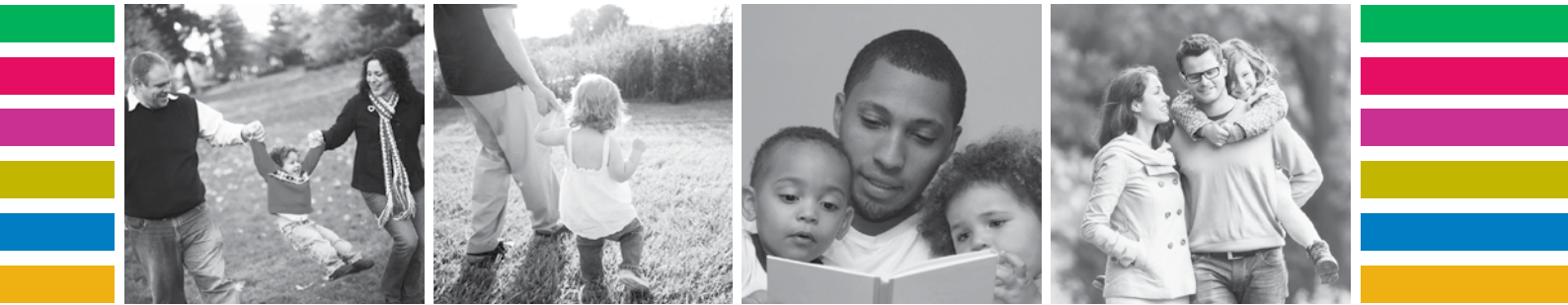


FRACTURED FAMILIES

Why stability matters

June 2013



THE CENTRE FOR
SOCIAL
JUSTICE

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About the Centre for Social Justice

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) aims to put social justice at the heart of British politics.

Our policy development is rooted in the wisdom of those working to tackle Britain's deepest social problems and the experience of those whose lives have been affected by poverty. Our Working Groups are non-partisan, comprising prominent academics, practitioners and policy makers who have expertise in the relevant fields. We consult nationally and internationally, especially with charities and social enterprises, who are the champions of the welfare society.

In addition to policy development, the CSJ has built an alliance of poverty fighting organisations that reverse social breakdown and transform communities.

We believe that the surest way the Government can reverse social breakdown and poverty is to enable such individuals, communities and voluntary groups to help themselves.

The CSJ was founded by Iain Duncan Smith in 2004, as the fulfilment of a promise made to Janice Dobbie, whose son had recently died from a drug overdose just after he was released from prison.

Director: Christian Guy

Fractured Families: Why stability matters

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Preface

The Centre for Social Justice was established to find and promote solutions to poverty, disadvantage and poor life chances. We work with a group of 360 grassroots poverty-fighting charities who prove every day that lives can be changed with dedication, ambition and common sense.

Since 2004, all over the United Kingdom, we have seen how stable families, committed relationships and safe environments are the most powerful down payment this country could make against deprivation. Adults thrive, children do better and less public money is spent if strong families are nurtured. They are a bulwark.

In 2007 the CSJ published *Breakthrough Britain*, which amongst other things set a path for greater family stability through effective public policy. Five years, three Prime Ministers, two Governments and hundreds of billions of pounds later, far too many families are in freefall and little has changed.

This report reveals the stark scale of the breakdown and volatility gripping neighbourhoods and holding people back. One in two children born today will not grow up with both their parents and every year an additional 20,000 people, mainly women, join the throngs of those raising children more or less singlehandedly. One million children have no meaningful contact at all with their fathers, and that's a conservative estimate. Lack of male role models in many young lives is further compounded by the dearth of male teachers within state primary schools. And although these trends are nationwide, they are particularly pronounced in our poorest communities where two thirds of all young adolescents have seen their parents part.

Such breakdown would matter not a lot if the human and economic costs were insignificant. But they are in fact devastating. Children with separated, single or step-parents are 50 per cent more likely to fail at school, have low self-esteem, struggle to make friends and with their behaviour. They often battle with anxiety or depression throughout the rest of their lives.

Adults' mental and physical health can take a huge knock when relationships crumble, making it much harder for them to achieve at work and be the parents they want to be. The costs are eye-watering – rising to £49 billion per annum by the end of this Parliament, it's more than the Government's whole defence budget.

This is an emergency. As a response one might assume that politicians would be queuing up to save lives and save money. But the public policy response – from those on the Left and the Right – has been feeble.

The previous Government failed to take the action required to stabilise family life. Disappointingly, despite some progress with the establishment of the Early Intervention Foundation, this Government is failing too. Conservatives say they would have been more radical on family policy had it not been for their Liberal Democrat colleagues, but even the commitment to recognise marriage in the tax system, made in the Programme for Government, has been ignored so far.

So for all of the promises the Conservatives made in Opposition, for all of the gimmick giveaways politicians have unveiled for middle class families, and for all of the safe ‘families come in all shapes and sizes’ rhetoric ministers have used for decades, hardly anything has been done to resist the tsunami of family breakdown battering the United Kingdom.

Government spend to tackle this emergency is only 0.01 per cent of the costs it incurs every single year – there has been a failure to prevent breakdown.

There are many misguided reasons for such political paralysis. Some argue that it is no business of politicians to meddle in the personal family choices people make. Others suggest that rising family breakdown is just a modern process, an inevitable trait of human advancement. Others say family instability doesn't matter.

Beyond this, perhaps more than in any other social policy area, personal experience shapes approach on family. Our own backgrounds, whether positive or negative, are formative. Many politicians and officials therefore bring their own views to policy commitments rather than hard evidence.

Furthermore, others seem painfully incapable of separating what is an essential compassionate response to those who have experienced family breakdown, especially lone-parent families, from what should be the overarching goal of public policy – doing all we can to prevent family breakdown and the devastation it triggers.

This has to change. Saying that family form is irrelevant is inaccurate and ultimately counter-productive. Our political discourse about family policy must mature. Family breakdown is an urgent public health issue. Backing commitment and setting a goal of reducing instability does not equate to criticising or stigmatising lone parents or those involved. In fact the opposite is true: in recent polling for the CSJ over half of lone mothers said it was important that a child grows up living with both parents – one in five that it was very important.

Within this need for new maturity, we should also agree that marriage is not a right wing obsession but a social justice issue: people throughout society want to marry but the cultural and financial barriers faced by those in the poorest communities thwart their aspirations. Poorer parents are significantly less likely to be married and their children far more likely to suffer family breakdown – repeatedly in many cases.

In the coming year the CSJ will publish radical ideas for family policy, as part of our Breakthrough Britain II project. For now though I hope politicians will digest this hard-hitting analysis. It should shock and move them. Where they have to-date ducked the crisis, we call on them to build consensus and deal with it.

Christian Guy

Director, Centre for Social Justice

Members of the CSJ Working Group



**Avril McIntyre MBE (Chair), Chief Executive,
LifeLine Community Projects**

Avril has been the Chief Executive of LifeLine since she founded it in 2000. During this time, she has developed a suite of services which engage some of the hardest to reach communities across East London. Under Avril's direction, LifeLine has grown from a small grassroots provider with a turnover of £20,000 to a large and dynamic organisation today with a portfolio of over £6.8 million of public sector delivery and 145 staff.

Avril also established FaithAction, a strategic partner of the newly formed Cabinet Office of the Third Sector in 2005. FaithAction is a network of over 13,000 faith-based voluntary and community sector groups across the country and has nine regional hubs, all offering capacity building support to grassroots groups as well as providing a much needed voice for some of the most marginalised faith-based groups across the country.



Elly Farmer

Dr Elly Farmer is a Clinical Psychologist who specialises in the treatment and understanding of difficulties around child maltreatment and domestic abuse. Her work involves a mix of policy development, teaching and clinical practice. She has recently co-authored a report for the CSJ on domestic abuse, 'Beyond Violence', and also contributed to CSJ policy work on the early years and youth criminal justice.

Up until very recently, Elly worked for the NSPCC providing assessment, treatment and consultation around the problem of sexual abuse, and in an NHS substance misuse service helping adults overcome the difficulties that lay at the root of their drugs and alcohol problems. Now she is just about to take up a role leading a clinical team to meet the needs of looked after children in the South of the UK for the largest provider of children's homes, Advanced Childcare. In a much smaller capacity, she also teaches clinical skills for work with children and young people on an Anna Freud Centre/UCL masters course and provides psychological consultation to CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre).



Professor Brigid Featherstone, Professor, Social Care, Open University

Brigid qualified as a social worker and worked in the areas of child protection and juvenile justice. Since becoming an academic, she has been involved in evaluating service responses to the needs of fathers including those who are domestically violent. She has also completed evaluations of the impact of independent advocacy and advice services on parents' engagement with child protection services, parenting programmes such as Triple P and local Sure Start programmes. Brigid has a particular interest in promoting family support services and the rights of children to be cared for safely within their families.



