> See for example, Deborah M. Capaldi, Lynn Crosby and Mike Stoolmille, “Predicting the Timing of First Sexual Intercourse for At Risk Adolescent Males,” *Child Development* 67 (1996): 344-359.

The problem of child abuse is especially felt among children who live with an adult who is not their biological parent. As indicated above, children in households where the biological father is missing are at a greater risk for being victims of abuse.<sup>74</sup> “Children two years of age and younger are 70-100 times more likely to be killed at the hands of their step-parents than by their biological parents.”<sup>75</sup>

### Economic Benefits for Family Members and Society

Marriage is economically good for husbands, wives, children and society. The majority of intact marriages keeps the married and their children out of poverty and does not stress government support programs, the health care system and the labor force.

Husband and wife are more economically stable than their unmarried peers. Contemporary married couples with children earn a median annual income of \$67,670.00 as compared to single-parent families with a median annual income of \$24,408.00.<sup>76</sup> Typically, the capacity of a

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<sup>73</sup> See, K. Crowder and J. Teachman, “Do residential conditions explain the relationship between living arrangements and adolescent behavior?” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66 (2004): 721-738; Bruce Ellis et al., “Does Father Absence Place Daughters at Special Risk for Early Sexual Activity and Teenage Pregnancy?” *Child Development* 74 (2003): 801-821; R. J. Quinlan, “Father absence, parental care and female reproductive development,” *Evolution and Human Behavior* 24 (2003): 376-390; K. A. Moore and P. L. Chase-Lansdale, “Sexual intercourse and pregnancy among African-American girls in high-poverty neighborhoods: The role of family and perceived community environment,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63 (2001): 1146-1157; Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Sharon D. White and Richard R. DeBlassie, “Adolescent Sexual Behavior,” *Adolescence* 27 (1992): 183-191.

<sup>74</sup> Children living in households with a single mother and a male partner who is not the biological father have an increased risk for abuse including: physical harm and even death from intentional injuries, see Carol D. Siegel et al., “Mortality from Intentional and Unintentional Injury Among Infants of Young Mothers in Colorado, 1982 to 1992,” *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* 150 (1996): 1077-1083. See also, A. Radhakrishna et al., “Are Father Surrogates a Risk Factor for Child Maltreatment?” *Child Maltreatment* 6 (2001): 281-289; Leslie Margolin, “Child Abuse by Mothers’ Boyfriends: Why the Overrepresentation?” *Child Abuse and Neglect* 16 (1992): 541-551. Children living without their biological father also have an increased risk of being sexually abused, see David Finkelhor, et al., “Sexually Abused Children in a National Survey of Parents: Methodological Issues,” *Child Abuse and Neglect* 21 (1997): 1-9.

<sup>75</sup> Howell, *Healthy Marriages, Healthy Lives*, (2008), p. 10, referencing Diana E. H. Russell, “The Prevalence and Seriousness of Incestuous Abuse: Stepfathers vs. Biological Fathers,” *Child Abuse and Neglect* 8 (1984): 15-22. See also, Patrick F. Fagan, “The Child Abuse Crisis: The Disintegration of Marriage, Family and the American Community,” *Background*, (Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation, May 13, 1997).

<sup>76</sup> See, Paul R. Amato and Rebecca Maynard, “Decreasing Nonmarital Births and Strengthening Marriage to Reduce Poverty,” *Future of Children* 17 (2007): 117-142.

married couple's household exceeds that of a single-parent household by nearly three times the amount in income.<sup>77</sup>

With regard to savings, the ability to accumulate wealth demonstrates the differences between the married and non-married most clearly. In the early 1990s for example, married families saved the most money with a median net worth of \$26,000. Remarried families were slightly lower with \$22,500 as a median net worth. However, single mothers and cohabiting couples were at the bottom with savings of just \$1,000.00 (and single mothers often saving no money).<sup>78</sup> This trend continues.

