



EMBARGOED UNTIL 11TH FEB 2010

Symptoms of a dangerous delusion

The falling number of weddings in the UK in 2008 to numbers last seen 100 years ago to be released by the ONS today illustrates a dangerous delusion in both public and private minds that marriage is not relevant any more.

‘Living together’ and marriage are increasingly seen as the same by the public¹, yet the outcomes are radically different. Two thirds of all the first marriages in 2008 can be expected to last a lifetime. Less than 10% of cohabiting relationships last even to their tenth anniversary. The contrast is even starker where children are involved – just 3% of children whose parents are still together when they reach 16 will have unmarried parents. The myth of the “long term stable (unmarried) relationship”, so beloved of liberal social commentators is just that, largely a myth.

Although the public perception is that marrying makes no difference to a relationship, the evidence shows differently. Making a positive public decision to make a relationship permanent and exclusive does change behaviour. And the longer a couple has lived in a state of “I’ll stick around as long as it works for me”, the harder it becomes to make the shift.

“There are very important differences in relationships which are based on a clear decision rather than those that just “slide” to their current state”, says Dave Percival. “And the falling marriage numbers are a symptom that the public at large doesn’t fully recognise this. That’s why we titled this Marriage Week ‘Celebrating Commitment’. Making a clear unequivocal long term commitment to each other is a key factor in building a lifelong relationship, with all the benefits to health, wealth, and children that flow from it.”

“Couples do still aspire to marriage, but are delaying marriage until later – of that there is no doubt,” said Dave Percival, Coordinator of National Marriage Week, “but the figures can be misleading as they omit the 50,000 weddings held abroad², and the message about the real value of marriage is getting lost.”

Increasingly couples regard the wedding as a celebration to crown having arrived in life, rather than being a stepping stone towards having a home and family as it used to be. But marriage still is regarded as a serious commitment, and something people aspire to, even those already living together. “Survey evidence³ 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.”

ENDS

Notes for Editors

[Marriage Week UK](http://www.marriageweekuk.com) celebrates the diversity and vibrancy of marriage as the basis for family life in the UK. It is timed to include Valentine’s Day (8th –14th Feb 2010) and has been held every year since 1997.

For further information contact Dave Percival, coordinator of Marriage Week UK, and founder of www.2-in-2-1.co.uk . Tel: 07802 660524; email: dave@2-in-2-1.co.uk

¹ The [latest NatCen British Social Attitudes report](#) found that “45% agree that it ‘makes no difference to children whether their parents are married to each other or just living together’, up from 38% in 1998. A quarter (27%) disagree, down from a third (33%) in 1998.

² Data from ONS Population Trends - http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/PT133_part2.pdf page 65

³ See <http://www.2-in-2-1.co.uk/images/mwuk/Press%20release%20Civitas.pdf>