Professor Donald Forrester, Professor of Social Work Research and Director of the Tilda Goldberg Centre for Social Work and Social Care, University of Bedfordshire

Professor Forrester is the Director of the Tilda Goldberg Centre, was appointed Professor of Social Work Research at the University of Bedfordshire in 2010, and is one of the leading evaluative researchers in social work in the UK. Professor Forrester practised as a child and family social worker for ten years before moving into research in 2000. His primary focus has been on children affected by parental misuse of drugs or alcohol. This has led to a broader concern with developing robust research to find out what works in social work. Professor Forrester continues to lead a wide range of different projects totalling over £3 million, including leading a number of studies within the Tilda Goldberg Centre, two ESRC projects to improve the quantitative skills of social work academics, advising the Welsh Government on evidence based policy and practice and various other evaluative studies ranging from £20,000 to £350,000.



Simon Hart, Independent Chair of Essex Safeguarding Children and Safeguarding Adult Boards

A former Director of Social Services in Gateshead and the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, Simon has been successfully involved in leading significant transformation and improvement programmes covering social care services for both children and vulnerable adults. In order to truly support vulnerable people he is a strong advocate for the development of effective partnership working and engagement with those who use or experience services.

Simon was one of the early appointments to the position of Independent Chair to Safeguarding Boards and worked in that capacity in London for four years during which time he became a Member of the London Safeguarding Children Board and Chair of the London Serious Case

Review Sub Committee. In this capacity he has provided advice to both the Munro Review and Ministers in relation to statutory guidance.

In an advisory capacity, Simon has also supported a number of Local Authorities with formal improvement programmes.



**Nick Woodall, Policy and Development,
The Centre for Separated Families**

Nick currently works on policy and development at the Centre for Separated Families, a national charity that uses whole family interventions to support parents in bringing about better outcomes for their children after divorce or separation. He has recently provided policy responses to the Family Justice Review and the reform of child maintenance. He has given oral evidence to the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee on both child maintenance reform and the Welfare Reform Reform Bill. As well as his policy brief, he works directly with families, and designs and delivers training to other professionals working with family separation. He is an ADR Mediator, accredited by School of Psychotherapy & Counselling Psychology, and sits on the International Committee of the Academy for Professional Family Mediators.

In addition, Nick is a BBC Online parenting expert and the co-author of *The Guide for Separated Parents* (Piatkus 2007) with his colleague and wife, Karen, and *Divorce for Dads* (Two Dogs 2010) written with former Manchester United and England goalkeeper, Gary Bailey. He has also written parenting information and articles for, amongst others, Parliamentary Brief, Early Years Educator, Nursery World, the UK government's Child Maintenance Options service, The Separated Dad's Guide and Dad.info.



**David Marjoribanks, Policy Researcher,
the Centre for Social Justice (since February 2013)**

David is the Researcher for family breakdown at the CSJ. Prior to joining the CSJ he worked as an Associate Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Kent in Canterbury, where he also completed a PhD in Philosophy, and as an Access to Higher Education Lecturer in Sociology at a Further Education College. Before that, he completed a BA with First Class Honours in Politics and an MA with Distinction in Political Philosophy, both at the University of York.



**Harriet Crawford, Research Manager and Lead Researcher,
the Centre for Social Justice (until February 2013)**

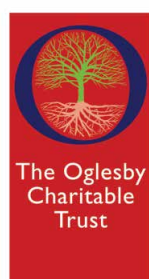
Harriet led the CSJ's work on family breakdown and assisted the Director of Policy in managing the policy team's research programme. She has edited a number of publications across different policy areas, including *Building a Social Recovery? A second year report card on the Coalition Government* and *Transforming Childcare, Changing Lives: Making sure that work pays*.

Harriet joined the CSJ from a business intelligence company, having obtained her Geography degree at the University of Oxford. There, she conducted original research looking at the integration experiences of academic refugees in the UK.

Special thanks

The CSJ would like to thank the many people and organisations who have kindly given their time to contribute evidence during the course of this review. Our thanks also go to the Working Group for giving their time and valuable expertise. Thanks also to Clare Chamberlain, for her contribution to the Working Group until other commitments prevented her continued participation, and to Isabelle Trowler for her contribution to the Working Group until she was appointed the Government's Chief Social Worker. Particular thanks go to the Group's Chairman, Avril McIntyre, MBE, for her commitment and leadership. Special thanks also to CSJ staff Alex Burghart, Director of Policy, for his invaluable guidance and help with the report and to Samantha Callan, Associate Director for Families and Mental Health for her invaluable editorial input.

We are also very grateful to the Oglesby Charitable Trust for their very generous support for this research.



Chairman's foreword

There is one common reality for every human being and that is that we will all, in one shape or another, be part of a family. This experience, whilst different for everyone, shapes our lives significantly.

This 'State of the Nation' report explores the causes, impact and consequences of family breakdown on children and adults in the UK today. It highlights the cost to the public purse through increased take up of benefits, issues of housing, health and in extreme situations, children and young people entering care.

Families matter and the challenge around family breakdown has far-reaching consequences. This report highlights issues of father absence, young parenthood and the decline of marriage. It looks at the growing number of 'complex families' in our communities and the impact of poverty on our children today.

Some of the statistics and research can seem quite overwhelming and paint a very depressing picture. Yet, the focus of this report is to ensure we face the issues and work towards policy and practice that addresses both the cause and consequence of family breakdown.

The Family Breakdown Working Group has had a little taste of the amazing work happening across the country. We are keen to ensure we don't 'prescribe fixes' to the complex issues facing families as we move into the *Breakthrough Britain II* full report. We will be meeting with people, charities, organisations, and local and central Government departments to explore the core elements that build stronger families. In those situations where breakdown is inevitable, we will be addressing what can be done to reduce the impact on the children and improve the economic future of both parents. We want to know what works and present real solutions to one of the greatest challenges in the UK today.

Increased family breakdown, its impact on children and the cost to this nation do not have to be inevitable. We need to take stock now and be willing to invest in turning the tide to ensure children growing up today experience a stable, loving and safe family – so that tomorrow their children will too.

Avril McIntyre MBE

Chairman

Executive summary

Building on the seminal work of *Breakdown Britain* (2006) and *Breakthrough Britain* (2007) this report re-examines how family breakdown continues to plague British society.

Since our last report, despite the fact that the scale of the problem has continued to increase, government action has been extremely weak. This is hugely unfortunate. As our work shows, the outcomes for children and adults who suffer from family breakdown are often terrible, and the costs to society are huge.

If governments have chosen to ignore this problem, they have done so despite the public's views. Some of our most striking findings have been from polls conducted for this report which show that people in the UK resolutely support the family:¹

- 89 per cent of people agree (52 per cent strongly agree) that 'If we want to have any hope of mending our broken society, family and parenting is where we've got to start'
- 81 per cent of people think that it is important for children to grow up living with both parents

It is time for politicians to acknowledge that family breakdown is an issue which matters to the vast majority of people in this country and take action to reverse it.

I Family breakdown in the UK

Today in the UK there are a record number of children – over three million – growing up in lone-parent households.² The number of lone parents has been rising steadily over the last 40 years, and, since the CSJ's first report on family breakdown in 2006, the problem has grown unabated. There are now 130,000 more lone-parent families than there were in 2006, and an additional 125,000 dependent children who are not living with both parents.³

¹ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/YouGov polling of 1,722 British adults, November 2012

² Office for National Statistics (ONS), *Statistical Bulletin: Families and Households*, 2012, [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcn%3A77-278923> (03/04/13)]

³ Ibid

The vast majority (92 per cent) of all lone-parent households with dependent children are headed by mothers.⁴ Consequently, there are many children growing up without a father at home. Whilst some fathers manage to remain closely involved in the lives of their children following separation, many do not. Today it is estimated that there are about one million children in the UK growing up without any meaningful contact with their fathers.⁵

Indications of future instability are reflected in the continued increase in the number of people cohabiting. Parents who cohabit are three times more likely to have separated by the time their child is aged five than parents who are married.⁶

Teenage pregnancy frequently leads to children growing up in unstable family environments. Whilst national rates have fallen slightly, overall figures are still high in international league tables – the UK is ranked 3rd highest of the 29 most developed countries in terms of teenage fertility (30 births per 1,000 girls aged 15–19), and it was one of only three of these countries which saw an increase since 2003.⁷ In some of the most affected areas, the rates have risen, against the national trend.⁸

