

The Impact of Contemporary Family Life Patterns on the Quality and Stability of Child Rearing

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Families represent a complex social and public good. The family unit is the social institution in which children are born, raised and educated to be the citizens of the next generation. Family relationships are not just private emotional affairs. This report will document family related research to gain understanding of family patterns in the new millennium with a particular focus on the quality and stability of children's well-being.

Historically marriage has been the appropriate institution for bearing, raising and caring for children. Marriage has been the tie that connects the father to his children and their mother for protection, emotional support and guidance. However, recent trends have focused on personal choice and preference in family formation. Concern for the well-being of the children has been pushed from center stage.

In the last 50 years six major trends have significantly altered family formation: divorce; births out-of-wedlock; unmarried cohabitation; single parent families; sperm/egg donor births; and same sex families. These varied family forms create challenges to the quality and stability of child rearing. The increase in unwed births and single-parent families are significant trends affecting the well-being of children. Single parents often shoulder the entire responsibility while fathers may be left out of the family equation. Lack of resources often leaves the family in poverty and dependent on state welfare. The decline of marriage is pushing many Americans out of the middle class.

Political leaders, social leaders and educators often fail to address concerns raised by these dramatic changes for the well-being of children. They fail to ask the questions that are necessary lest they appear to be discriminating or judging a contemporary lifestyle. However a responsible society must be concerned with the quality and care of its children.

This paper will document the following questions. *What influences were responsible for bringing about changes in family relationships? * How do varied family patterns affect the stability and quality of child well-being? * What are the present and long term consequences for children and for society when children grow up in unstable and complex family relationships? * How can families, marriage and family educators, and public policy encourage stable, responsible and caring family relationships for the well-being of children?

The Changing Family Structure in America

The 1960's brought a change in thinking as conflict theory challenged structural-functional social theories that dominated social research. Sociologist Karl Marx had written about alienation, identified as powerlessness, meaninglessness and self-estrangement. Marx saw in the traditional family arrangements the foundation of the social ills perpetrated by private property. (Smelser, 1973:63)

THE NEW MORALITY CONFRONTS THE FAMILY (Engels, 1884)

In 1884 Frederich Engels, co-author of the *Communist Manifesto* with Karl Marx, analyzed the family structure and outlined problems that he saw in the practice of sexual behaviors and lifelong monogamous marriages. Engels contended that the submission of women to their husbands represented class oppression established by men for their benefit. Seeking to liberate people from binding family relationships and the "oppression of monogamy", Engels outlined a new morality and a new social order. He proposed:

- * drawing the "entire female sex into public industry",
- * making men and women equal "in rights and responsibilities"
- * passing "the means of production into common property",
- * abolishing the family as "the economic unit of society",
- * and having "society take care of all children equally irrespective of whether they are born in wedlock or not".

Engels contended that this new social organization would give rise to "more unrestrained sexual intercourse, and along with it, a more lenient public opinion regarding virginal honour and feminine shame." The new moral standard for judging sexual intercourse would be "whether it arose from mutual love or not." "...a definite cessation of affection, or its displacement by a new passionate love, makes separation a blessing for both parties as well as for society."

Marxism became 'politically correct' in American and European universities in the 1960's. Seeking a life free of moral and political restraints, Marxist intellectuals sought to dismantle the traditional moral authority structures. Movements developed to advance the rights of oppressed ethnic groups, women, homosexuals, and other minorities. Claiming that there are no absolutes for all times and places, post modern thinkers sought to destroy the foundations for absolute moral thought and behaviors.

CHANGING THE FAMILY FOCUS

Until the 1960's social legislation relating to family law focused on the creation of a social status with rights and responsibilities in regard to spouse, parent, and child. Marriage and

family relationships were outlined as a social institution. This model integrated sex, parenthood, economic cooperation and emotional intimacy into a permanent union. A spouse wishing to change his or her social status through divorce faced obstacles in proving the necessity of the social change. To leave a marriage, a person was required to prove egregious wrongdoing on the part of the spouse (Strong et.al., 1998:503-505).

In contrast, the modern era was moving away from social status to an emphasis on personal contract in which individuals decided their own terms of relationships. The institutional family model was overwritten by the “soul mate” model which outlined marriage as a couple-centered vehicle dependent on the happiness of both spouses (Wilcox et.al. 2010: 38). A major shift occurred in family focus. Alice S. Rossi notes, “Westerners are shifting from a concern for their children’s futures to a self-orientation that gives priority to individual desires rather than to the needs of spouses and children.” This shift changed the basis for childbearing and childrearing in America (Whitehead, 1996:4).

EXPOSING FAMILY VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

Although women and children have been subjected to violence throughout history, prior to the 1960’s family violence in the United States was perceived to be rare and not widespread. When it occurred it was overlooked as a private and personal experience. People were reluctant to discuss family matters outside the home. As researchers examined official reports of family abuse and child maltreatment, including police reports, clinical case records and self-report survey data it became evident that the family is often the site of interpersonal and social stress that can lead to conflict and violence. Reports detailed abuse and neglect of children, sexual abuse of children, violence between spouses, abuse and neglect of the elderly, violence between siblings, and courtship violence and abuse. By the late 1960’s, mandatory reporting laws for child abuse and neglect were enacted in all 50 states (Gelles, 1994).

In 1970 the theme for the annual meeting of the National Council on Family Relations was “Violence and the Family”. This focus brought to attention the fact that literature on violence and the family was not well covered or recognized. Soon research brought to light the extent of concerns (Steinmetz and Straus, 1974:Preface).

As society moved toward increased egalitarian relationships, established power structures within family relationships became challenged. In the 1960’s the theme of male superiority was still dominant in society. As women moved toward increased freedom and participation in society, returning to school and taking jobs outside the home, some husbands felt threatened and out-of-control. Threats of violence, overflowing into violent acts, were frequent among husbands as means of controlling their wives (Whitehurst, 1974:80).

WOMEN'S LIBERATION EXPANDS

In 1970, Kate Millet published her book *Sexual Politics* which became a best seller, raising concerns about women as second-class citizens. In 1971 discrimination based on sex was also added to the *Civil Rights Act* which was enacted into law in 1964 ruling against discrimination based on race, religion, or national origin in place of public accommodation (Burns et.al.,1978).

In 1972 the first Female Studies Program was established at Cornell University and other universities soon developed programs for Female Studies. These programs gave the roles of homemaking and motherhood low priority. Marriage was being seen as a potential source of female oppression. Women were being encouraged to remain single or accept divorce as a viable alternative. They were being encouraged to leave their families, leave their children in day care centers, to develop careers and enter paying jobs.

THE GAY MOVEMENT EMERGES

Heterosexuality had been the presumed sexual norm throughout the social institutions of the United States. Until 1966 homosexual behavior was legally prohibited in every state (Henslin, 2000). Although a comprehensive survey of sexuality in 1992 documented that only 2.8 percent of men identified as homosexual or bisexual and 1.4 percent of women defined themselves as lesbian or bisexual (Laumann et.al., 1994), the gay culture, influenced by the civil rights and women's movements, rapidly influenced the American culture with gay liberation.

REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES CHANGE FAMILY TRADITIONS

The future of social, sexual, ethical and family practices was brought into question when the New World of reproductive technologies arrived on the scene. Prior to the late 1970's artificial insemination was the technology available to help a couple who experienced male infertility. In 1979 a national survey showed that fewer than 10 percent of infertility doctors would provide sperm to single women. However in 1982, the Sperm Bank of California was created to provide sperm to unmarried and heterosexual singles and lesbian women. Most sperm donors were medical students who could earn \$50 a donation. Women receiving sperm were given very little information about the donor of the sperm. Generally little screening of the donors was done, nor were records maintained.

In-vitro fertilization (IVF) which involves removing mature eggs from a woman, combining eggs and sperm in a petri dish, and then transferring several embryos back into the uterus opened the door to many reproductive possibilities. The first in-vitro fertilization baby was born in England in 1979. In 1980 Carol Pavek became a surrogate mother for a California couple, opening the possibility of buying an embryo and hiring a surrogate to carry it to term.

Egg donation became a commercial enterprise in 1984 when women began “donating” eggs. The freezing of sperm, eggs, and embryo offered the opportunity to place reproductive tissue in storage for use at a later time. (Andrews, 1999; Becker, 2000)

DIVORCE CONFRONTS THE FAMILY

In 1960 the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws developed a model for state legislatures to consider called *The Uniform Marriage and Divorce Act*. Fault was eliminated as a necessity for divorce. An individual could petition for divorce on the grounds of “irretrievable breakdown,” regardless as to whether the other spouse agreed (Rice, 1996). California established the first no-fault divorce law in 1970. Within ten years most states had developed some form of no-fault divorce law, and soon all fifty states had adopted no-fault divorce laws. Fault was eliminated as grounds for divorce, eliminating the legal adversarial process. Settlements were based on equity, equality, and need rather than fault or gender. Limitations were placed on alimony, assuming that a woman would work. The husband was no longer considered solely responsible for support (Strong et. al., 1998).

The change in social legislation created changes in social acceptance of divorce. Without consideration of fault, the stigma connected with divorce was reduced, leading to decreased social disapproval.

THE ‘FAMILY’ CHANGES

With the ideological attacks on lifelong monogamous and heterosexual marriage, calls for personal freedom, exposures of family violence, reproductive technologies, and the changing divorce laws created a fluid and flexible family structure. The traditional idea of family as father, mother, children and extended family became simply one of many choices. As one marriage and family textbook noted: “It is now simply one of many choices we have: We may choose singlehood, cohabitation, marriage- or divorce – and if we choose to divorce, we enter the cycle of choices again: singlehood, cohabitation, or marriage and possibly divorce for a second time. A second divorce leads to our entering the cycle for a third time, and so on.” (Strong et. al., 2001:505.)

The National Marriage Project (NMP, 2012:65-95) a nonpartisan and interdisciplinary initiative located at the University of Virginia provides research and analysis on the health of marriage in America. Now directed by W. Bradford Wilcox, associate professor of sociology, the NMP was founded in 1997 by family scholars David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead. An important goal of the project is to publish the *State of Our Unions*, which monitors the current health of marriage and family life in America and provides accurate information to

journalists, policy makers, religious leaders and the general public. The 2012 issue of the *State of Our Unions* reports the following changes in family patterns between 1960 and 2011.

