

Media information: EMBARGO: 00.01 am Saturday 7th February 2009, marking Marriage Week UK (7th-14th February)**Marriage today: I do - if I can afford it**

The recession will take a toll on marriage - but the aspiration is alive and well, finds data analysis from the independent think tank Civitas marking the first day of Marriage Week UK.

A broadminded attitude amongst the young towards other people's decisions about marriage shouldn't be mistaken for a modern indifference to getting married.

'What we have in the UK today are "traditional" personal aspirations on the one hand, with liberalised social norms on the other', commented Anastasia de Waal, Director of Family and Education. 'In short, it's a case of "I do - but I won't judge what you do".'

Although the latest British Social Attitudes survey shows that fewer than 40 per cent of young people consider marriage to be "the best kind of relationship", additional survey evidence gathered during the same period, shows that 70 per cent of young people in Britain would like to get married themselves.

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Survey evidence tells us that people want to marry to make a commitment. This explains why, despite the acceptability of cohabitation today, nearly 79 per cent of young people in cohabiting relationships want to get married. Yet the recession may well mean that an increasing number of young people are not able to tie the knot.

Extensive research shows that people living in poorer circumstances, particularly when unemployed, are less likely to marry. Marriage takes a backseat in hard times as the commitment associated with it becomes less available. "Settling down" tends to come with a set of prerequisites, from being able to afford a mortgage to having a steady income.

'As the recession bites it's going to be harder for partners to make that commitment - without financial stability and jobs they won't have the confidence to say "I do"', commented Anastasia de Waal.

'So as well as financial strains breaking up existing marriages, we are also likely to see fewer marriages as a result of increased unemployment.'

Notes for Editors

- i. **Civitas is an independent social policy think-tank.** It receives no state funding either directly or indirectly and has no links to any political party.
- ii. British Social Attitudes Survey, 25th Report, January 2009; fieldwork carried out in 2007; <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/bsa/report.htm>.
- iii. Ipsos MORI/Civitas 'Young People's Attitudes to Marriage', fieldwork carried out in July 2007; sample: 1,560 adults in Britain aged 20-35.

Summary of main findings:

- Seven in ten wanted to marry;
- Nearly eight in ten (79 per cent) of those cohabiting wanted to marry;
- The number one reason why young people wanted to marry was to make a commitment (47 per cent);
- Just two per cent wanted to marry for tax reasons;
- Less than one per cent thought that marriage jeopardises equality between men and women;
- Of those respondents who wanted to marry, only 20 per cent thought that 'married people are generally happier than unmarried people'.

For a full report of the findings see **Second Thoughts on the Family**, May 2008, Civitas.

iv. Unemployment's negative effect on marriage: see for example Sander, W., 'Unemployment and marital status in Great Britain,' Soc Biol., Fall-Winter; 39 (3-4):299-305, 1992; Edin, K. and Reed, J.M., 'Why Don't They Just Get Married? Barriers to Marriage among the Disadvantaged', The Future of Children, Volume 15, Number 2, Fall 2005, pp117-137.

v. Marriage Week UK runs from 7th - 14th February 2009.

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