At the most extreme level of family breakdown, a worrying rise in the number of children entering care strongly indicates great instability in the most vulnerable families in society. The 2011/12 figures show that over 67,000 children were in care – more than in any year since 1997. This means that at any one time approximately one in 200 children in England was in the care of the local authority, rather than living with their family.⁹

2 The consequences of family breakdown

These issues matter because of the staggeringly high human and financial costs they exact on families and taxpayers. Family breakdown is currently estimated to cost the country £46 billion a year – a figure that is set to rise to nearly £49 billion by the end of the Parliament¹⁰ – more than the Government spends on the whole Defence budget.¹¹

4 Ibid

5 An ONS survey (*Non-resident parental contact, 2007/8: A report on research using the National Statistics National Omnibus Survey produced on behalf of the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Children, Schools and Families*, Omnibus Survey Report No. 38, 2008 [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rellifestyles/non-residential-parental-contact/2007-08-results/non-residential-parental-contact---2007-2008-results.pdf> (29/04/13)]) found that 30 per cent of non-resident parents never saw their children, and 40 per cent saw them twice a year or less. Since there are 3.16 million children, and about 92 per cent of lone parents are lone mothers, this would mean that over a million children see their non-resident father twice a year or less, and at least 802,387 never see them, although this figure does not include all those children in stepfamilies who do not see their non-resident father. Further, the Fatherhood Institute estimates that somewhere between 1 and 2 million children have no contact with their father. Fatherhood Institute policy briefing – see *Addressing Fatherlessness: how Government can strengthen the active presence of fathers in their children's lives*, October 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2012/addressing-fatherlessness-a-fatherhood-institute-policy-briefing/> (15/04/13)]. Since there is a lack of reliable data on this, we stick to the conservative side of the estimate, corroborated by the ONS survey.

6 Goodman A, and Greaves E, 2010, *Cohabitation, Marriage and Relationship Stability*, Institute for Fiscal Studies Briefing Note 107

7 UNICEF, *Child well-being in rich countries: A comparative overview*, Innocenti Report Card 11, April 2013

8 See page 40

9 Department for Education (DfE), *Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England (including adoption and care leavers) – year ending 31 March 2012* [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-looked-after-by-local-authorities-in-england-including-adoption> (06/02/13)]. There are 13.3 million dependent children in the UK (ONS, *Families and Households 2012* Op. cit), and 67,000 of these represents about 1 in 200.

10 Relationships Foundation, *Counting the Cost of Family Failure 2013 Update* (Research Note), Cambridge: Relationships Foundation, 2013 p5

11 HM Treasury, *Spending Review Statistical Annex*, Table A.9: Total Departmental Expenditure Limits, 2010 [accessed via: http://cdn.hm-treasury.gov.uk/sr2010_annexa.pdf (22/02/13)]

The costs to individuals are even greater. As was argued in our first report, family breakdown is one of the pathways to poverty. Lone-parent households are 2.5 times more likely to be in poverty than couple families¹² and in 2011, 41 per cent of children from lone-parent families were in households living on less than 60 per cent of median income, against 23 per cent of children from two-parent families.¹³

Family breakdown is also very closely associated with poor outcomes for children. Children who experience family breakdown are more likely to experience behavioural problems; perform less well in school; need more medical treatment; leave school and home earlier; become sexually active, pregnant or a parent at an early age; and report more depressive symptoms and higher levels of smoking, drinking and other drug use during adolescence and adulthood.¹⁴

Adults, likewise, can suffer greatly. Family breakdown can lead to worse mental health – especially depression and lack of self-esteem, which can then hinder effective parenting and lead to multiple relationship transitions – and poverty. The CSJ has argued for the need to understand the bidirectional causal relationship between poverty and family breakdown: on the one hand, financial pressures can put additional stress on relationships and increase conflict; on the other hand, family breakdown itself can lead to and entrench poverty.

This can happen directly, through diminished income and fewer opportunities to increase work due to childcare responsibilities, or indirectly, through complex, interconnected factors such as poorer parental mental and emotional health which can follow relationship breakdown. This may lead to harsher parenting or neglect, and consequently poorer children's mental and emotional health, behaviour problems and failure at school, lack of work opportunities, etc. Family breakdown can be, therefore, *both* a driver *and* an effect of poverty, and can entrench disadvantage.

3 The causes of family breakdown

There are complex social reasons behind the long-term rise in family breakdown. These include a cultural shift in family formation away from married-couple families towards increasing numbers of lone parents and sole registrations of births as well as cohabiting families. Over the last 40 years, the proportion of the adult population who are married has declined from about 70 per cent of the adult population to less than half, while the percentage of lone parents has almost doubled.¹⁵ The rise in cohabitation is the cultural trend

12 CSJ, *Fractured Families*, London: CSJ, December 2006

13 Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), *Households Below Average Income: An analysis of the income distribution 1994/95–2010/11*, Table 4.5db Percentage of children in low-income groups by various family and household characteristics, United Kingdom, London: DWP, June 2012

14 Pryor J, and Rodgers B, *Children in Changing Families*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001 cited in Mooney A, Oliver C and Smith M, *Impact of Family Breakdown on Children's Well-Being: Evidence Review*, London: Department for Children, Schools and Families, June 2009

15 Murphy M, The evolution of cohabitation in Britain 1960–95, *Population Studies*, 54, 2000, cited in 'Cohabitation and marriage in Britain since the 1970s', *Population Trends* nr 145, Office for National Statistics, Autumn 2011; Beaujouan E and Bhrolchain MN Op. cit

that has changed most significantly: fewer than one in 100 adults under the age of 50 in the 1960s, compared to one in six today.¹⁶

Key life transitions such as the birth of a child are stressful, and additional pressures caused by lack of resources due to reduced household income or the costs of having a baby, can make relationships very hard to sustain.

Similarly, personal experience has a part to play. Young people who grow up in environments where unstable and informal relationships are the norm can find it extremely difficult to form permanent, good quality relationships of their own. Poor self-esteem – often partly due to father absence – make it more likely that young people become involved in abusive relationships and repeat patterns of unstable and dysfunctional relationships.

There are also a number of crucial areas in which public services may inadvertently inhibit family formation and even encourage family breakdown. Fathers frequently feel excluded from services that are largely geared towards mothers and children and which – in some cases – automatically suspect men of domestic or child abuse. There is often a perception that a man's role is one of providing but not nurturing and caring, or that positive father involvement can be an added bonus rather than something obligatory.

This is also further reinforced by law, which does not require unmarried fathers to be named on the child's birth certificate. This can be detrimental to children's development, given the important role fathers have to play. Fathers are important to children's emotional and physical health, educational attainment and behaviour; and their implicit exclusion is therefore cause for concern.

A major problem within the existing welfare system is the couple penalty. Any savings couples receiving welfare make by living together, in terms of rent and bills, are more than swallowed up and the tax and benefit system does not even encourage parents to live together. Universal Credit will eliminate some of the benefits which have been most responsible for couple penalties, but some barriers to couple formation may remain, as a lone parent can earn more before benefits taper off than a couple. This is particularly concerning where children are involved, given the importance, ideally, of both parents for children's wellbeing.

Another perceived penalty which can undermine couple formation in poorer communities involves social housing. Where two people both living in social housing want to move in together, they are faced with the prospect of losing one of their houses – moving in together constitutes a significant risk.

Finally, the UK tax system provides no recognition of the social, economic and health benefits of marriage – the most stable family form – as such is an outlier across Europe and the wider grouping of OECD countries.

¹⁶ Beaujouan E and Bhrolchain MN, 'Cohabitation and marriage in Britain since the 1970s', *Population Trends* nr 145, Office for National Statistics, Autumn 2011

4 Highly vulnerable families

One of the Government's key social justice reforms has been the creation of the 'Troubled Families' programme which sets out to 'turn around' the lives of 120,000 families with the most complex and entrenched difficulties by 2015, through a tried and tested model of intensive, whole-family intervention. The CSJ is extremely supportive of the aims of the programme and sincerely hopes that funding for it will continue beyond 2015 when the current budget expires. However our research has suggested that the criteria for including families are too narrow, and miss many vulnerable families, and that so far the programme has not made full use of local knowledge and expertise from the voluntary sector in finding the most troubled families. Furthermore, whilst the aim of turning around these families is admirable, the time-frame is unrealistic, and it is imperative that funds for family intervention projects continue into the next parliament.

5 Next steps

Over the next year the working group will continue to look into the following areas with a view to making recommendations to political parties in advance of the next General Election in 2015:

I. Removing barriers to stability, including:

■ *Welfare and social housing*

This will look at how we can ensure that couple penalties are adequately tackled in Universal Credit so that there are no perverse incentives to live apart. We will also look at reducing the risk of one person leaving social housing to live with children and partners.