Social Indicators of Marital Trends over the Past Five Decades in the U.S.

| | 1960 | | 2011 | |
|--|-------------|--------|-------------|--------|
| | male | female | male | female |
| % All persons age 15 and older who were married | 69.3 | 65.9 | 52.1 | 49.5 |
| % All persons 15 and older Who were divorced | 1.8 | 2.5 | 9.0 | 11.0 |
| % Children under age 18 Living with a single parent | 9 | | 26 | |
| % Children under 18 living with Two married parents | 88 | | 65 | |
| % Live births to unmarried women | 5.3 | | 40.7 | |
| Number of cohabiting unmarried Adult couples of the opposite sex (in millions) | .439 | | 7.599 | |
| Number of cohabiting unmarried Adult couples of the opposite sex With one or more children (in millions) | .197 | | 3.034 | |

Since the first in-vitro fertilization (IVF) baby was born 35 years ago, IVF has become so common that researchers estimate that some 5 million babies have been born worldwide. IVF has become mainstream (Rochman, 2013). Sperm and egg donor banks proliferate and now offer catalogs detailing the physical and mental characteristics and qualities of the donors. Buyers can select an egg and sperm and have an embryo created by IVF. The world's largest sperm bank, Cyros, is in Denmark and three-quarters of its sperm are shipped overseas (Marquardt et. al., 2010:5).

Unmarried, heterosexual singles and lesbian women can order sperm to be delivered to their door. They can then take it to a doctor for insertion, or do it themselves with a turkey baster (Andrews, 1999:87).

In the 1990's homosexual couples began to use surrogacy in what was labeled a "gayby" boom when a West Los Angeles company, Growing Generations, began helping gay men become fathers (Andrews,1999:95,120-121.) A study done in 1993 indicated that there were 3-8 million lesbian or gay parents, raising 6-14 million children in the United States. While most were children from a former heterosexual relationship or marriage, a growing number were opting to become parents through commercial reproductive services or adoption. States differ in their laws for single gays and lesbians and same-sex couples who seek to adopt or foster children (GA, 1996:232).

Growing Concern for the Quality and Stability of Child Rearing

THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN – A GROUNDBREAKING STUDY

No-fault divorce laws gave rise to an extraordinary increase in the incidence of divorce. Each year over a million new children under 18 years of age began experiencing the divorce of their family. Concerned about how divorce was affecting the children, family researchers Judith S. Wallerstein and Joan B. Kelly (1980) organized the California Children of Divorce Project to document the effects of divorce on the children. Sixty divorcing families, including 113 children, were enlisted for the study which continued from 1971 to 1977. Assessments were made at the time of divorce with follow up findings at a year and a half and again at five years. Fifty-eight families continued through the five year study. Wallerstein continued to study the impact of divorce as the children moved into their adult years with a follow up at the 10 year mark when 52 families and 113 children were interviewed again. A 25 year follow up of interviews involved only the children. The 25 year sample consisted of 93 adult children (75% of the original sample from 45 families). For the 25 year sample a comparison group of 44 adults in the same age range whose parents had remained married was recruited, selected from the same neighborhood and socio-economic status (Wallerstein and Lewis, 2004).

While research on divorce proliferated, longitudinal studies that followed the subjects through to adulthood were few. Studies by P.R.Amato, A. J. Cherlin, and E. M.Hetherington based on large samples largely agreed that there are significant differences between adults from divorced families and those from intact families, with children of divorce scoring lower on a variety of indicators of well being.

Wallerstein and her colleagues stand alone in their qualitative study which documents the children of divorce within their families over several decades. This ground breaking study became a benchmark in understanding that divorce was a long-lasting, painful and wrenching experience for many children. The purposes of the study were: to understand how the children experienced the divorce itself; to follow the children and adolescents over time to assess the impact of divorce on their developmental processes; and to examine the changes in parent-child relationships and the relationship of the parents at the time of divorce and following.

Even if the children were aware of strife within the marriage, the overwhelming majority of children responded to the breaking up of family with shock, fear and grieving. Less than 10 percent were relieved. Three quarters of the children strongly opposed the divorce, worried about what would happen to them, who would care for them. Fear of abandonment grew from concern that if father leaves, will mother leave too. Ninety percent of the time the children stayed with their mother. More than half of the children missed their father acutely even if the previous relationship had not been close. Boys especially missed their father. Six to twelve year old boys felt the most rejected by their fathers, concerned that "He doesn't want to live with us anymore."

Children responded differently by age and developmental level. Preschool children responded by anxious clinging to their mother or caregiver. Children age 8 and younger often felt blame, feeling guilty for causing the family breakup by being too noisy or messy.

Pre-adolescent children, ages 9-12, were in a time of rapid growth and strengthening ego. Their sense of identity and self-image which was tied to their status in the family was severely shaken. The feeling that most distinguished this age group was intense anger. Half were angry at mother, half at father and many were angry at both. The children felt a threat to their sense of right and wrong, their sense of moral and social obligation and to their conscience which was in formation.

Children in their teen years experienced a reversal in traditional expectations. During adolescent years children gradually withdraw from their parents as a normal developmental process while the parents support and encourage their future. Divorce threatens this process. Jack, age fourteen, told the interviewer, "I felt the rug had been pulled out from under me." The feeling was that their parents had left them instead of their leaving their parents. In the intact family sexuality plays an invisible supportive role. Parents who accuse each other of infidelity change this situation. Being made aware of their parents' sexual liaisons left adolescents feeling vulnerable to their own sexual and aggressive impulses without the guidance and support needed to hold them on a straight course. They felt betrayed by the parents who they looked to for support and guidance.

Bitter custody battles brought distress for children in trying to maintain loyalty to both parents. Two-thirds of the parents competed for their children's love. Children were afraid to move in either direction, feeling like a move toward one parent would be like rejecting the other. Paul, age 11, said, "I felt I was being torn into two pieces."

As the children reached adulthood an enduring theme became evident. The children of divorce reached a sad conclusion: "Personal relationships are unreliable, and even the closest family relationships cannot be expected to hold firm." (Wallerstein and Lewis, 2004:359). This conclusion grew out of their experiences. The parents of two-thirds of the children experienced multiple marriages and divorces, broken love affairs and/or temporary cohabitations. Less than 10 percent of the parents created stable and caring step-families where the children felt welcome.

Twenty-five years after the divorce of their parents the adult children continued to recall their feelings of shock, unhappiness, loneliness, bewilderment and anger. Those who were abandoned recalled in detail the last time they saw the lost parent. Memories of violent scenes were retained in their consciousness. Hardly any of the subjects recalled a happy childhood. Compared to their peers in intact families, the children of divorce reported less play and less participation in extracurricular activities such as sports or music. Older children took on responsibilities in the home, caring for younger children and needy parents. They developed a sense of compassion and moral responsibility at an early age. The price was high as they lost out on the play of childhood and the pleasures of adolescence.

As adolescents they were required to be responsible for themselves. They had fewer rules and those they had were poorly enforced. Rules established in one household may not be followed through in the other household. "One in five of the girls had her first sexual experience before 14. Over half were sexually active with multiple partners during high school". They often frequented bars. Sex was the price they paid for attention. At the 25 year mark, the majority of the children of divorce had decided not to have children. "Nothing in my childhood prepared me for parenting." (pg. 361). By contrast, the majority of girls from intact families reported sex only in established relationships, postponing sex until late high school or college. These families had stricter rules with greater supervision.

In the majority of states child support ends at 18. Only 30 percent of the children of divorce received consistent support for college as compared to 90 percent from intact homes. Half of the children of divorce ended up with less education than their parents. However, those who received a good education were successful in the workplace because of their life experiences of having to work through difficult situations and taking responsibility for themselves.

When it comes to sexual relationships and lasting relationships, children of divorce are at a disadvantage. Not having seen an example of how to deal with differences and solve conflicts constructively, they were afraid that a marriage cannot be successful. One-third of the men and women were pessimistic about marriage. Sixty percent were not interested in having children. Even when a relationship was going well, they feared a sudden loss. They were unprepared for marriage. "If you don't marry, then you don't divorce." (pg. 363).

At the end of the study 42 percent of the men had never married or cohabited, compared with 6 percent of the comparison group. Women, on the other hand, jumped headlong into relationships, often with men they hardly knew. Ten women said they enjoyed sex but froze when they liked or loved a man. "It's not sex that scares me, it's getting close." (pg. 363)

The central concern for a child of divorce is not the temporary distress or unhappiness, but the possibility that the family breakdown would interfere with the child's progress along the developmental ladder. While some divorces enabled the parents to remake their lives in a better way, the benefits were not generally passed on to the children. The widely held premise, that children were resilient and would recover in a two year period and resume normal developmental progress was challenged. This longitudinal study of children of divorce calls "attention to the enduring problems in the lives of the children involved." (pg. 367).

CHALLENGING THE CONCLUSIONS OF DIVORCE EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

During the 1980's and 1990's high-quality longitudinal surveys such as the *Child Supplement to the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth*, the *Panel Study of Income Dynamics*, the *High School and Beyond Study*, and the *National Longitudinal Survey of Families and Households* yielded evidence that growing up in a single-parent or stepfamily is associated with lower levels of well-being and life outcomes than living in a family with two biological parents. Researchers, Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur (1994) "found strong associations between growing up in a single-parent or stepparent family and a higher probability of dropping out of high school, of giving birth as a teenager, and, for young men, of being 'idle' – that is, neither employed nor in school in the first few years after high school." (Cherlin,1999:422).

Family researcher, Andrew Cherlin (1999), however raised questions as to how much of the associations were truly caused by the divorce itself and also what proportion of children in single-parent families experienced harmful outcomes. Cherlin specifically criticized Wallerstein's conclusions on the effect's of divorce on children indicating that other individual and family problems may have caused these difficulties. Wallerstein had concluded that most of the children were harmed by the experience of divorce itself. Cherlin, however, saw this as an extreme conclusion. He noted that the couples in Wallerstein's study were not typical American

families. They were troubled families. While the children in the study were found to be psychologically sturdy, in the appendix Wallerstein had reported that about 50 percent of the mothers and fathers were “moderately troubled”.