The economic advantage of married men and women continues into their fifties and sixties. Older married couples continue to have a higher income than their non-married peers with a median net worth of slightly over \$132,000.00. Divorced men and women have about \$33,670.00 and currently separated, only \$7,600.00. The never married have about \$35,000.00.<sup>79</sup> For people nearing retirement age (in the U. S., 65), the married accumulate about \$410,000 while the divorced have assets at about \$154,000. Those who are separated are under \$96,000. The never married have about \$167,000.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> David G. Schramm, "Counting the Cost of Divorce: What Those Who Know Better Rarely Acknowledge." *The Family in America* 23 (2009). Available at [www.familyinamerica.org/index.php?doc\\_id=19&cat\\_id=4](http://www.familyinamerica.org/index.php?doc_id=19&cat_id=4); (last accessed, 7/14/11).

<sup>78</sup> See, Lingxin Hao, Family Structure, Private Transfers, and the Economic Well-Being of Families with Children," *Social Forces* 75 (1996): 269-292.

<sup>79</sup> See, Joseph Lupton and James P. Smith, "Marriage, Assets and Savings," in, Shoshana A. Grossbard, Ed., *Marriage and the Economy, Theory and Evidence from Advanced Industrial Societies*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>80</sup> See, Joseph Lupton and James P. Smith, "Marriage, Assets and Savings," in, Shoshana A. Grossbard, Ed., *Marriage and the Economy, Theory and Evidence from Advanced Industrial Societies*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Researchers conclude that, “Married couples apparently save significantly more than other households, an effect that is not solely related to their higher incomes nor the simple aggregation of the two individuals' wealth.”<sup>81</sup>

As with the previous subjects, the economic benefits of marriage for family members, especially for children, who are the most vulnerable, can be more clearly understood when reviewing studies on divorce, single-parenthood, cohabitation and their adverse outcomes.

### *Divorce and Non-Married Partners Harm the Economic Lives of Family Members*

When families break due to divorce the “economic and financial challenges for a split household can be devastating, even for middle-class couples.”<sup>82</sup> One study estimates that despite couples dividing their assets fairly when divorcing, the family’s standard of living drops by about 25% after the divorce with the standard of living for wives declining by 27%, while that of the men, increasing by about 10%. Researchers conclude that it costs more to live separately than together.<sup>83</sup>

Research on the causes of poverty in the United States demonstrates that over 80% of poverty is related to changes in the family structure, especially due to increases in families headed by single mothers.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> David G. Schramm, “Counting the Cost of Divorce: What Those Who Know Better Rarely Acknowledge.” *The Family in America* 23 (2009). Available at [www.familyinamerica.org/index.php?doc\\_id=19&cat\\_id=4](http://www.familyinamerica.org/index.php?doc_id=19&cat_id=4) (accessed 7/14/11). See also, Julia Health, “Determinants of Spells of Poverty Following Divorce,” *Review of Social Economy* 49 (1992): 305-315.

<sup>83</sup> See, Richard R. Peterson, “A Re-Evaluation of the Economic Consequences of Divorce,” *American Sociological Review* 61 (1996): 528-536.

<sup>84</sup> See, Hilary Hoynes, Marianne Page and Ann Stevens, “Poverty in America: Trends and Explanation,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 20 (2006): 47-68; Adam Thomas and Isabel Sawhill, “For Love and Money? The Impact of Family Structure on Family Income,” in Elisabeth Donahue, Ron Haskins and Sara McLanahan, eds., *The Future of Children, Vol. II, Children and Families*, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press and Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University, Princeton, N.J., Fall 2005); Adam Thomas and Isabel Sawhill, “For Richer or for Poorer: Marriage as an Antipoverty Strategy,” *Journal of Policy analysis and Management* 21 (2002): 587-599.