■ *Public services and legislation*

We will look at how law and public services can encourage strong and stable families. Arguably, local authorities should be held responsible for reducing family breakdown as part of their local child poverty strategies and services such as Sure Start could be increasingly family-focussed, for example by including relationship support for parents.

■ *Fatherhood*

With increasing and already high numbers of children growing up in homes with little or no contact with their fathers, we will consider how better to ensure that fathers – both those still in relationships with their child(ren)'s mother and those who have separated – can be engaged in raising their children. This will also include looking at Contact Orders, registration law, and how Child Maintenance can maintain the principle of contribution without stripping fathers of the means to spend time with their children.

■ *Removing barriers to marriage*

Given that many people from poorer backgrounds aspire to get married but feel there are issues that prevent them from doing so, this section will consider what can be done to remove these obstacles.

2. Work with families with multiple complex needs, including:

- How the most vulnerable families can be reached and supported.
- Taking stock of the challenges faced by the Troubled Families programme, the Working Group will map out how it should be focussed going forward and into the next Parliament, including how both parents can be helped to work together where appropriate to turn the family around, drawing in fathers where they are absent.
- The role of extended families and kinship care.

Breakthrough Britain II

When the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) published *Breakthrough Britain* in 2007, the British political landscape was fundamentally altered. The policy-making context was changed and a tired national debate about tackling poverty was reinvigorated.

These experience-led reports – shaped by mass domestic and international evidence-gathering – presented an unprecedented diagnosis of poverty in the UK and outlined a fresh vision for fighting it. This vision rested on recognising that using money alone to combat disadvantage, as important as income is, is too narrow an approach.

Through these conclusions and the thousands of people who shaped them, the CSJ demonstrated the need to identify and tackle the root causes of poverty, not merely the symptoms. We showed that for too long, five pathways to poverty have characterised life in our poorest neighbourhoods. These are: family breakdown; economic dependency and worklessness; educational failure; drug and alcohol addiction and serious personal debt. These pathways are interconnected. For example, a child who experiences family breakdown is less likely to achieve at school. Someone who fails at school is less likely to enter work and more likely to be on benefits. Consequently they are then more likely to live in financial poverty and debt. And so the cycle continues.

As a result of *Breakthrough Britain*, a debate was initiated about social and family breakdown in the UK. Yet much has changed in the policy-making environment since we published in 2007. In particular, the economic crisis has led to one of the deepest and longest recessions on record and there will be significant public expenditure reductions to deal with the national deficit. We also have the first Coalition Government since 1945.

However, what remains clear within the debate about putting Britain on a secure financial footing is the need for a social recovery, as well as an economic one. The costs of social breakdown are significant and often preventable. The CSJ believes it is time to revisit *Breakthrough Britain*. In view of the monumental challenges now confronting policy-makers and society, such a review would lay fresh foundations for tackling poverty in an age of austerity. Once again, this must be based on recognition of poverty's root causes.

The CSJ has conducted a national audit of social breakdown for each of the six policy areas which comprise *Breakthrough Britain II*. This 'State of the Nation' report sets out the key problems and trends in relation to family breakdown and will act as a 'springboard' for the main report to be published in Spring 2014, comprising a number of policy recommendations for government in relation to each of the policy areas.

Introduction

Stable families are at the core of a strong society. It is within the family environment that an individual's physical, emotional, and mental development occurs, where we learn to love, understand right from wrong, and we acquire fundamental social skills such as sharing, empathising, self-control and communication. The qualities we learn as children enable us to develop and flourish at school, engage positively in work, fulfil our potential and grow into adults who are fully integrated into society. A secure, nurturing, loving, stable family environment is therefore crucial and its absence has a profoundly damaging effect on children, families and wider society.

Yet over the past 40 years, there has been an escalation in family breakdown across the UK. Because parental relationships lay the foundations for children's social and emotional development, it is extremely concerning that by the time children are 15, almost half will no longer be living with both their mother and father.¹⁷

'By the end of a childhood a youngster is considerably more likely to have a television in their bedroom than a father at home.'¹⁸

The effects of this breakdown on children are often severe. Young people from fractured families are twice as likely as those from 'intact' families to have behavioural problems.¹⁹ They are more liable to suffer depression, turn to drugs and alcohol, perform worse at school²⁰ and have a far higher risk of living in relative income poverty.²¹

The economic consequences of family breakdown are staggering. The Government is estimated to spend a staggering £46 billion every year responding to family breakdown –

17 HM Government, *Social Justice Outcomes Framework*, London: The Stationery Office, October 2012

18 See below, p 35

19 Meltzer H et al, *Mental Health of Children and Adolescents in Great Britain*, Norwich: The Stationery Office, 2000; Hansen K, Jones E, Joshi H and Budge D, *Millennium Cohort Study Fourth Survey: A User's Guide to Initial Findings*, London: Centre for Longitudinal Studies, 2010 (2nd edition), pp 165–176

20 Rodgers B and Pryor J, *Divorce and Separation: The Outcomes for Children*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), 1998

21 41 per cent of children in lone-parent families live in households with the poorest 20 per cent of incomes, compared to 23 per cent of children in couple families; DWP, *Households Below Average Income, An analysis of the income distribution 1994/95–2009/10*, Table 4.14ts, London: Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 2011

at a cost of £1,541 to each tax payer (see page 52 for the breakdown).²² And this cost is increasing: since 2009 this figure has increased by 24 per cent.²³

We 'should be as troubled by the shortage of decent relationships as that of decent jobs; concerned about the distribution of care as well as income'.²⁴

In 2006 and 2007 the CSJ published two key reports on the state of family and social breakdown in the UK. The first report found that:

'Successive governments have neglected to consider adequately the distinct possibility that much breakdown might be preventable and that many marriages and partnerships might be worth saving, in financial as well as emotional terms.'²⁵

On the eve of the 2010 General Election, David Cameron, then Leader of the Opposition, gave a speech acknowledging that UK governments had failed to address family breakdown and pledged to place the agenda at the heart of his future administration.²⁶

'We have a higher rate of teenage pregnancy than other countries in Europe, we have higher rates of family breakdown than other countries in Europe, we have the worst divorce rate in Europe.'

'... let me just say something about the organisation that I think is the most important of all in fighting for, and delivering, a responsible society and that is the family. I want the next Government to be the most family-friendly Government we've ever had in this country and that is about everything we do to support families and it's about supporting every sort of family.'

22 Relationships Foundation, *Counting the Cost of Family Failure 2013 Update (Research Note)*, Cambridge: Relationships Foundation, 2013

23 Ibid

24 Moullin S, 'Why Progressives Should be Pro-Family', *The Political Quarterly*, 83, 3, July–September 2012, pp512–519

25 CSJ, *Fractured Families* London: CSJ, December 2006; CSJ, *Breakthrough Britain: family breakdown*, London: CSJ, July 2007

26 Speech by Rt. Hon David Cameron, *Mending our broken society*, 22 January 2010 [accessed via: http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2010/01/David_Cameron_Mending_our_Broken_Society.aspx (10/05/13)]

In power, however, the family stability agenda has barely been mentioned. Indeed, although the landmark *Social Justice Strategy* recognises that 'past government policy across a range of areas, from welfare to the legal system, has exacerbated the rising trend in family breakdown'²⁷ comprehensive action to tackle existing policy barriers to family stability has been almost entirely absent. The Government has also failed to provide any kind of balanced support for 'stay-at-home' parents.