Cherlin contrasts Wallerstein’s extreme conclusion with an opposite extreme outlined by psychologist Judith Rich Harris (1998) who was influenced by behavioral genetics and evolutionary psychology. In her book *The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out the Way They Do*, Harris concludes that half of a child’s behavior is influenced by genetic inheritance and the other half by the influence of the child’s peer group. Harris explains that following divorce the decline in a mother’s income will force the family to move to a new neighborhood. She states, that “parental divorce has no lasting effects on the way children behave when they’re not at home, and no lasting effects on their personalities.” (Cherlin,1999:423).

Cherlin rejects both of these extremes, contending that while divorce cannot be blamed for all the problems that affect the children, neither can it be dismissed as a problem factor. He contends that while genetics and peer groups may account for some of the influence on a child’s development, parents’ actions still make a difference in a child’s outcome. Cherlin notes that even in the case of a twin-pair, a parental divorce increased the risk of major depression by 42 percent, even after allowing for genetic relatedness. He concludes that while many (perhaps most) children who grow up in single parent homes or stepfamilies will not be seriously harmed, “the long-term mental health of adults who experienced parental divorce as children or adolescents appears to deteriorate in relation to the mental health of those who grew up with two biological parents.” (Cherlin, 1999:427).

PARENTING FOLLOWING DIVORCE

Divorce increased rapidly following the establishment of the no-fault divorce laws. In 1970 four million Americans had divorced. By 2000 the number had grown to twenty-two million (Henslin, 2000:371). The statistics held different interpretations. Couples in troubled and abusive relationships had the opportunity to leave an unhealthy marriage and start over again, but the children suffered in many ways. Besides losing the nurturing presence of a parent, a damaging consequence of divorce was the downward social mobility of many women and children. After divorce, women were primarily responsible for children of the marriage and were at greater risk of poverty.

A study by the Census Bureau found that children could expect to become 37 percent poorer following the divorce of their parents. Fewer than half the children surveyed (44 percent) received child support from their fathers after divorce. The study, entitled *Family Disruption and Economic Hardship: The Short-Run Picture for Children*, followed the progress of

200 families for three years beginning in 1983. The families were drawn randomly as a representative sample of the larger population. The findings showed that following a family breakup the percentage of children living in poverty increased from 19 percent to 36 percent; the number of children receiving food stamps increased from 10 percent to 27 percent; and the number of children in families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children doubled from 9 percent to 18 percent (Boublon, 1991).

Until the early 1970's, fathers had few rights in custody cases. Courts adhered to the "tender years" doctrine which exclusively favored the mother as the parent who could best provide nurture for a child's development. In *Watts v Watts (1973)* the New York court system recommended that the "tender years" doctrine be discarded since "it is based on outdated social stereotypes rather than a rational up-to-date consideration of the welfare of the children involved" (Robinson and Barret, 1986:87). Today "the best interests of the child" doctrine provides more equal treatment for the parents.

Custody arrangements create challenges for both parents and children. When a divorce is angry and bitter, children are often pulled into the middle of the maelstrom, each parent trying to marshal support and alliance. Struggling with their own emotional stress and anxiety, the parents may show little sensitivity to the needs of the children. Courts decide the custody arrangement based on the child's best interests (Robinson and Barret, 1986:88-95; Before it's News, 2013; Nolo,2014)

Sole Legal Custody is the most common kind of custody. In this instance one parent retains the responsibilities and rights in relation to the child or children. The non-custodial party can retain visitation rights but has little other rights over the children's upbringing.

When one parent obtains sole custody, the other parent is permitted only occasional visiting rights. The children lose the guidance and support of one of their parents. The non-custodial parent may feel divorced also from his or her children. Fathers are generally the 'visitors' in sole custody. Rather than spending the day or afternoon developing a meaningful relationship, he may try to win his children's affection through over-indulgence, entertainment and gifts. Missing are the important daily things like helping children with homework, putting them to bed, and being there to help them solve problems.

A non-custodial father remarked, "I had to adjust to the loss of control. Not that I had been an authoritarian father at home, although I did exert a daily influence over their experience and their behavior. Now that influence became less frequent and more subtle, I had to bite my tongue over many decisions made outside of my domain. I had to use our visits to subtly communicate my values, being careful not to undermine their mother's authority" (Robinson and Barret, 1986:93).

Some non-custodial parents accept their roles while others give up and walk away. The majority of children have little or no contact with their father. David Popenoe notes that half of adolescent children of divorce had not seen their father in over a year and only one of seven saw them weekly (Wilson,2002:168-169; Popenoe,1996:31).

Joint Legal Custody is the most recommended arrangement for the children. Both parents have equal responsibilities for their children. This requires parents to work together for the sake of the children and provide a plan to the court as to how the custody will work. A parent with legal custody can make decisions about schooling, religion, medical care and other aspects of the child's upbringing.

Joint Physical Custody requires the parents to share the time with the children. Parents work out a schedule according to their work requirements, housing arrangements and the children's needs. Children may move back and forth between houses on a prearranged schedule: a few days each week, every other week, or every other month at each home. Holidays and weekends may be alternated between mother's house and father's house.

Joint custody allows both parents to have influence on the children's growth and development and feel more satisfaction as parents. However children lack a stable and permanent environment which may affect them emotionally as they are shifted from one environment to another (Robinson and Barret, 1986:89).

In a December 2013 message, a prominent television minister in his discussion of divorce shared his personal poignant memories as a child of divorce. He said, "My parents divorced when I was very young. My memories are of traveling back and forth between the houses of my mother and father. I never knew where I would spend the holidays. When I went to my mother's house and saw a picture of her and my stepfather with their children and then went to my father's house and saw a picture of him and my stepmother with their children and I wasn't in the pictures, I felt lost. I only felt that I was half there in either house. I'm thirty years old now and I still remember these feelings."

Split Custody is sometimes arranged and is the least desirable. In this case the mother receives custody of one or more children and the father receives custody of the remaining children. At the time of a divorce children often lean on each other for support. Removing them to separate homes may be very emotionally stressing for them. This often results in the girls living with their mothers and boys living with their fathers.

STEP FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

Following divorce, many women remarry taking the children with them. Nine out of ten step-children of divorce will live with a step-father and their biological mother. Forming a step-family is not the same as forming a biological family. The members of a stepfamily bring different memories, histories, habits, and expectations. New roles and rules must be developed and learned. As a step-father moves into a family where the mother and children have established relationship patterns, he faces uncertainty over his new identity. The children and step-father are required to form instant, intimate relationships as they live together. They may resent each other and be virtual strangers, or bury their anger and anxiety under a pretense of forced friendship. Conflicts may develop around discipline when the step-father assumes the role of disciplinarian. Children will test him to see how he will react. However, stepfathers often become successful fathers and provide security that stabilizes the family. Boys particularly benefit by having a father in the home. Girls may be affected differently. School-age girls tend to be more anxious in stepfather families than in intact families. Research suggests that girls have more difficulty relating to stepfathers than do boys. They may view stepfathers as a rival for their mother's attention (Robinson and Barret, 1986:118-132.)

Though most stepfathers may be caring and devoted, there is an increased risk of violent abuse. Preschool children living with a stepfather are forty times more likely to suffer abuse and seventy to a hundred times more likely to be murdered than children living with a biological father (Daly and Wilson, 1988:87-88; Wilson, 2002:169). The risk of sexual child abuse increases as a man who is not the biological father and longtime protector enters a child's family. The incest taboo is significantly weaker. Numerous studies confirm that stepfathers are far more likely than biological fathers to molest their stepchildren (Blankenhorn, 1995:40).

THE POSTMARRIAGE SOCIETY EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

By 1974 divorce had replaced death as the primary cause of family breakup. Unwed motherhood saw a rise from 5 percent in 1960 to 30 percent in 1990. The breakdown of marriage had harmful consequences for children yet little attention was paid to these concerns. Literature focused on how to help children adjust to divorce. Through divorce and unwed child-bearing a growing number of children were spending part or all of their lives in single-parent families.

In 1996 Barbara Dafoe Whitehead identified the trend toward a "postmarriage" society, "marked by the decline of marriage as a childbearing institution and the rise of a more voluntary system of family relationships with easily dissoluble ties and more contingent and limited commitments" (Whitehead,1996:5). A postmarriage society is characterized by fragile

and impermanent relationships and instability in family life. While this offers opportunity to leave a relationship that is unsatisfactory, abusive, or violent, problems are created for the children when their primary attachments and security are threatened.

This shift changed the basis for childbearing and childrearing in America. Whitehead identified author, Jane Mattes, as encouraging this movement through her book *Single Mothers by Choice*, in which she “advises women on how to avoid the social and legal entanglements of involving a father in the rearing of a child”.

COHABITATION AFFECTS THE CHILDREN

As divorce soared following no-fault divorce, many no longer saw marriage as a necessary or permanent commitment for living together. By the end of the century, the average marriage was lasting only seven years. Living together before marriage was seen as a way to test for compatibility before marriage, delaying the age of marriage. Cohabiting relationships are fragile, lasting generally no more than two years, leading then to either marriage or a breakup. About half of cohabiting couples eventually marry. However, these couples are more likely to divorce than those who do not live together before marriage, having higher levels of disagreement and instability and lower levels of commitment. Cohabiting couples are generally unable to purchase a house or insurance benefits together as banks do not consider their income as joint. About 30 percent of cohabiting couples have children from previous marriages or relationships. The other partner is generally not as involved with the children as he or she would be if they were married. Whereas society generally encourages married couples to make sacrifices to preserve their relationship, this social support is usually lacking for cohabiting couples (Strong et. al.,2001:241-247).