### *Women, Divorced and/or Unmarried with Children*

Divorce generally harms the financial health of women more than that of men. Divorce renders women financially vulnerable. Divorce research is starkly clear: approximately one in five women will slide into poverty<sup>85</sup>; one out of three mothers will lose a home they jointly owned with their husbands<sup>86</sup>; and nearly three out of four divorced mothers do not receive full payment of their child support.<sup>87</sup>

Considering the economic status of mothers at the time they gave birth, one 1998 study found that “among those who were unwed and age 20 or older, 60% depended on welfare after the birth of their child.”<sup>88</sup> Indeed, research consistently shows that unwed motherhood increases the economic risk of both mother and child.<sup>89</sup>

### *Children of Divorce and Unmarried Households*

Spouses’ choice to “split,” or men and women’s decision to not marry, not only leaves men and women vulnerable, but it also places children at risk. One study found that almost 50% of families with children undergoing divorce transition into poverty following the divorce.<sup>90</sup> The disadvantages will affect these children throughout the course of their adolescent development

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<sup>85</sup> As previously noted, single mothers and cohabiting women are at the bottom of the financial ladder. See, Hilary Hoynes, Marianne Page and Ann Stevens, “Poverty in America: Trends and Explanation,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 20 (2006): 47-68; T. S. Grall, “Custodial Mothers and Fathers and their Child Support: 2003.” *Current Population Reports, Series P60-230* (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 2003); Pamela J. Smock et al., “The Effect of Marriage and Divorce on Women’s Economic Well-Being,” *American Sociological Review* 64 (1999): 794-812.

<sup>86</sup> See, T. L. Hanson et al, “Windows on Divorce: Before and After.” *Social Science Research* 27 (1998): 329-349.

<sup>87</sup> T. S. Grall, “Custodial Mothers and Fathers and their Child Support: 2003.” *Current Population Reports, Series P60-230* (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 2003); Lingxin Hao, “Family Structure, Private Transfers, and the Economic Well-Being of Families with Children,” *Social Forces* 75 (1996): 269-292.

<sup>88</sup> See, E. Michael Foster, Damon Jones, et al., “The Economic Impact of Nonmarital Childbearing: How are Older, Single Mothers Faring?” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60 (1998): 163-174.

<sup>89</sup> See for example, Sara McLanahan, “Family, State, and Child Well-Being,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 703-706.

<sup>90</sup> See, Julia Health, “Determinants of Spells of Poverty Following Divorce,” *Review of Social Economy* 49 (1992): 305-315.

into their adult lives. Divorce causes many detrimental economic effects.<sup>91</sup> The research is clear, children who live in non-married families live with fewer economic resources (and often in communities with weaker resources) than children from intact married households.<sup>92</sup>

Children living in cohabitating households face the same economic risks since they are primarily cared for under the economic commitment of one adult (usually their biological mother). The conclusion of the evidence is that children of families headed by a single mother are at greater risk of living below the poverty line than their peers who live in intact married families.<sup>93</sup>

The difficulties experienced in their youth and their development due to the economic vulnerability of broken homes continues its effects through their maturing adult lives. Research demonstrates that adolescents who have lived apart from one of their parents during some period of their youth are “twice as likely to drop out of high school, twice as likely to have a child before age twenty, and one-and-a-half times as likely to be “idle”- out of school and out of work- in their late teens and early twenties.”<sup>94</sup> In addition, children of single-parent families have a higher risk for failing at finding and securing a career or steady job because they had lacked both the parental and community support and resources enjoyed in two-parent families.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> David G. Schramm, “Counting the Cost of Divorce: What Those Who Know Better Rarely Acknowledge.” *The Family in America* 23 (Fall 2009). Available at [www.familyinamerica.org/index.php?doc\\_id=19&cat\\_id=4](http://www.familyinamerica.org/index.php?doc_id=19&cat_id=4); (accessed, 7/14/11).

<sup>92</sup> See, Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, “Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps.” (1994), p. 125.

<sup>93</sup> The U. S. Census Bureau completed a study in 2000 which showed that “only 6% of married-couple families with children under 18 were below the poverty line compared to 32.5% of families headed by a single mother.” U. S. Census Bureau, “Historical Poverty Tables,” Table 4, Washington, D.C. Available at [www.census.gov/hhes/poverty/histpov4.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/poverty/histpov4.html) (accessed 7/14/11).