The Government has admitted that it is spending just £30 million over the course of the Parliament on preventing family breakdown – or about 0.01 per cent of the £46 billion costs it incurs to the taxpayer.²⁸ This is not to say that the programmes covered by this modest spending are not useful. The Government has also launched a £14 million 'Innovation Fund' that will test out the most effective means of helping separating and separated parents work together in the best interests of their children.²⁹

Some progress has also been made in seeking to improve the lives of individuals who have suffered from intense family breakdown, or those who are especially vulnerable. A number of reforms have sought to improve matters for children in need – notably the Munro Review of child protection³⁰ and policies intended to increase the speed and availability of adoption for children who have been taken into care.³¹ Similarly, the Government's Troubled Families programme aims to turn around the lives of families who have severe, multiple and long-standing problems.³²

These are laudable aims, and these measures are welcome, but as nearly half of all children will see their parents split up before their fifteenth birthday, they barely scratch the surface of a problem which, under this Government, continues to grow at an alarming rate. If present trends continue throughout this Parliament, by 2015:

- The number of lone parents will have risen above 2 million for the first time (an increase of 120,000 from 2010);³³
- Over 24 per cent of all children will live in lone-parent families – about 3.2 million (a rise of 100,000 from 2010);³⁴
- The annual cost of family breakdown will have reached £49 billion;³⁵
- There will be 70,900 children in care in England (a staggering increase of 10 per cent across the parliament).³⁶

27 DWP, *Social Justice: transforming lives*, London: The Stationery Office, March 2012

28 Hansard, Written answers, 6 December 2012, HC Deb c867w [accessed via: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm121206/text/121206w0002.htm#121206w0002.htm_wqn39 (10/05/13)]

29 DWP, *Innovation Fund: Help and Support for Separated Families*, 9 April 2013, [accessed via: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/supplying-dwp/what-we-buy/general-goods-and-services/innovation-fund-separated-fam/> (11/06/13)]

30 Munro, E, *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report*, London: Department for Education (DfE), May 2011

31 DfE, *An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay*, 2011 [accessed via: <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/a/an%20action%20plan%20for%20adoption.pdf> (22/05/13)]

32 Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), *Helping troubled families turn their lives around* [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/helping-troubled-families-turn-their-lives-around> (08/05/13)]

33 Projection based on average increase since 2000, ONS, *Statistical Bulletin: Families and Households*, 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/family-demography/families-and-households/2012/stb-families-households.html> (03/04/13)]

34 Ibid

35 The Relationships Foundation, *Counting the Cost of Family Failure 2013 Update*, Cambridge: Relationships Foundation, March 2012

36 Projection based on DfE, *Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2012*, Statistical Release, 25 September, 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001084/sfr20-2012v3.pdf> (04/04/13)]

Without urgent attention to the scale of this issue, these problems will only continue to deteriorate.

If the Government has side-lined this agenda, the public has not. Polling shows that people care deeply about this subject and believe in the importance and necessity of stable families.³⁷

- 89 per cent of people agree (52 per cent strongly agree) that 'if we want to have any hope of mending our broken society, family and parenting is where we've got to start';
- 81 per cent of people think that it is important for children to grow up living with both parents;
- 31 per cent believe that having two parents at home is *the most important* thing for children;
- 60 per cent believe marriage has become less important and this is a bad thing;
- 57 per cent would like to get married at some point in the future;
- 95 per cent believe that fathers are important to a child's wellbeing;
- But 50 per cent believe that this and the previous Government's policies treat fathers as not important.

Family breakdown is one of the most uncontrolled problems facing society today. It is extraordinarily difficult to crack; few administrations around the world have succeeded in even denting the problem. But more worryingly, few have really tried. Governments have given up on this problem, either because they have seen family breakdown as a matter of personal responsibility and choice, or because they have not valued stable families, or because they consider the problem too complex to solve.

This report challenges governments present and future to face up to challenge of reversing this trend before more and more families and communities suffer from its miserable consequences.

As the Department for Work and Pensions has recently said:

'The family is the first and most important building block in a child's life and any government serious about delivering Social Justice must seek to strengthen families.'³⁸

This is a fine sentiment indeed. But principles need to be realised in practice, and, overall, the Government's actions thus far have not measured up to this admission of the centrality of family.

This paper continues the process started with the last Breakthrough Britain report, of holding governments to account for what they are doing to strengthen the family in the UK. It re-examines the damage that family breakdown is causing to individuals, communities and the country.

³⁷ CSJ/YouGov polling of 1,722 British adults, November 2012

³⁸ DWP, *Social Justice: transforming lives*, Op. cit

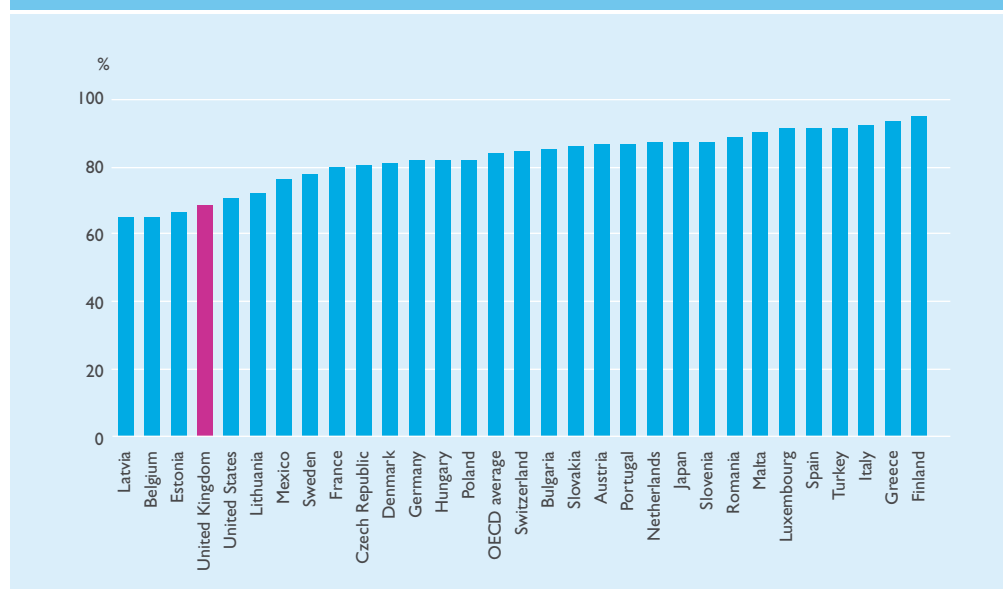
This paper draws its evidence from three main sources: academic literature review, official statistics, and anecdotal qualitative evidence from practitioners given to Working Group evidence hearings. The evidence hearings were attended by national and local charities, and national and local government representatives. A subsequent paper will consult practitioners more widely in search of good practice and policy solutions, and will make recommendations on how government, commissioners and the community itself can do more to support and strengthen families.

chapter one

Family breakdown in the UK

Today, seven years on since our 2006 report, *Fractured Families*, the UK is experiencing historically unprecedented levels of family breakdown and has one of the highest rates in the Western world. About 300,000 families separate each year and over four million children do not live with both their parents.³⁹ At nearly a third of under-fifteen year olds, this is almost double the OECD average.⁴⁰

Figure 1: OECD countries' percentages of households where both mother and father of children aged 0–14 are in the same household⁴¹



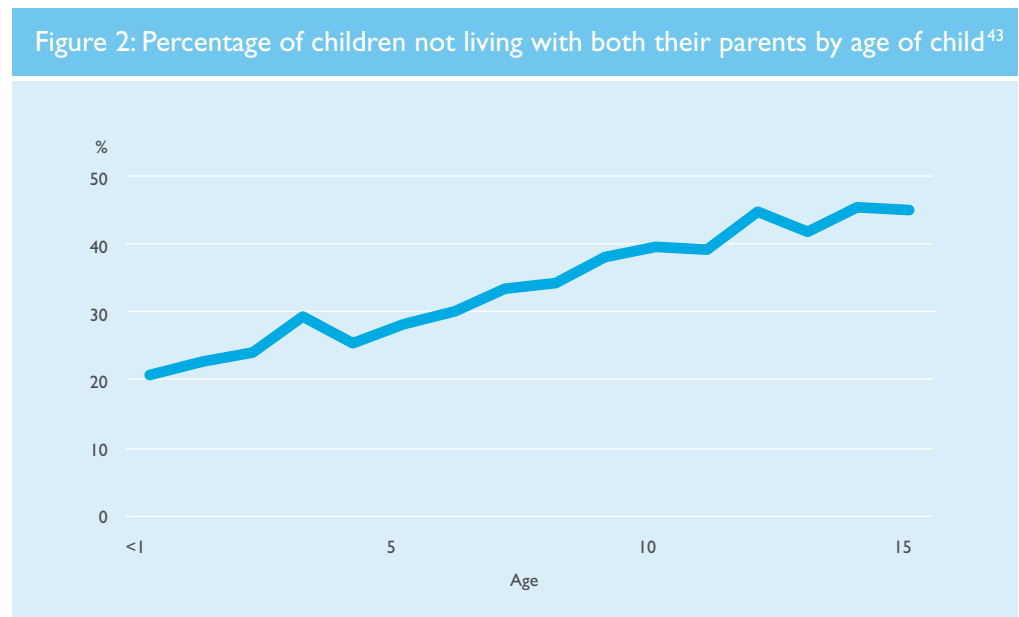
39 DWP, *Social Justice: transforming lives – One year on*, London: The Stationery Office, 7 May 2013

40 OECD, *OECD Family Database*, SF1.3: 'Living arrangements of children', 1 November 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/42293565.xls> (03/04/13)]

41 Ibid

One in five new-borns in the UK do not live with both parents. By the time they are 15 this has increased dramatically: nearly half (45 per cent) of all children aged 15 are not living with both their parents.⁴²

As figure 2 shows, by the age of five, over a quarter of children do not live with both birth parents. By the time children reach 15 this has increased to 45 per cent.