By 2011 the rise in cohabiting households with children had become the largest threat to the quality and stability of children’s lives. Approximately 24 percent of children in the United States were born to cohabiting couples, with another 20 percent spending time in a cohabiting household with an unrelated adult sometime in their childhood. Children are less likely to thrive in cohabiting households, with physical, sexual, and emotional abuse being markedly more likely than in married families or single-parent families. Family life became increasingly unstable for children, and family instability is generally harmful for children. Data from the *National Survey of Family Growth* reports that, “Cohabiting couples who have a child together are more than twice as likely to break up before their child turns twelve, compared to couples who are married to one another.” (Institute for American Values, 2011:6-8,46).

OUT-OF-WEDLOCK BIRTHS, SINGLE PARENTING AND CHILD WELL-BEING

In his book, *The Marriage Problem: How Our Culture Has Weakened Families*, James Q. Wilson contends that America has become two nations, separated by customs, laws, wealth and family structure. In the first nation “a child is raised by two parents, acquires an education, a job, a spouse, and a home kept separate from crime and disorder...children look to the future and believe that they control what place they will occupy in it:” In the second nation “a child is raised by an unwed girl, lives in a neighborhood filled with many sexual men but few committed fathers, and finds gang life to be necessary for self-protection...They live for the moment and think that fate, not plans, will shape their lives.” (Wilson, 2002:2). This concern is echoed by Kay Hymowitz (2005) who concludes, “The truth is that we are now a two-family nation, separate and unequal – one thriving and intact, and the other struggling, broken, and far too often African-American.”

By the mid 1960’s half of all blacks had moved into the middle class but progress seemed to be stalling. In 1965 Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then Assistant Secretary of Labor, noted a curious inconsistency as he looked over his charts. Even though jobs for black men increased, welfare enrollment also increased. As he examined family patterns he saw that 25 percent of black families were living without a father in the home. He concluded that black poverty in America was related to the absence of nuclear families and was hindering progress toward economic and political equality. He argued that the matriarchal structure was weakening the ability of black men to function as authority figures. Through pages of charts and graphs he describes what he called a “tangle of pathology” which included delinquency, joblessness, school failure, crime and fatherlessness. Moynihan’s Department of Labor report, entitled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* warned that the ghetto family was in disarray.

The report was sharply attacked by Black-Americans, civil rights leaders and feminists as a threat to undermine the civil rights agendas for both blacks and women. It was reviled as both racist and sexist. Blacks lodged complaints that the “Moynihan Report” stereotyped the black family and black men and failed to recognize cultural and social bias. Convinced that marriage

was the arena of male privilege, feminists argued that the report presented a male-centric view of social problems. The poverty of single mothers was seen as proof of the “lack of government support for single women and the failure of business to pay women their due.”(Hymowitz, 2005:5). In 1978, researcher Diana Pearce introduced the term “feminization of poverty”, identifying the problem not as a consequence of crumbling nuclear families but rather a problem of government neglect for support for single women.

Apprehensive about the state of the American family, President Jimmy Carter convened the White House Conference on Families in 1980. The message that came from this conference was that all family forms are equal. The proportion of babies born out-of-wedlock increased dramatically. Children who had grown up without a father felt no shame about bearing a child outside of marriage. Many even wanted to have babies.

Social researcher, Sara McLanahan, a divorced mother herself, realized that little research was reporting on how the children of single mothers were faring. Over a decade she analyzed whatever she could find and concluded that “children in single-parent homes were not doing as well as children from two-parent homes on a wide variety of measures, from income to school performance to teen pregnancy.” Social scientists were shocked into re-examining the problem that they thought was not a problem. Gradually top family researchers came around, concluding that McLanahan – and even Moynihan – was right (Hymowitz, 2005:9).

In 1994 McLanahan published, with Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent*. The study shows that “Children whose parents live apart...are twice as likely to drop out of high school as those in two-parent families, one and a half times as likely to be idle in young adulthood, twice as likely to become single parents themselves... divorce – particularly an attendant drop in income, parental involvement, and access to community resources – diminishes children’s chances for well-being. “ (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1997).

In 1960 only 9 percent of all children lived in single parent families. By 1990 the percent of all children in the United States living with a single parent had increased enormously and was equal to the 25 percent of black children in this category that had alarmed Moynihan in the 1960’s. Fragile – typically fatherless – families had grown due to increases in divorce, out-of-

wedlock births, and unmarried cohabitation. However, blacks have continued to far out-distance other ethnic groups experiencing single parent families and births out-of-wedlock.

Family living patterns of Children in the United State, by Year and Race

| | 1960 | | | 2011 | | | |
|---|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|----------|-------|
| | Black | White | Total | Black | White | Hispanic | Total |
| % Children under 18 living with single parent | 22 | 7 | 9 | 52 | 19 | 27 | 26 |
| % Children under 18 Living with 2 married parents | 67 | 91 | 88 | 33 | 75 | 60 | 65 |
| % Live births to unmarried women, | 37.6 | 5.7 | 5.3 | 72.3 | 29.1 | 53.3 | 40.7 |
| | (1970) | (1970) | | | | | |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1995*

The National Marriage Project. *The State of Our Unions: Marriage in America*. 2012.:90,92,94.

The State of Our Unions is a report published by The National Marriage Project (NMP). This group identifies itself as “a nonpartisan, non-sectarian, and interdisciplinary initiative located at the University of Virginia. The Project’s mission is to provide research and analysis on the health of marriage in America, to analyze the social and cultural forces shaping contemporary marriage, and to identify strategies to increase marital quality and stability.”

The State of Our Unions (2010) is titled: *When Marriage Disappears: The New Middle America*. The editors express concern that the retreat from marriage, that had been seen as a problem afflicting the poor, today has spread into the middle class. The increasing retreat from marriage among middle class Americans is creating a social and cultural divide in the United States. While the marriages of college educated couples (who make up 30 percent of

the adult population) remain staple and strong, the family lives of moderately educated Americans increasingly resemble those of high school dropouts and the poor where marriage continues to be fragile and weak. This retreat from marriage is placing The American Dream beyond the reach of many Americans. As mothers remain single or drift in and out of relationships and fathers are distant from the family, it increases the odds that children will drop out of school, end up in trouble with the law, and become pregnant as teenagers (Wilcox et. al. 2010).

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES AFFECT FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

An epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) resulted from the increasing prevalence of casual and non-monogamous sexual behaviors. Casual sexual behaviors presented as acceptable by Hollywood, television, the press and even universities and schools became a dominant force in society. Young people were being drawn into early and promiscuous sexual relationships. In November of 1991, the New York City high schools inaugurated the first large-scale condom distribution program in the nation. Under a cloak of secrecy, condoms were made available to students, even if their parents objected (Berger, 1991). By 1997, 418 public schools made condoms available to students (Advocates for Youth, 1997).

By December of 2000, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that 3 million new cases of Chlamydia were occurring annually in the U.S. and 5.5 million people became infected with the human papilloma virus each year (CDC, 2000). On March 11, 2008, researchers at CDC announced that 1 in 4 teen girls had at least one sexually transmitted disease. The virus that causes cervical cancer, the human papilloma virus, was the most common, affecting 18 percent of the 838 girls studied. Chlamydia, the second most common, affecting 4 percent of the sample, can cause infertility. Nearly half of black teens had one or more STDs, while 20 percent of white and Mexican American teens were affected. (AP, 2008).

REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES AND THE CHILDREN

The sexual freedom revolution, and the women's liberation movement contributed to an increase in infertility problems. Women who postpone childbearing for education and career suffer a decline in fertility with age. Women and men who engage in sex with multiple partners often suffered from untreated sexually transmitted diseases that caused damage to reproductive organs. By 2010, the "fertility industry" was booming, bringing in \$3.3 billion annually in the United States alone where 30,000-60,000 children were born each year through sperm donation. By 2014 The Society for Assisted Reproductive Technology reported that "one or two of every 100 babies born in the U.S. are now conceived with advanced fertility help" (AP, 2014). However, the numbers of IVF and sperm babies can only be estimated because the industry is not required to report the vital statistics. There are almost no reliable data in any nation about experiences of children or young adults conceived in this way (Marquardt et. al.,2010;5).

Realizing that there was no reliable data about the experience of young adults conceived through artificial insemination, researchers under the direction of Elizabeth Marquardt developed a study "to learn more about the identity, kinship, well-being and social justice experiences of donor conceived adults." (Marquardt et. al, 2010:19).

Their study, entitled *My Daddy's Name is Donor: A New Study of Young Adults Conceived Through Sperm Donation*, compared responses from three representative groups between the ages of 18-45: 485 adults were conceived using a sperm donor; 562 adults were adopted as infants; and 563 adults were raised by their biological parents. Of the donor offspring in the study, 262 were born to heterosexual married couples, 113 to single mothers, and 39 to lesbian couples. Compared to the respondents who were adopted or raised by their biological parents, those who were conceived through sperm donations fared worse on depression, delinquency and substance abuse. Compared to 19 percent of adopted adults, 48 percent of donor offspring agreed "When I see friends with their biological fathers and mothers, it makes me feel sad"

The donor offspring struggled with their origins and identities and were more hurting, confused and isolated from their families. A large majority of donor offspring agreed that they should have the right to have non-identifying information about the sperm donor father (68%), to know his identity (67%), to have the opportunity to form some kind of relationship with him (63%), to know about half-siblings conceived with the same donor (64%), and to have the opportunity to form some relationship with these half-siblings (62%).

45% agreed "The circumstances of my conception bothers me."

58% agreed "When I see someone who resembles me I often wonder if we are related."

65% agreed "My sperm donor is half of who I am."

75% agreed "I find myself wondering what my sperm donor's family is like."

Delinquency, substance abuse, and depression, even controlling for socio-economic and other factors, were significantly more likely among donor offspring than those raised by their biological parents. In the open-ended responses to the survey, one donor offspring commented, "I've never thought about this before I took this survey, but yes, I stay depressed a lot, and would like to know more about my donor's family health." (pg. 38) Compared with those raised by their biological parents, donor offspring and adopted offspring were almost twice as likely to report substance abuse problems and problems with the law before age 25: 21 percent of donor offspring, 17-18 percent of adopted offspring, and 11 percent of offspring raised by their biological parents. Donor offspring born to single mothers seemed to be hurting more than those born to heterosexual or lesbian couples. The donor offspring of single mothers were almost 2.5 times more likely than those raised by biological parents to report problems with the law before age 25.