<sup>94</sup> McLanahan and Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent*, (1994), p. 2.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid: 35-36. See also, Yongmin Sun and Yuanzhang Li, “Stable Postdivorce Family Structures during Late Adolescence and Socioeconomic Consequences in Adulthood,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 70 (2008): 129-143.

In assessing the devastating economic effects of the single parent home on children, a leading socialist of the family, Barbara Dafoe Whitehead (Rutgers University), noted that for many American young adults who have grown up in non-married families, the lack of economic stability has adversely affected the development of initiative, independence and risk-taking. Without these traits, the cultivation of other personal characteristics key to the fostering of a good economy, such as resourcefulness and responsibility, are also lost.<sup>96</sup>

### *The Non-Married Family's Cost to Society*

Divorce and unwed childbearing stress the economic resources of society. A 1998 report conservatively estimated that family fragmentation in the United States cost taxpayers a minimum of \$112 billion a year.<sup>97</sup> These increased taxpayer expenditures included funding for social programs on antipoverty, the effects of poverty, criminal justice and other educational topics. An earlier report from 1996 showed similar estimates and added information on the high costs of teenage childbearing.<sup>98</sup> In terms of social services and lost tax revenue due to government dependency, the gross annual cost to society of adolescent childbearing was estimated at \$29 billion.<sup>99</sup> Currently, the estimated cost of family fragmentation over a decade is set at more than \$1 trillion dollars.<sup>100</sup>

Single parent families constitute more than 73% of the lowest income among the American population and consequently need to take advantage of governmental supportive

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<sup>96</sup> Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, "The Divorce Culture: Rethinking Our Commitments to Marriage and Family." (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1996), p. 194.

<sup>97</sup> Benjamin Scafidi, *The Taxpayer Costs of Divorce and Unwed Childbearing: First-Ever Estimates for the Nation and All Fifty States*, (New York: Institute for American Values, 1998).

<sup>98</sup> Rebecca Maynard, ed. *Kids Having Kids: A Robin Hood Foundation Special report on the Costs of Adolescent Childbearing*, (New York: The Robin Hood Foundation, 1996), p. 19.

<sup>99</sup> Rebecca Maynard, ed., *Kids Having Kids: A Robin Hood Foundation Special Report on the Costs of Adolescent Childbearing*, (New York: The Robin Hood Foundation, 1996), p.19.

<sup>100</sup> *The Taxpayer Costs of Divorce and Unwed Childbearing: First-Ever Estimates for the Nation and All Fifty States*, (New York: Institute for American Values, 2008), p. 20.

programs.<sup>101</sup> In a 1998 survey of the U. S. government’s Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program (or “Welfare”), 40% of the recipients were shown to be divorced or separated people living in single-parent households.<sup>102</sup> And, as early as 1989, it was estimated that about 75% of all women who applied for welfare benefits did so because of a disrupted marriage or disrupted relationship in which they live with a male outside of marriage.<sup>103</sup> This trend has not changed:

Each year, family fragmentation costs American taxpayers at least \$112 billion dollars. These costs are recurring—that is, they are incurred each and every year—meaning that the decline of marriage costs American taxpayers more than \$1 trillion dollars over a decade.<sup>104</sup>

The economic effects of family fragmentation extend further than government assistance programs. Some studies estimate that “lost work time due to marital difficulties accounts for \$6 billion in annual losses in productivity for American businesses”<sup>105</sup> [and] even “when employees do report for work, they are less likely to perform well and more likely to feel distracted due to the stresses associated with relationship problems or divorce.”<sup>106</sup> Research consistently demonstrates that the intact family is necessary for a financially sound society.

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<sup>101</sup> *Families with Children by Income Quintile & Family Structure*. (Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, 1997).

<sup>102</sup> Committee on Ways and Means, U. S. House of Representatives, *1998 Green Book: Background Material and Data on Programs Within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means* (May 19, 1998), p. 540.