Source: Understanding Society wave 1 (2009–10). Percentage includes children born into or living in lone-parent families, step-families, adoptive families, foster families or those who are in the care of relatives.

This matters because children's life chances are affected by the stability of their family environment, and the evidence shows that children growing up without both parents tend to have far worse outcomes than those who grow up with both parents.

1.1 The rise of instability

Unstable relationships have serious consequences for both the adults and the children involved. The link between family instability and poor child outcomes, and between family instability and family structure, is significant. Family instability – which we consider only a part of family breakdown – can be understood as 'whether or not the parent(s) with whom a child lives changes over time'.⁴⁴ The CSJ identified rising family instability in our 2007 report *Breakthrough Britain: Family Breakdown* and made recommendations to government with the aim of countering this damaging, long-term trend. Since then, family instability has continued to increase dramatically, as the data in the rest of this chapter will show.

42 DWP, *Social Justice Outcomes Framework*, Op. cit. p7 (This figure includes those living in foster families, adoptive families, and those in the care of relatives, as well as lone-parent families and step-families)

43 Reproduced from DWP, *Social Justice Outcomes Framework*, Op. cit.

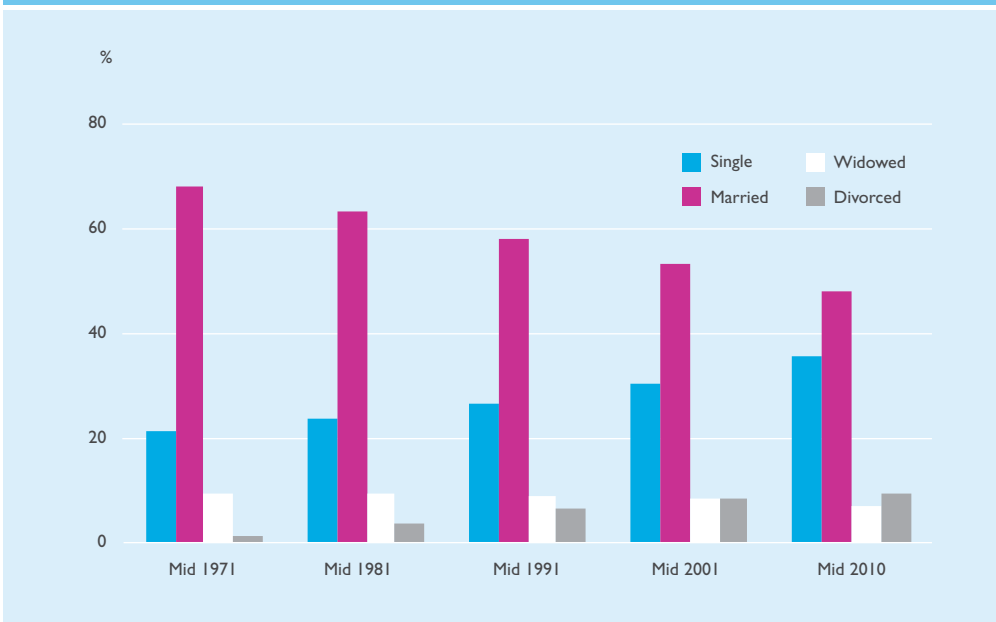
44 Craigie T-A, Brooks-Gunn J, Waldfogel J, 'Family structure, family stability and outcomes of five-year-old children', *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 1, 1, 2012, pp43–61

1.1.1 Household composition

The long-term trend in the UK has been a steady decrease in the proportion of married households, a related increase in the level of single people and an enormous expansion in the proportion of people cohabiting.

The short-term trends point to a continuation of this long-term picture, and to further family breakdown. Since 2007, the proportion of married couple families with dependent children has seen a small decrease from 62 per cent of all families to 60 per cent in 2012.⁴⁵

Figure 3: Adult population by marital status, (percentages) 1971–2010 (England and Wales)⁴⁶



The graph above shows that the percentage of those who are married has declined from almost 70 per cent of the adult population in 1971 to less than half in 2010, and the proportion of single adults has seen more than a 50 per cent increase. Whilst divorce has increased, divorcees are still less than ten per cent of the total adult population.

1.1.2 Families with dependent children

Over the same period there has been a significant increase in the proportion of children growing up in lone-parent households. Whilst the majority of children (over 3 in 5)⁴⁷ still live with married parents, more children are living with cohabiting unmarried parents or only one parent.

45 ONS, *Statistical Bulletin: Families and Households*, 2012, [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcn%3A77-278923> (03/04/13)]

46 ONS, *Population Estimates by Marital Status – Mid 2010*, 29 November 2011 [accessed via: http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_244768.pdf (04/04/13)]

47 ONS, *Statistical Bulletin: Families and Households*, 2012 Op. cit.

Figure 4: Households with dependent children 1971–2011⁴⁸

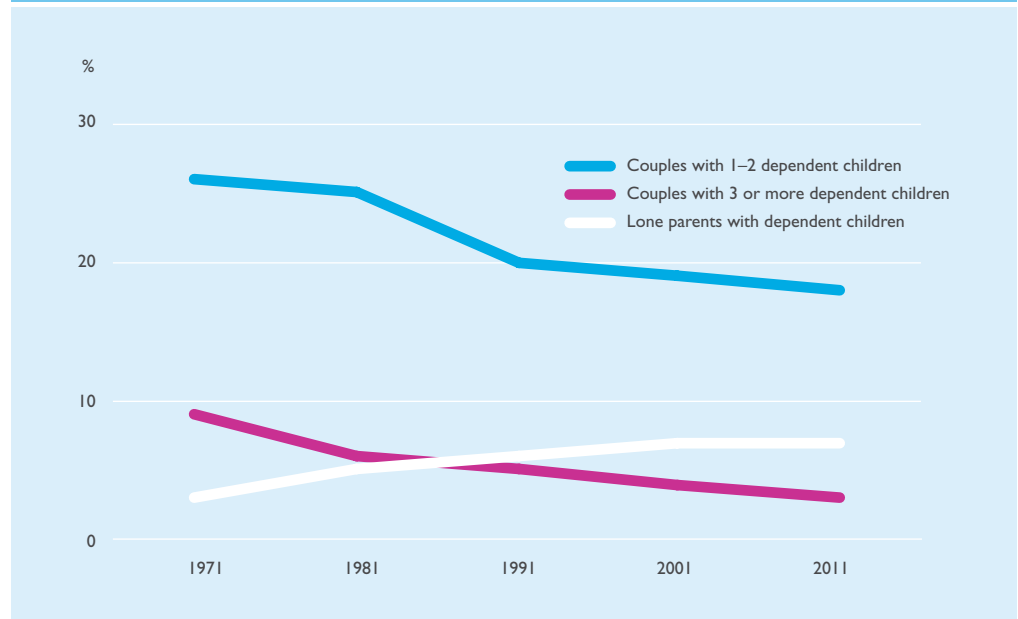
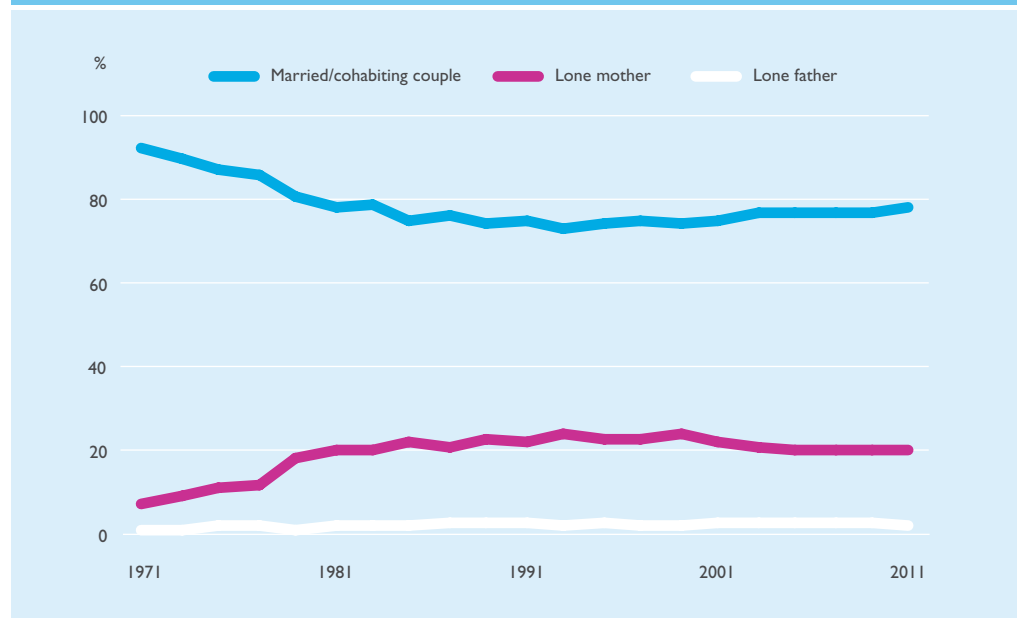


Figure 4 demonstrates clearly the fall in couple *households* with children, against the rise in lone-parent households over the last 40 years. Figure 5 shows a similar picture of changes in *family* type.