However, when asked about the practice of donor conception, a large majority of donor offspring responded positively in the following ways. (Pg. 63)

76% "I think every person has a right to a child."

76% "Artificial reproductive technologies are good for children because the children are wanted."

73% "Society should encourage people to donate their sperm or eggs to other people who want them."

76% "Health insurance plans and government policies should make it easier for people to have babies with donated sperm or eggs."

In an open-ended response one donor offspring wrote: "I was uncomfortable with the fact that I was conceived this way at first. But through the support of my family and the positive environment they provided, I turned out fine."

FATHERLESSNESS BECOMES A PROBLEM

Divorce and out-of-wedlock births often resulted in children being raised without a father present in the household. Men were increasingly leaving or being left out of family relationships. In many families the roles of fatherhood were reduced to 'weekend Dad', 'check in the mail Dad', 'sperm donor Dad' or 'no Dad at all'. Nurturing and emotional bonding of children with their fathers became a problem or nonexistent. By the late 1990's 40 percent of families with children had no father present. David Blankenhorn (1995), founder and president of the Institute for American Values, contended that fatherhood is the most important role for men, because it promotes socially responsible behavior. Fatherhood protects and advantages

children. Increasingly children were growing up without the protection and advantage of a loving and caring father. Blankenhorn identified fatherlessness in America as the most urgent social problem. Claiming fatherlessness to be “the most harmful demographic trend of this generation.” he writes:

“Tonight, about 40 percent of American children will go to sleep in homes in which their fathers do not live. Before they reach the age of eighteen, more than half of our nation’s children are likely to spend at least a significant portion of their childhoods living apart from their fathers. Never before in this country have so many children been voluntarily abandoned by their fathers. Never before have so many children grown up without knowing what it means to have a father.”

(Blankenhorn, 1995:1)

In examining the extensive data on father absence and father involvement, a “father factor” is seen in almost all of America’s social problems. 24 million children in America – one out of three- live in biological father-absent homes (Statistics on Father Absence, 2014).

Studies report that:

*Children in father-absent homes are almost four times more likely to be poor (in 2011, 12% of children in married-couple families, 44% of children in mother-only families.)

* Children of single mothers show higher levels of aggressive behavior than children born to married mothers.

* Youth in father-absent families had significantly higher odds of incarceration than those in mother-father families.

* Being raised by a single mother raises the risk of teen pregnancy.

* The absence of a biological father increases the risk of child maltreatment. There is a higher risk of abuse and neglect to children in families with a non-biological (social) father.

* Father-child contact was associated with better socio-emotional and academic functioning, fewer behavior problems and higher reading achievement even in cases of nonresident fathers. (Statistics on Father Absence, 2014.)

MORE STATISTICS:

(The Fatherless Generation, 2014)

Children from fatherless homes include:

*63% of youth suicides (US Dept. of Health/Census)

* 90% of homeless and runaway children

* 85% of children who show behavior disorders (Center for Disease Control)

* 80% of rapists with anger problems (Justice & Behavior, Vol. 14, p. 403-26)

*71% of high school dropouts (National Principals Association Report)

* 75% of adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers.

- * 70% of juveniles in state operated institutions (US Depart. Of Justice,1988).

Children with fathers who are involved are:

- * 40% less likely to repeat a grade in school.
- * 70% less likely to drop out of school
- * more likely to get A's in school, enjoy school and engage in extracurricular activities.

In 90 percent of child custody cases following divorce, custody was given to the mother.

The ability of fathers to speak with authority and contribute to the discipline of their children was jeopardized by children living apart.

GAY PARENTING AND THE CHILDREN

In 1996, researchers believed that the number of children living with at least one gay parent ranged from 6 million to 14 million (Kantrowitz, 1996). Through rigorous research and scholarship, the Williams Institute on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Law and Public Policy at UCLA School of Law provides documentation to judges, legislators, lawyers and the public. Using multiple data sources (*the General Social Survey, 2008/1010; Gallup Daily Tracking Survey, June-September 2012; Census 2010; and 2011 American Community Survey*) Gary J. Gates provides a demographic portrait of LGBT parenting in the United States. Main findings from the report are included here as estimations. (Gates, 2013.)

- * 3.5% of adults in the US self-identify as LGBT.
- * There are more than 8.2 million LGBT adults in the US.
- * 37% of LGBT-identified adults had had a child at some time in their lives.
- * Among those under age 50, half of LGBT women (48%) are raising a child under age 18.
- * Among those under age 50, a fifth of LGBT men (20%) are raising a child under age 18.
- * 125,000 same-sex couple households include 220,000 children under age 18.
 - 111,000 couples are raising 170,000 biological, step, or adopted children.
 - 16,000 couples are raising more than 22,000 adopted children.
 - 2,600 couples are raising 3,400 foster children.
 - 32,000 couples are raising 48,000 grandchildren, siblings, or other related or non-related children.
- * 39% of same-sex couples who have children under age 18 living in the home are non-White.
- * 50% of children under 18 living with same-sex couples are non-White.
- * 41% of non-White women in same-sex couples have children under age 18 in the home.
- * 20% of non-White men in same-sex couples have children under age 18 in the home.
- * 23% of White women in same-sex couples have children under age 18 in the home.
- * 8% of White men in same-sex couples have children under age 18 in the home.
- * Single LGBT adults raising children are three times more likely than comparable non-LGBT

Individuals to report household incomes near the poverty threshold. (\$12,000 yearly.)

- * Married or partnered LGBT individuals with children are twice as likely as comparable non-LGBT individuals to report household incomes near the poverty threshold (\$24,000 yearly.)

Most gay and lesbian parents have been previously married. Concerns about gay and lesbian families centered around parenting abilities, fear of sexual abuse and worry that the children would become gay or lesbian. Following a divorce, lesbians fear losing their children in custody battles, but courts generally side with the mothers if children are well cared for. Gay men are seldom awarded custody unless the mother's care was unfit.

When children learn that their mother is lesbian they respond with shock. Accepting a homosexual identity of a parent may be more difficult for a child than divorce, because there has been no support group for them. Feeling a need to keep their mother's lesbianism a secret, children become isolated. Children and older adolescents are concerned that they might become gay or lesbian or that others might think them to be gay or lesbian. Children may blame their mother's partner for their mother's sexual orientation.

Some lesbians create families through artificial insemination. A 1990 study estimated that nearly a third of lesbians become mothers through reproductive technology. The non biological parent in a lesbian or gay couple generally obtains no legal ties to the child although second-parent adoptions by lesbians and gays have been approved in some states (Strong et. al., 2001:350-352).

When gay fathers share joint custody for their children, their partners may include the children as a part of the family and contribute to their care. However problems also arise. One gay father reported, "Both (my partner) and my son became jealous of my attention. I felt torn between the two; each person seemed to demand more of my time than I was able to give. This was an irritant in my relationship with (my partner) (Robinson and Barret, 1986:146).

Some states allow gay men to adopt children. However, surrogacy offers an option for gay men to become fathers to a child that will be biologically connected to at least one partner. Using a surrogate ensures that the father will be recognized as the biological father. Gay and lesbian families have accepted the assumption that has become commonly accepted in modern relationships, 'Children do not need both their mother and their father'.

In the early 1990's the gay agenda sought to promote tolerance of the gay/lesbian lifestyles in the public schools, pushing the schools to promote these lifestyles as equal to heterosexuality. Under the guidance of its founder, Kevin Jennings, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) registered more than 4,000 Gay-Straight Alliance clubs on junior and senior high school campuses. President Obama appointed Kevin Jennings as the Assistant Deputy Secretary for Education, heading the Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools.

However, questions need to be raised at all levels about the wisdom of the normalization of homosexual behaviors, especially among the young (GLSEN, 2012; Lucas, 2009).

Reports from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirm that homosexual behaviors, especially those involving men having sex with men, are extraordinarily more dangerous than heterosexual behaviors. "In 2008, men who have sex with men (MSM) accounted for 63 percent of primary and secondary syphilis cases in the United States...Men who have sex with men are 17 times more likely to develop anal cancer than heterosexual men." (CDC, 2010). In discussing HIV/AIDS, the CDC reports "the number of new cases among people aged 13-29 years increased by 21 percent from 2006 to 2009. The rise in HIV incidence among young adults was fueled by a 34 percent increase in HIV infections among young gay and bisexual men." (CDC, 2012).

In their early years children naturally play and associate with other children of the same sex. To teach children that this behavior may indicate homosexual orientation and that homosexual behaviors are equivalent to heterosexual behaviors jeopardizes their ability to move naturally into heterosexual and family relationships.

GAY MARRIAGE CHALLENGES THE TRADITIONAL FAMILY

A 1992 study reported that while many gay men and lesbians were in committed or steady relationships, they were unable to marry and obtain the legal benefits of marriage, including insurance coverage for a spouse and access to the hospital to visit a dying partner. Seeking to change this, gays organized to challenge the marriage laws (GA, 1996:231).

In 1993, when the Hawaii Supreme Court ruled that denying gays and lesbians the right to marry was unconstitutional, opponents of gay marriage organized to protect the definition of marriage. In September of 1996 Congress passed the *Defense of Marriage Act: An Act to define and protect the institution of marriage* (DOMA). It passed both houses of Congress by large, veto-proof majorities and was signed into law by President Clinton. While DOMA did not prevent states from recognizing gay marriages, it did impose constraints on the benefits received by legally married gay couples. Section 3 barred same-sex married couples from being recognized as 'spouses' for purposes of federal law and receiving federal marriage benefits.

In 1998, Hawaiians voted to amend the state constitution limiting legal marriage to heterosexual couples. The vote was 69%, overturning the earlier Hawaiian decision.(Strong et. al.2001). In 1999 Vermont granted marital benefits to same-sex couples, but stopped short of same-sex marriage. In response to pressures by homosexual activists to legalize same-sex

marriage, thirty states passed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which only recognizes a marriage between a man and a woman.