<sup>103</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Factors Affecting the Labor Force Participation of Lone Mothers in the United States*, Panel on Evaluation Factors Affecting the Labor Force Participation of Lone Mothers (Paris, 1989).

<sup>104</sup> *The Taxpayer Costs of Divorce and Unwed Childbearing: First-Ever Estimates for the National and All Fifty States*, (New York: Institute for American Values, 2008), p. 20.

<sup>105</sup> David G. Schramm, “Counting the Cost of Divorce: What Those Who Know Better Rarely Acknowledge,” *The Family in America* 23 (Fall 2009), p. 3 of 5; available at: [http://www.familyinamerica.org/index.php?doc\\_id=19&cat\\_id=4](http://www.familyinamerica.org/index.php?doc_id=19&cat_id=4); accessed, 7/14/55. Schramm references, M. S. Forthofer et al, “Associations Between Marital Distress and Work Loss in a National Sample,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58 (1996):597-605.

<sup>106</sup> David G. Schramm, “Counting the Cost of Divorce: What Those Who Know Better Rarely Acknowledge,” *The Family in America* 23 (Fall 2009), p. 3 of 5.

## Conclusion—Marriage is a Good for Society

Marriage benefits society by building and strengthening human relationships within the home (among spouses and children) and beyond (involving relatives, neighbors, and communities). For this reason, the family has long been understood as the fundamental unit of society, the foundation from which religious, civic, and legal organizations naturally develop and flourish. As shown above, the weight of research supports these beliefs about marriage, demonstrating the benefits for the individual and consequently, for the society.

For happily married women, the benefits include: more satisfying relationships with their spouses and children; emotionally healthier, experience less depression and are less likely to attempt or commit suicide; wealthier and less likely to remain in or end up in poverty; decreased risk to be victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, or other violent crimes; a decreased risk of drug and alcohol abuse; and are physically healthier and live longer than their unmarried peers.

Happily married men experience many benefits as well, including: are physically healthier, recuperate from illness faster and live longer; emotionally healthier and less likely to attempt or commit suicide; have better relationships with their children, and a more satisfying sexual relationship with their wives; are wealthier, have higher wages and experience an increase in the stability of employment; have a decrease risk of drug and alcohol abuse; less likely to commit violent crimes; and less likely to contract a sexually transmitted disease.

As discussed above, the evidence from research indicates that children raised in intact families: do better in school; are more likely to attend college and enter the work force in stronger positions; are physically and emotionally healthier; are less likely to be physically or sexually abused; less likely to use drugs or alcohol and to commit delinquent behaviors; have a decreased risk of divorcing when they get married; are less likely to initiate sexual activity,

become pregnant/impregnate someone as a teenager; and are less likely to be raised in poverty.<sup>107</sup>

The relational ties and community assets forged through marriage result in many positive outcomes for society. Marriage is a “seedbed” of pro-social behavior that fosters social connections, civil and religious involvement, and charitable giving. Marriage connects men and women to the larger community and encourages personal responsibility, family commitment, community voluntarism, and social altruism.<sup>108</sup> Marriage is the greatest social educator of children. It is the institution that most effectively teaches the civic virtues of honesty, loyalty, trust, self-sacrifice, personal responsibility, and respect for others. The virtues cultivated between men and women in marriage, and between parents and the children, radiate outward into civil society. They deepen in married men and women strong habits of devotion to civic life.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> See, Wilcox et al., *Why Marriage Matters* (2005) and Waite and Gallagher, *Case for Marriage* (2000).

<sup>108</sup> Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, “U.S. Senate Testimony,” <http://marriage.rutgers.edu>.

<sup>109</sup> W. Bradford Wilcox, *Sacred Vows, Public Purposes: Religion, the Marriage Movement, and Marriage Policy*, (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2002), pp. 3, 28. Available at, <http://pewforum.org/publications/reports/marriagepolicy.pdf>; accessed, 7/15/11.

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