Figure 5: Families with dependent children⁴⁹

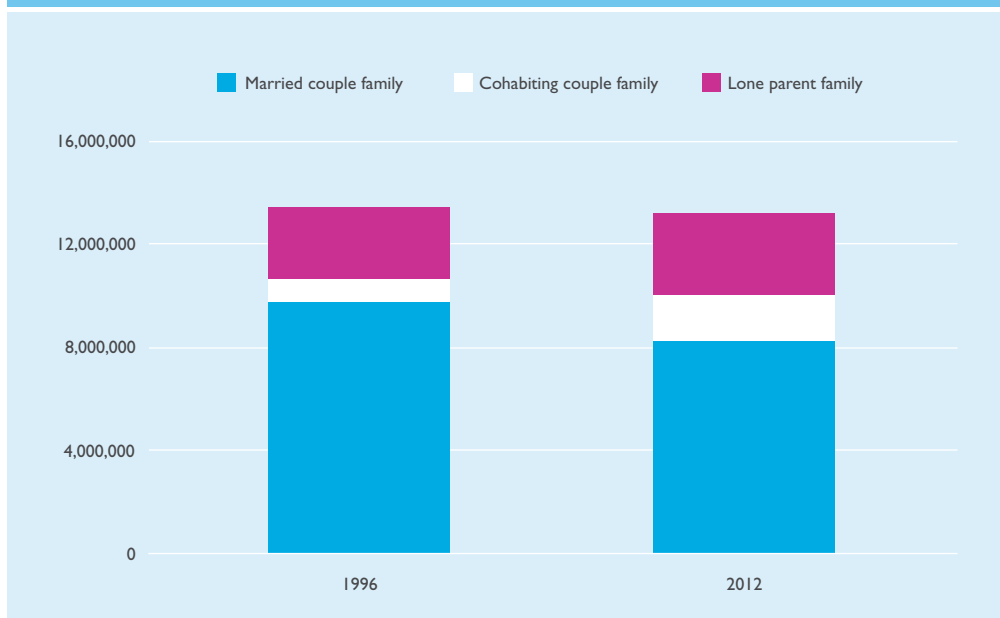


48 ONS, *Measuring National Well-being: Households and Families, 2012*, 26 April 2012 [accessed via: http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171766_259965.pdf (04/04/13)]

49 ONS, *General Lifestyle Survey Overview: A Report on the General Lifestyle Survey 2011*, Chapter 3 – Households, families and people, 7 March 2013 [accessed via: http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_302210.pdf (10/04/13)]

Between 1996 and 2012, the number of lone parents increased by 25 per cent to just under two million,⁵⁰ and lone parents now represent over one quarter of all families with dependent children.⁵¹

Figure 6: Dependent children by family type⁵²



We can clearly see in figure 6 above that while the majority (62 per cent) of dependent children still live in married-couple families the proportions of dependent children living in cohabiting families has increased significantly (in fact it has doubled), married couples with children have decreased and numbers of those living in lone-parent families has risen by 15 per cent.

In 2012:

- According to the most recent data, 3,160,000 children (almost 24 per cent of all dependent children) now live with only one parent;
- 1,833,000 lived in cohabiting families up from 908,000 in 1996; and
- 8.26 million children lived in married couple families, down from 9.74 million in 1996.⁵³

50 ONS, *Statistical Bulletin: Families and Households*, Op. cit.

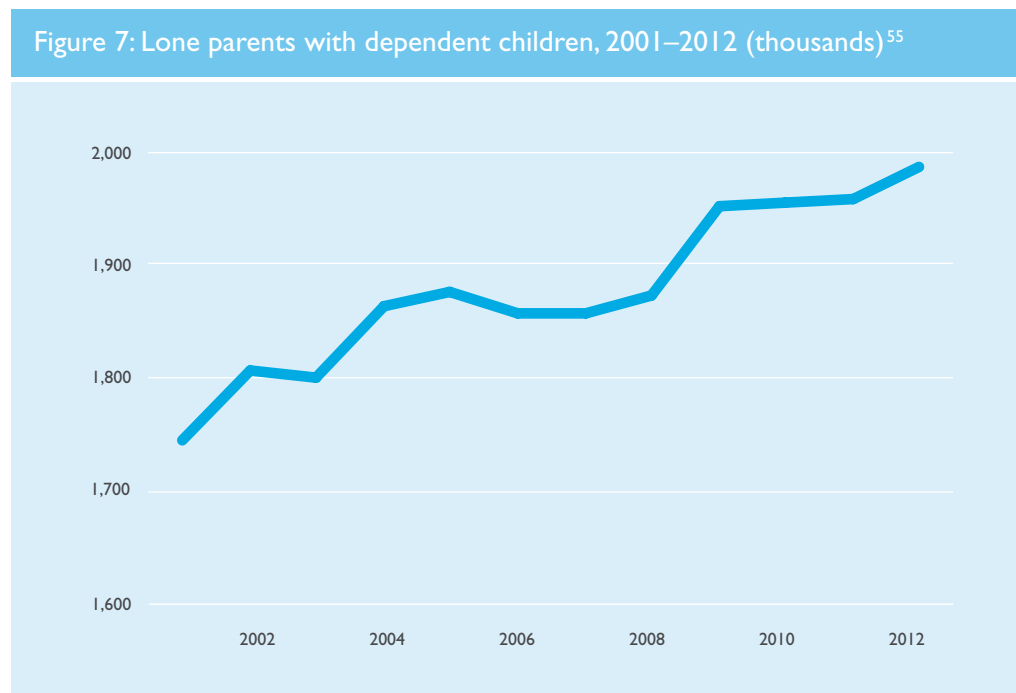
51 Ibid

52 ONS, *Families and Households 2012*, 1 November 2012 Table 4, [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/family-demography/families-and-households/2012/rft-tables.xls> (03/04/13)]

53 Ibid

1.1.3 Lone-parent households

As stated above, 26 per cent of all families with dependent children in the UK today are headed by lone parents. The Office for National Statistics estimates that the number of lone-parent households with dependent children has increased from 1,631,000 in 1996 to 1,986,000 in 2012 – an average since 1996 of almost 25,000 extra lone-parent households every year, or 58 every day.⁵⁴ While this figure is slightly skewed by a larger increase in 1998, taking a 10-year average, the figure is still almost 21,000 more lone-parent households with children each year:



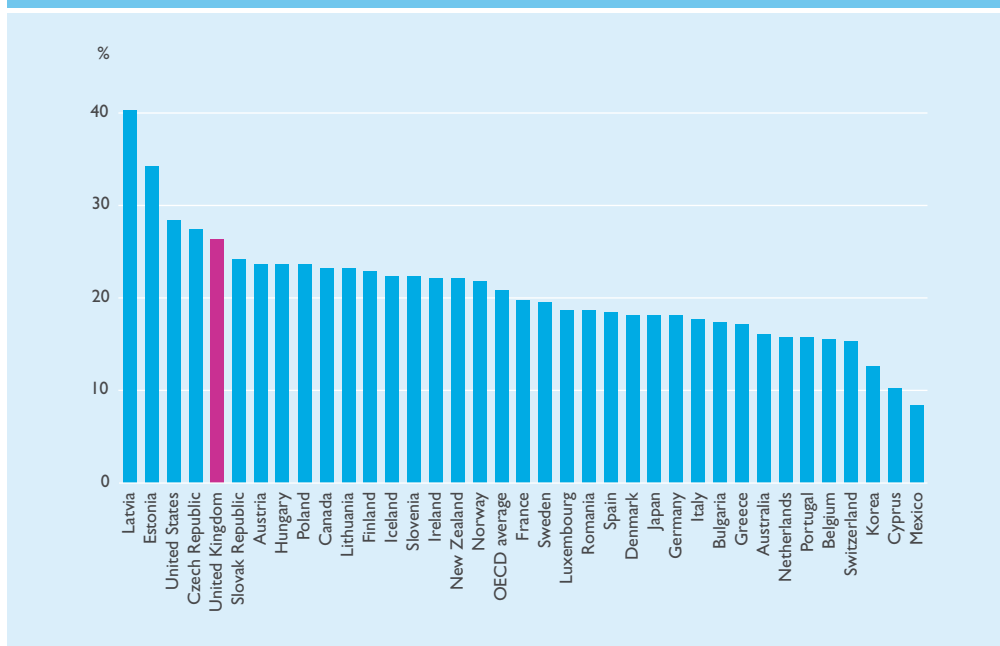
Although international comparisons are not straightforward due to definitional differences, the proportion of lone-parent households in the UK is much higher than the European average; of EU member states, only Ireland has a higher proportion.⁵⁶ The UK also has the fifth highest percentage of lone parents in the OECD.