In 2003, the United States Supreme Court invalidated sodomy laws as a criminal offense in *Lawrence v. Texas*, making same sex activity legal in every U.S. state and territory. Gay activists continued and increased their efforts to achieve legal marriage for same-sex couples. In 2011 the Obama administration announced that it considered Section 3 of DOMA unconstitutional and would not defend it in court. In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court declared Section 3 of DOMA to be unconstitutional under the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment in *United States v. Windsor (Defense of Marriage Act, Wikipedia)*. By 2014, seventeen states had legalized same-sex marriage; six by court decision, eight by state legislature, and three by popular vote. Thirty-three states had a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage (ProCon.org. 2014).

Jonathan Rauch and Judith Stacey are two leading proponents of same-sex marriage who come to the discussion from different perspectives. In his book, *Gay Marriage* (2004), Jonathan Rauch argues that “legalizing same-sex matrimony” would “shore up marriage’s unique but eroding status as the preferred structure for two people who want to build a life together.” Rauch writes, “I would say that marriage is two people’s lifelong commitment, recognized by law and society, to care for each other.” He contends that gay marriage would strengthen marriage by “signaling society’s clear preference for marriage over cohabitation.” On the other hand, Judith Stacey is an activist whose main agenda is to combine socialism with women’s liberation. In her book, *Brave New Families* (1990) Stacey calls for more “family diversity”. Stacey is devoted to “deinstitutionalizing marriage”. She views the fight for same-sex marriage as a wedge issue for “rebuilding family forms” in the United States. (Blankenhorn, 2007:129-134).

FAMILY INSTABILITY AFFECTS A CHILD’S WELL-BEING

Over the last 50 years instability in family relationships has become prevalent in the lives of many children. With the increase in divorce and the prevalence of nonmarital cohabitation, the traditional biological parent-child family has become increasingly challenged. An extensive body of research suggests that changes in family structure create crises and distress for children that often reduces their ability to develop normally. Even if no crises occurs, a sense of insecurity and mistrust could affect a child’s emotional development. Compared to children from stable homes, children experiencing family transitions were found to relate to elevated behavior problems, disruptive behavior at school, lower grades, poorer emotional adjustment, and dropping out of school. Self reported delinquent behavior was strongly associated with the number of family transitions experienced by the child.

Paula Fomby and Andrew J. Cherlin (2007) summarize and discuss the growing body of research documenting that children who experience transitions in their family structure generally fare worse than children raised in stable two parent families and perhaps even children raised in a stable single-parent family. The more changes a child experiences, the worse becomes his or her ability to adjust. Family instability may be brought about by divorce, parental separation, remarriage, co-habiting partners moving into, or out of, the home or a single parent who marries. Each structural family change requires a period of adjustment as parents, partners and children establish new identities and ways of relating to each other.

THE ECONOMIC COSTS OF FAMILY FRAGMENTATION

Concerns related to the fragmentation of family relationships has focused primarily on 'social costs'. However family issues are more than just moral or social concerns, but also economic ones. The breakdown of the stable two-parent family is the single most cause of increasing levels of poverty for children. To a greater extent today, two parents are needed to give children material security and opportunity. In his book *Poor Support* (1988) David Ellwood showed that , "73 percent of children from one-parent families will experience poverty at some point during their childhood, versus 20 percent for children from two-parent families; 22 percent of children from one-parent families will experience persistent poverty (seven years or more), versus only 2 percent from two-parent families." Data suggest strongly that a stable, intact family is the best anti-poverty program for America's children (Galston, 1996:274-275).

Marriage and families create and develop, or fail to create and develop, human and social capital. "In 2000, a group of more than one hundred family scholars and civic leaders noted the range of public costs associated with family breakdown". They concluded, "While no study has yet attempted precisely to measure these sweeping and diverse taxpayer costs stemming from the decline of marriage, current research suggests that these costs are likely to be quite extensive." Concerns related to higher rates of crime, drug abuse, education failure, chronic illness, child abuse, domestic violence, poverty, welfare expenditures, higher day-care subsidies, child support collection costs, foster care, child protective services, Medicaid, Medicare, administration costs in regulating post-divorce or unwed families, and increasing crime-control measures. (Scafidi, 2008:8).

To address this concern, Benjamin Scafidi, an economist in the J. Whitney Bunting School of Business at Georgia College & State University, developed a study to provide the first rigorous estimate of the costs to U.S. taxpayers created by the high rates of divorce and unmarried childbearing both at the national and state levels. Four organizations co-sponsored this study: the Institute for American Values, the Institute for Marriage and Public Policy, Georgia Family

Council, and Families Northwest. The study adopted the assumption “that all of the taxpayer costs of divorce and unmarried childbearing stem from the effects that family fragmentation has on poverty...” Based on this methodology, the study concluded “that family fragmentation costs U.S. tax-payers at least \$112 billion each and every year, or more than \$1 trillion each decade.” This figure was seen as a ‘minimum estimate’ based on costs that “arise from increased taxpayer expenditures for antipoverty, criminal justice, and education programs, and through lower levels of taxes paid by individuals who, as adults, earn less because of reduced opportunities as a result of having been more likely to grow up in poverty.” (Scafidi, 2008:5).

Restoring Stable and Caring Family Relationships

American democracy rests on a foundation of strong and stable families that raise, educate and prepare the citizens of tomorrow. A major function of a strong family is to encourage civic character and competence and to link children to the community. Concern for the well-being of the community is developed in caring connections to family and kin. When families become incapable of performing that role, democracy and the community is jeopardized. When families fail to prepare responsible and independent citizens capable of taking personal and social responsibility the state is required to step in and assume control for the safety of all (Galston, 1996:272-273).

With the decline in stable marriages, many children are failing to learn the processes necessary for responsible family functioning. In large numbers we have bought into the conviction that children do not need both their mother and their father to develop in a healthy, responsible and productive direction. As we move increasingly to one-parent families, out-of-wedlock births, and sperm donor births, a large number of children are living without their father. However, family scholars and researchers provide ample documentation of problems and concerns.

A stable, intact family is the best anti-poverty program. When families become unstable and broken, a large number of children from one-parent homes experience poverty at some point in their childhood. Children whose mothers have depended on welfare as a single parent are more likely to also become dependent on charity and the state. “The absence of fathers as models and co-disciplinarians contributes to the low self-esteem, anger, violence, and peer bonding through gang lawlessness characteristic of many fatherless boys.” (Galston 1996:273). Mothers and fathers bring differing perspectives and contributions into the lives of children that integrate them into society more completely. Single parents often become overwhelmed by the everyday demands of child care with no help or support with the problems that arise.

David Blankenhorn had raised this alarm in 1995 when he wrote, “Fatherlessness is the most harmful demographic trend of this generation...If this trend continues, fatherlessness is likely to change the shape of our society...the United States will be a nation divided into two groups, separate and unequal...One group will consist of those adults who grew up with the daily presence and provision of fathers. The other group will consist of those who did not.”(Blankenhorn, 1995:1-2).

WHY MARRIAGE MATTERS – THIRTY CONCLUSIONS FROM THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

In 2011, a team of eighteen prominent family scholars, chaired by W. Bradford Wilcox published the third edition of *Why Marriage Matters* to bring to awareness research conclusions related to concerns about changing family forms. The conclusions summarize large bodies of research on the impact of divorce, stepfamilies, single parenthood, and cohabitation on children, adults, and the larger community. The report seeks to provide information to “policy makers, scholars, civic, business, and religious leaders, professional, and others interested in understanding marriage in today’s society.” (National Marriage Project, 2011).

Three fundamental conclusions are drawn from these studies:

1. **The intact, biological, married family remains the gold standard for family life in the United States**, insofar as children are most likely to thrive – economically, socially, and psychologically- in this family form.
2. **Marriage is an important public good**, associated with a range of economic, health, educational, and safety benefits that help local, state, and federal governments serve the common good.
3. **The benefits of marriage extend to poor, working-class, and minority communities**, despite the fact that marriage has weakened in these communities in the last four decades. (pg.11)

Thirty Conclusions from summarized research studies differentiate intact marriage from other family forms. (pgs-12-40)

Conclusions regarding Marriage

- * Marriage increases the likelihood that fathers and mothers have good relationships with their children.
- * Children are most likely to enjoy family stability when they are born into a married family.
- * Marriage is a virtually universal human institution.
- * Marriage, and a normative commitment to marriage, foster high-quality relationships between adults, as well as between parents and children.

- * Marriage has important biosocial consequences for adults and children
Married men have lower testosterone levels than men who are never-married or divorced.
Girls appear to benefit in their sexual development from growing up in an intact family.
- * Married couples build more wealth on average than singles or cohabiting couples.
- * Marriage reduces poverty and material hardship for disadvantaged women and children.
- * Minorities benefit economically from marriage also.
- * Married men earn more money than do single men with similar education and job histories.
- * Children who live with their own two married parents enjoy better physical health, on average, than do children in other family forms.
- * Parental marriage is associated with a sharply lower risk of infant mortality.
- * Marriage is associated with reduced rates of alcohol and substance abuse for both adults and teens.
- * Married people, especially married men, have longer life expectancies than do otherwise similar singles.
- * Marriage is associated with better health and lower rates of injury, illness, and disability for both men and women.
- * Marriage seems to be associated with better health among minorities and the poor.
- * Married mothers have lower rates of depression than do single or cohabiting mothers.
- * Marriage appears to reduce the risk that adults will be either perpetrators or victims of crime.
- * Married women appear to have a lower risk of experiencing domestic violence than do cohabiting or dating women.
- * There is a growing marriage gap between college-educated and less educated Americans.

Conclusions Related to other family forms.

- * Children are less likely to thrive in complex households where they share the house with stepsiblings, half-siblings, stepparents, or adults with whom they are unrelated.
- * Cohabitation is not the functional equivalent of marriage. Cohabitators more closely resemble singles than married people.
- * Growing up outside an intact marriage increases the likelihood that children will themselves divorce or become unwed parents.
- * Divorce and unmarried childbearing increase poverty for both children and mothers, and cohabitation is less likely to alleviate poverty than is marriage.
- * Parental divorce reduces the likelihood that children will graduate from college and achieve high-status jobs.
- * Children whose parents divorce have higher rates of psychological distress and mental illness.
- * Cohabitation is associated with higher levels of psychological problems among children.

