

Media information: Immediate release

Misconceptions: Unmarried parents

Lowest marriage rates on record published today, connect strongly to an increase in parenting outside marriage. Yet, over 60% of young unmarried parents would like to marry

Today's marriage figures follow shortly after findings from the British Social Attitudes Survey showing that unmarried parenting has become more socially acceptable than ever. Whilst this may appear to be the death knell of marriage in the UK, attitudes on personal aspirations tell a different story.

Survey evidence shows that a modern enthusiasm for marriage comfortably co-exists with a liberal outlook about *other people's families*. In line with this, attitude surveys show that marriage is the **majority aspiration** among both cohabiting couples and unmarried parents.

In a 2007 IpsosMORI/Civitas survey of 1560 young people (aged 20-35) across the UK, **62 per cent** of unmarried parents wanted to marry. Furthermore, only just over a quarter of unmarried parents surveyed, **26 per cent**, actively did not want to marry.

Not a new social order...

'There is a common misconception that unmarried parenthood signals a rejection of marriage, and a new "social order",' commented Anastasia de Waal, Director of Family and Education at independent think tank Civitas. 'Yet this is not supported by what a large number of unmarried parents themselves are telling us.'

...rather, new prerequisites

Arguably the main reason for unmarried parenthood today is the 'prerequisites' for modern marriage. Young people want certain things in place before tying the knot: the top three being a partner to whom they want to commit, financial stability and home ownership.

Tough conditions for marriage

'Interestingly, the "conditions" which many young people hold as necessary for getting married appear to be *tougher* than the conditions for which they are prepared to have a child,' commented Anastasia de Waal. 'This really does blow out of the water the notion that marriage is no longer valued.'

The question is: will people who want to marry, succeed in doing so? Or are high rates of unmarried parenting indicators of thwarted aspirations? It is *this* question which policymakers should be addressing, rather than endlessly bickering with *each other* about whether the public do or don't value marriage.'

Misinterpreting *lack of choice, for choice*

'Labour thinks unmarried parents are choosing not to marry on the grounds of "progressive" values; the Tories think unmarried parents are choosing not to marry because they don't value marriage – if both parties were only to listen to what real people are saying they would realise that for many "choice" has nothing to do with it. It's about economics,' said Anastasia de Waal.

Politicians need to finally get real on marriage

'We know that there is a very strong relationship between unemployment and non-marriage,' concludes Anastasia de Waal. 'Therefore the number one priority for any government interested in marriage and family stability should be getting people into work.'

[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.

- IpsosMORI/Civitas *Attitudes to Marriage Amongst Young People*: Unmarried parents' attitudes to marriage:

- Amongst parents, making a commitment to their partner was the main reason for wanting to marry

- The majority of parents surveyed were female (57 per cent compared to 30 per cent male)

- The fieldwork was carried out in the summer of 2007

- British Social Attitudes Survey:

- Cohabiting parents: *Britain becoming increasingly liberal*: '45% agree that it "makes no difference to children whether their parents are married or just living together," up from 38% in 1998.' NatCen 26.01.10

- The fieldwork for the 2010 edition of the British Social Attitudes Survey was carried out between June and November 2008

- Marriage Week UK runs between 8-14th February 2010

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