- * Family breakdown appears to increase significantly the risk of suicide.
- * Boys raised in non-intact families are more likely to engage in delinquent/criminal behavior.
- * A child not living with his or her own two-married parents is at greater risk of child abuse.

The report acknowledges that “While marriage is a social good, not all marriages are equal...Marriages that are unhappy do not have the same benefits as the average marriage. Divorce or separation provides an important escape hatch for children and adults in violent or high-conflict marriages.” The report also notes that “While cohabitation is associated with increased risks of psychological and social problems for children, this does not mean that every child who is exposed to cohabitation is damaged.” (pg. 10.)

CALLS TO RE-INSTITUTIONALIZE MARRIAGE IN AMERICA

Marriages play an irreplaceable role in support for children and intergenerational continuity. The nuclear and extended family relationships create a social unit that persists through space and time. People are linked to hundreds of other people through the generations past, present, and future. The family provides a foundation of emotional and physical support throughout a person’s life. Sexes and ages are integrated in concern through “richer or poorer”, “better or worse,” “in sickness and in health.” Through the love and raising of children, people develop an emotional and personal attachment and concern for the quality of society and the quality of the future because the future society provides the home for their children and grandchildren.

Having a good Marriage and Family Life is ‘Extremely Important’.

The hope and desire of young people of both sexes for a good marriage and family life has remained consistently high. The Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan developed a nationally representative survey of high school seniors. The survey titled *Monitoring the Future* included responses of six thousand high school students surveyed at five year intervals between 1976 and 2010. The respondents overwhelmingly responded that “Having a good Marriage and Family Life is ‘Extremely Important’”. Responses by Boys ranged from 69.4 to 72.9 percent. Responses by Girls ranged from 80.2 to 83.2 percent. Will these young people, products of the divorce revolution, continue the family trends of the past generation or might there be a cultural counterrevolution that could lead to a reversal of current trends? (Bachman, et. al., 2011).

The Divorce Revolution has failed.

The Council on Families in America, co-chaired by David Popenoe, Associate Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Rutgers University and Jean Bethke Elshtain, Professor at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, filed a report in 1996 claiming that America's divorce revolution had failed. The report, entitled *Marriage in America: A Report to the Nation*, noted that the divorce revolution had the worthy goals of fostering greater equality, improving family lives, and expanding individual happiness and choice. However the unanticipated and unintended destructive consequences created terrible hardships and insupportable social costs.

The report outlines the concerns.

...“today there is widespread and growing evidence of failure in rearing children... Many factors have contributed to the deteriorating well-being of children. But what ranks as the most fundamental factor of all, in our judgment, is the weakening of marriage as an institution... To reverse the current deterioration of child and societal well-being in the United States, we must strengthen the institution of marriage...We are not suggesting a return to the marriage forms of earlier eras. We endorse a marriage form which puts children first and is based on a full sense of mutuality and equal regard between husband and wife. We call for the nation to commit itself to this overriding goal: To increase the proportion of children who grow up with their two married parents and decrease the proportion of children who do not.”

(The Council on Families in America, 1996:294-295.)

Realizing that such a dramatic change to reverse the trend in family fragmentation would require support from many sectors of society, the Council drew up recommendations addressed to community leaders, including leaders of religious organizations, community and educational organizations, business, social work, health care, marriage and family life education, and family law.

The Project Director and Associate Director for the Council on Families in America were David Blankenhorn, president of the Institute for American Values and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead. Members of the Council included close to twenty prominent family scholars, researchers and proponents of religious and social policy, including: William A. Galston, professor of Public Affairs at the University of Maryland; Mary Ann Glendon, Learned Hand Professor of Law, Harvard University Law School; Norval D. Glenn, Ashbel Smith Professor of Sociology and Stiles Professor in American Studies, University of Texas at Austin; James A. Hefner, president, Tennessee State University at Nashville; Leon R. Kass, Addie Clark Harding Professor in the College and the Committee on Social Thought, University of Chicago; and Judith Wallerstein, founder and director, Center for the Family in Transition, Corte Madera, California.

PUBLIC POLICY BOLSTERS MARRIAGE

“A marriage is a legally recognized union between a man and a woman in which they are united sexually; cooperate economically; and may give birth to, adopt, or rear children. The union is assumed to be permanent (Although in reality it may be dissolved by separation or divorce.” (Strong et. al. 2001:15)

Centuries ago Edmund Burke outlined the importance of the family as a foundation for public good when he suggested that “the seeds of public concern are sown in the sense of connection we feel to our family and kin.” Previously, Tocqueville observed that “America’s families helped mute self-centered egoism and link individuals to their political institutions.” In 1996, family scholar, William A. Galston considered the fragmenting of family relationships and concluded, “The erosion of the two-parent family structure thus threatens to generate a growing subset of the population that cannot discharge the basic responsibilities of citizenship in a liberal democracy.” (Galston, 1996:273).

In considering public policy and its’ influence on marriage, Galston notes, “Individuals get and stay married because they think it is in their interest to do so and/or because they believe that it is the morally correct thing to do.” While cautioning against a careless return to the legal status quo of the 1950’s where discriminatory gender roles created barriers to women in the workplace, he suggested that “public policy can bolster marriage by increasing the practical advantages it offers and by reinforcing its moral standing.” (pg. 283).

Galston outlined economic, political and cultural considerations for a pro-marriage policy agenda. Economic considerations would include improving the employment prospects and marriageability of young males by raising high school graduation rates; helping students acquire vocational skills; introducing them to potential employers; raising the tax allotment for parents raising children; and making workplaces hospitable to workers with children by providing on-site child care, flextime and opportunities for home-based employment. Political considerations would include the continuation of AFDC benefits to children if the natural parents marry and live together as long as their income does not exceed state eligibility standards; and the elimination of unilateral no-fault divorce for couples with dependent children. Cultural considerations would formulate and administer social programs of the federal government to promote the stability and well-being of the American family; develop a national campaign bringing together government, academia and the private sector to “drive home the personal effort and moral responsibility that parenthood entails, and reinforce the practical and emotional benefits of stable marriages.” (Galston, 1996:283-289).

MARRIAGE AND RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION

Federal and State Government Initiatives for marriage education

With the hopes of strengthening families, reducing divorce, decreasing poverty, and improving child well-being, a number of states began to fund healthy marriage and relationship education programs. The *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)* legislation enacted in 1996 as part of welfare reform was the first federal law to set as goals the promotion of marriage and two-parent families and the reduction of out-of-wedlock childbearing.

In 2001, the Administration for Children and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services declared that strengthening marriage would be one of nine priorities. Funding was provided for community marriage and relationship education programs for lower-income individuals and couples. Based on university-based training programs, the sessions focused on providing knowledge and relationship skills to single youth and adults, and engaged, married and remarried couples to increase the quality and stability of family life (Ooms and Hawkins, 2012).

In , 2003, the *Supporting Healthy Marriage Project (SHM)* was funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. The project was motivated by research that “indicates that married adults and children raised by both parents in stable, low-conflict households do better on a host of outcomes.”

In 2005, Wade Horn, Assistant Secretary for the Administration for Children and Families, announced plans for the expansion of funding. Acknowledging that the overarching purpose of TANF was to “improve child well-being through programs aimed at encouraging responsible fatherhood and healthy marriages”, Horn announced that \$200 million was being provided for programs aimed at promoting family formation and healthy marriages (Supporting Healthy Marriage Project, 2014.)

In 2005, The *Deficit Reduction Act* set up the *Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Act* which provided competitive grants to community organizations. The grants provided \$150 million a year for five years. In 2011, federal funding was renewed for three more years. These programs were provided free and most of the programs served lower-income individuals and couples (Ooms and Hawkins, 2012).

The *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)* program offered grants to states to support and promote marriage at the state level. States used these funds in different ways. Florida, Tennessee, Minnesota, Maryland, Oklahoma and Texas provide incentives for marriage preparation by reducing the marriage license fees if the couple participates in a premarital education course. Twelve states have passed or proposed legislation that would require or

encourage marriage education. Arizona funds a *Marriage and Community Skills Program*, Oklahoma offers relationship skills workshops, and Utah offers a video for couples preparing for marriage. (State Policies, 2014: Together in Texas, 2014).

A CALL FOR PARENTING EDUCATION

Many community, religious and national non-profit organizations focused attention on improving marriage and families by offering parenting and relationship classes for couples and single parents. However, despite efforts to increase the marriage rate, marriage was continuing to unravel. By 2013, young adults in middle America, the sixty percent with a high school education but no college degree, were cycling through unstable relationships, hooking up, having babies, hooking up with someone else, and so on. “Forty-four percent of births to high school educated mothers are outside of marriage. Forty-three percent of high school educated adults say that marriage has not worked out for most people they know.”(Lapp, Amber and David, 2013:3). Sexuality was being viewed as an assumption of dating. Many teens had already had several sex partners.

This is a difficult foundation for forming strong families. The young mothers who found themselves ‘suddenly pregnant’ were in a crisis of confusion, not knowing what was necessary to build a strong family. Reaching these new mothers and helping them develop a positive approach to supporting their children is critical. Although many are unwed, learning the ways to be a good mother for their children is essential. Those who come from broken and dysfunctional homes need guidance, encouragement, direction and a way to think about a positive family life for themselves and their children.

Parenting classes that offer information in positive communication and conflict resolution skills, childhood education information, health and wellness, nutrition, money management and participation in the community are increasingly necessary as young parents from unstable backgrounds become parents. It is essential that schools, community organizations, and religious organizations step forward to offer parenting courses to encourage and support healthy family relationships.

SUMMARIZING THE CONCERNS FOR CHILD WELL-BEING

Over the last 50 years changes in marriage and family patterns have created profound changes in social organization, especially in the areas of social integration, social reproduction, social health and the intergenerational transfer of cultural values. Historically the nuclear family based on the marital relationship had been the predominant family form in Western society. Both morality and freedom were tied intimately into the family. The traditional morality of interpersonal behavior outlined love, respect, integrity, and loyalty between husband and wife, and parent and child. An important part of individual freedom included the opportunity to develop and preserve ideas and values by passing them on to the future through the autonomous, continuing relationship with children and extended family.

In the 1960's conflict theorists, seeking to advance the rights of women and oppressed minorities, challenged the status quo which outlined marriage and family as a social institution with rights and responsibilities in regard to spouse, parent, and child. The modern era moved away from the institutional family to an emphasis on personal contract in which individuals decided their own terms of relationship. Women's liberation, no-fault divorce laws, reproductive technologies, and the gay movement challenged lifelong monogamous and heterosexual marriage, creating fluid and flexible family structures. Family as father, mother, children and extended family became simply one of many choices.

By 2011, 26 percent of children under age 18 were living with a single parent, 40 percent of births were to unmarried women, 7.5 million adult couples were cohabiting outside of marriage, 30,000-60,000 children were being born each year through sperm donation, and 125,000 same-sex couple households included 220,000 children under the age of 18.

No-fault divorce laws in the early 1970's gave rise to an extraordinary increase in divorces. Each year over a million new children under 18 experienced the divorce of their parents. Research on the children of divorce challenged the widely held premise that children were resilient and would recover in a two year period and resume normal development. Longitudinal studies of children of divorce found enduring problems in the lives of the children. Twenty-five years after the divorce of their parents the adult children continued to recall their feelings of shock, unhappiness, loneliness, bewilderment and anger. Many became pessimistic about relationships and marriage, fearing a sudden loss.

A Census Bureau study found that following divorce children could expect to become 30 or more percent poorer. Fewer than half the children received child support. Custody arrangements created challenges for parents and children. Children are often pulled into the

middle of angry disputes. When one parent receives sole custody, the other parent- usually the father – obtains only limited visiting rights. In joint custody arrangements children lack a stable and permanent environment which may affect them emotionally as they are shifted from one environment to another. If the parents remarry, the members of a stepfamily bring different memories, histories, habits, and expectations. Stepfathers often become successful fathers; however, there is an increased risk of violent abuse. Numerous studies confirm that stepfathers are far more likely than biological fathers to molest their stepchildren.

A trend toward a postmarriage society shifted the basis for childbearing and childrearing in America. Following no-fault divorce, many no longer saw marriage as a necessary or permanent commitment for living together. By 2011, 24 percent of children in the United States were born to cohabiting couples. Another 20 percent of children were spending some years in a cohabiting household. Physical, sexual, and emotional abuse were much more likely in cohabiting households than in married families or single-parent families. Fragile –typically fatherless – families grew due to increases in divorce, out-of-wedlock births, and unmarried cohabitation.

Reproductive technologies developed into an industry that allowed women and men to create children through buying egg, sperm or embryos. Most gay and lesbian parents had been previously married; however, reproductive technologies allowed gays and lesbians to form families. By 2014, 1 percent of children were reported born through the use of ‘advanced fertility help’. A study documenting the experience of young adults who were conceived through artificial insemination found that many donor offspring struggled with their origins and identities and were hurting and confused.

Men were increasingly leaving or being left out of family relationships. By 2014, 24 million children in America – one in three – were living in a biological father –absent home. Children in father-absent homes were almost four times more likely to be poor. By overwhelmingly large majorities, children from fatherless homes were included among youth suicides, homeless and runaway children, rapists with anger problems, high school dropouts, adolescents in chemical abuse centers, and juveniles in state operated institutions.

The breakdown of the two parent family was not only creating economic problems for mothers and children. A study reported in 2008 documented that “family fragmentation costs U.S. tax-payers at least \$112 billion each and every year...based on costs that arise from increased taxpayer expenditures for antipoverty, criminal justice and education programs, and through lower levels of taxes paid by individuals who, as adults, earn less..”

Restoring Stable and Caring Family Relationships

A number of Federal and State Government initiatives were developed to strengthen families, reduce divorce, decrease poverty, and improve child well-being.

* 1996 – The *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families* (TANF) program offered grants to states to support and promote marriage at the state level.

* 2001 – The Administration for Children and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) declared that strengthening marriage would be one of nine priorities.

* 2003 – The *Supporting Healthy Marriage Project* was funded by HHS.

* 2005 – The *Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Act* provided grants.

Parenting classes that offer information in positive communication and conflict resolution skills, childhood education information, health and wellness, nutrition, money management and participation in the community are increasingly necessary as young parents from unstable backgrounds become parents.

In 2011, a team of eighteen prominent family scholars brought to awareness research concerning changing family forms (National Marriage Project, 2011.) They drew three conclusions:

1.” The intact, biological, married family remains the gold standard for family life in the United States, insofar as children are most likely to thrive – economically, socially, and psychologically – in this family form.

2. Marriage is an important public good...,

3. The benefits of marriage extend to poor, working-class, and minority communities...”

Research confirms that the hopes of young people of both sexes for a good marriage and family life remains high. However the unintended consequences of the divorce revolution have created terrible hardships for children. To reverse the deterioration of child and societal well-being in the United States, studies confirm that we must strengthen the institution of marriage. To reverse the trend in family fragmentation requires support from many sectors of society, including leaders of religious organizations, community and educational organizations, business, social work, health care, marriage and family life education and the law.

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Abstract : The Impact of Contemporary Family Life Patterns on the Quality and Stability of Child Rearing

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April, 2014

This report will document family related research to gain understanding of family patterns in the new millennium with a particular focus on the quality and stability of children's well-being. Family relationships are not just private emotional affairs. Families represent a complex social and public good. The family unit is the social institution in which children are born, raised and educated to be the citizens of the next generation.

Historically marriage has been the appropriate institution for bearing, raising and caring for children. Marriage has been the tie that connects the father to his children and their mother for protection, emotional support and guidance. However, recent trends have focused on personal choice and preference in family formation. Concern for the well-being of the children has been pushed from center stage.

In the last 50 years six major trends have significantly altered family formation: divorce; births out-of-wedlock; unmarried cohabitation; single parent families; sperm/egg donor births; and same sex families. These varied family forms create challenges to the quality and stability of child rearing. The increase in unwed births and single-parent families are significant trends affecting the well-being of children. Single parents often shoulder the entire responsibility while fathers may be left out of the family equation. Lack of resources often leaves the family in poverty and dependent on state welfare. The decline of marriage is pushing Americans out of the middle class.

Political leaders, social leaders and educators often fail to address concerns raised by these dramatic changes for the well-being of children. They fail to ask the questions that are necessary lest they appear to be discriminating or judging a contemporary lifestyle. However a responsible society must be concerned with the quality and care of its children.

This paper will document changing family structures in America and address the following questions. * What influences were responsible for bringing about changes in family relationships? * How do varied family patterns affect the stability and quality of child well-being? * What are the present and long term consequences for children and for society when children grow up in unstable and complex family relationships? * How can families, marriage and family educators, and public policy support and encourage stable, responsible and caring family relationships for the well-being of children?

The Impact of Contemporary Family Life Patterns
On the
Quality and Stability of Child Rearing

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The Impact of Contemporary Family Life Patterns on the Quality and Stability of Child Rearing

Table of Contents :

| | |
|---|----|
| The Changing Family Structure in America | 2 |
| The New Morality Confronts the Family | 2 |
| Changing the Family Focus | 2 |
| Exposing Family Violence and Abuse | 3 |
| Women’s Liberation Expands | 4 |
| The Gay Movement Emerges | 4 |
| Reproductive Technologies Change Family Traditions | 4 |
| Divorce Confronts the Family | 5 |
| The ‘Family’ Changes | 5 |
| Growing Concern for the Quality and Stability of Child Rearing | 7 |
| The Effects of Divorce on Children – A Groundbreaking Study | 7 |
| Challenging the Conclusions of Divorce Effects on Children | 10 |
| Parenting Following Divorce | 11 |
| Step Families and Children | 14 |
| The Postmarriage Society Effects on Children | 14 |
| Cohabitation Affects the Children | 15 |
| Out-of-wedlock Births, Single Parenting and Child Well-being | 16 |
| Sexually Transmitted Diseases Affect Families and Children | 19 |
| Reproductive Technologies and the Children –My Daddy’s Name is Donor | 20 |
| Fatherlessness Becomes a Problem | 21 |
| Gay Parenting and the Children | 23 |
| Gay Marriage Challenges the Traditional Family | 25 |
| Family Instability Affects a Child’s Well-being | 26 |
| The Economic Costs of Family Fragmentation | 27 |
| Restoring Stable and Caring Family Relationships | 28 |
| Why Marriage Matters – Thirty Conclusions from the Social Sciences | 29 |
| Calls to Re-institutionalize Marriage in America | 31 |
| Having a good Marriage and Family Life is “extremely important” | 31 |
| The Divorce Revolution has failed | 32 |
| Public Policy Bolsters Marriage | 33 |
| Marriage and Relationship Education | 34 |
| Federal and State Government Initiatives for Marriage Education | 34 |
| A Call for Parenting Education | 35 |
| Summarizing the Concerns for Child Well-Being | 36 |
| Restoring Stable and Caring Family Relationships | 38 |
| References | 39 |

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The PDF file of the paper can be downloaded from the above website under "Related Essays".

The 2012 issue of the *State of Our Unions* reports the following changes in family patterns between 1960 and 2011.

Social Indicators of Marital Trends over the Past Five Decades in the U.S.

| | 1960 | | 2011 | |
|--|------|--------|-------|--------|
| | male | female | male | female |
| % All persons age 15 and older who were married | 69.3 | 65.9 | 52.1 | 49.5 |
| % All persons 15 and older Who were divorced | 1.8 | 2.5 | 9.0 | 11.0 |
| % Children under age 18 Living with a single parent | 9 | | 26 | |
| % Children under 18 living with Two married parents | 88 | | 65 | |
| % Live births to unmarried women | 5.3 | | 40.7 | |
| Number of cohabiting unmarried Adult couples of the opposite sex (in millions) | .439 | | 7.599 | |
| Number of cohabiting unmarried Adult couples of the opposite sex With one or more children (in millions) | .197 | | 3.034 | |