54 ONS, *Families and Households 2012*, 1 November 2012 Table 3: Families with dependent children by family type and number of dependent children [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/family-demography/families-and-households/2012/ft-tables.xls> (03/04/13)]

55 ONS, *Statistical Bulletin: Families and Households*, 2012, Op. cit.

56 ONS, *Statistical Bulletin: Families and households, 2001–2011*, 19 January 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/family-demography/families-and-households/2011/stb-families-households.html#tab-International-comparisons-of-household-type> (10/05/13)]

Figure 8: Lone parents as percentage of all households with children: international comparisons⁵⁷



Rates of lone parenthood vary with ethnicity. In 2006 a geographical study of lone parenthood found that, controlling for economic variables, lone parenthood was higher than expected in some areas with large black ethnic populations such as Lambeth, and lower than expected in some with large Asian populations such as Tower Hamlets.⁵⁸ More recently, an analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study in 2010 found that single motherhood was most common among Black and mixed ethnic race mothers.⁵⁹

Since the CSJ published *Breakthrough Britain* in 2007, the proportion of lone-parent families has increased from 24.8 per cent to 25.7 per cent.⁶⁰ Although a small percentage change, this represents a significant number – the UK has seen an additional 100,000 lone parents. Under the Coalition Government, the UK has seen an additional 15,500 lone-parent families with dependent children per year from 1,955,000 to 1,986,000, or 42 every day.⁶¹

Taking the most local view possible (Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs)), the areas with the highest levels of lone parenthood have proportions that are well above (three times higher than) the LSOA average of 24 per cent.⁶² In the top area, three-quarters of all families with dependent children are headed by lone parents, and in the top six, the proportion is two-thirds.

57 OECD, *OECD Family Database*, SF1.1: Family size and household composition, Table SF1.1.B: Households with children, OECD, Paris, 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/42293876.xls> (10/04/13)]

58 CSJ, *Fractured Families*, December 2006, London: CSJ, p40–41

59 Kiernan K and Holmes J, *Fragile Families in the UK: evidence from the Millennium Cohort Study*, Draft report, June 2010 [accessed via: <http://www.york.ac.uk/media/spsw/documents/research-and-publications/HolmesKiernan2010FragileFamiliesInTheUKMillenniumCohort.pdf> (02/04/13)]

60 ONS, *Statistical Bulletin: Families and Households*, 2012, Op cit.

61 This is based just on the last two years' data. Taking a longer-term view, the number is rising by almost 21,000 each year.

62 ONS, *Nomis: 2011 Census*, ks105ew Household Composition [accessed via: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/> (17/05/13)]

Figure 9: Top 20 UK LSOAs for single parenthood, 2011⁶³

2011 super output area – lower layer	Ward	One family only: Married or same-sex civil partnership couple: Dependent children	One family only: Cohabiting couple: Dependent children	One family only: Lone parent: Dependent children	Other household types: With dependent children	Percentage of households with dependent children headed by single parent
Sheffield 075G	Manor Castle	29	18	182	15	75
Liverpool 050J	Riverside	24	14	106	6	71
Birmingham 138C	Ladywood	3	4	19	1	70
Wirral 011C	Bidston and St James	23	30	143	9	70
Bristol 054B	Lawrence Hill	12	3	36	3	67
Liverpool 038C	Wavertree	43	22	142	8	66
Knowsley 008B	Stockbridge	43	16	135	13	65
Gosport 008G	Town	15	13	54	1	65
Liverpool 022D	Kirkdale	45	20	171	31	64
Liverpool 012C	County	41	24	124	6	64
Knowsley 006B	Stockbridge	31	10	98	17	63
County Durham 025B	Easington	32	21	104	9	63
Birmingham 121B	Brandwood	32	30	134	18	63
Bristol 023G	Ashley	25	6	77	15	63
Liverpool 012A	County	32	28	112	7	63
Middlesbrough 004C	Pallister	41	42	179	25	62
Wirral 008C	Seacombe	40	36	144	11	62
Bath and North East Somerset 009C	Kingsmead	17	8	56	9	62
Camden 024B	King's Cross	37	6	102	19	62
Cardiff 013D	Trowbridge	43	53	180	14	62

While the national picture is concerning enough, in the most affected local communities, lone parenthood is the norm.

In the next section we look at the levels of father absence and the particular effects that lack of father involvement can have on children's lives. While there is no data on father absence at a local level, there is local data on fatherless households – an important and very large subset of lone-parent households. The table below shows the local communities where lone parenthood is most pronounced and how many families in the area are headed by a lone mother, thus giving a picture of where in the UK father-absent households are most prevalent.

Figure 10: Top 20 UK LSOAs for fatherless households⁶⁴

2011 super output area – lower layer	Ward	Families with dependent children	Families headed by a lone mother	Percentage of households with dependent children headed by lone mother
Liverpool 050J	Riverside	150	97	65
Birmingham 138C	Ladywood	27	17	63
Wirral 011C	Bidston and St James	205	129	63
Camden 024B	King's Cross	164	101	62
Liverpool 038C	Wavertree	215	130	60
Middlesbrough 004C	Pallister	287	173	60
Cardiff 013D	Trowbridge	290	172	59
Liverpool 006C	Warbreck	243	144	59
Liverpool 022D	Kirkdale	267	158	59
Cardiff 039E	Ely	322	190	59
Liverpool 014A	Kirkdale	233	136	58
Birmingham 022B	Kingstanding	324	189	58
Nottingham 005C	Bulwell	225	131	58
Wirral 011D	Bidston and St James	344	200	58
Gosport 008G	Town	83	48	58
Liverpool 024C	Everton	227	131	58
Knowsley 006B	Stockbridge	156	90	58
Liverpool 012A	County	179	103	58
Knowsley 008B	Stockbridge	207	119	57
Liverpool 012C	County	195	112	57

Thus in the most affected areas, just under two-thirds of households with dependent children are headed by single mothers and do not have a father living in the family. The devastating effects this can have in terms of children's life chances and entrenching disadvantage will be explored in Chapter 2.

1.1.4 Father involvement

1.1.4.1 Father involvement after separation

In practice, the rise in lone-parent households has meant an increase in the number of young people growing up without fathers living at home, and a smaller but still worrying number growing up without positive father involvement. In 2012, 92 per cent of lone parents with dependent children were mothers.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ ONS, Nomis: 2011 Census, ks105ew Household Composition and 2011 Census, ks107ew Lone-parent households with dependent children [accessed via: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/> (17/05/13)]

⁶⁵ ONS, *Families and Households, 2012*, Op. cit. Table 2

Even in intact families there are degrees of father involvement and we must recognise the spectrum. The Millennium Cohort Study suggests that as many as four in ten children being brought up by their mothers have no contact with their fathers at all.⁶⁶ Since in 2012 there were 3,160,000 dependent children in lone-parent families,⁶⁷ this means that 1,162,880 children are estimated never to see their father. The Fatherhood Institute puts this number higher, reporting that by the time they are 16, one sixth of all children did not see their father at all.⁶⁸

'This means that somewhere between one and two million children in the UK at any one time, are estimated to not be in meaningful contact with their father.'⁶⁹

In 2008 the Office for National Statistics found through a representative survey of resident and non-resident parents that seven per cent of *non-resident* parents reported that they see their child less than once a year and 17 per cent never see them, but *resident* parents reported that 30 per cent of the non-resident parents never see their child. This means that somewhere between 17 and 30 per cent of non-resident parents never see their children. This rises to 40 per cent when we include those non-resident parents who see their child two times a year or less.⁷⁰ Similarly with indirect contact (that is, via telephone, email, etc.), where non-resident parents responded, 15 per cent never even had indirect contact, and where resident parents responded, 30 per cent of non-resident parents were found never to have indirect contact with their children.⁷¹ Furthermore, the ONS report detected a slight increase in the number of non-resident parents who never have contact with their child between 2002 and 2007 amongst both non-resident and resident parent samples.

Since there are 3,160,000 children living in lone-parent families, 92 per cent of lone parents are mothers,⁷² and up to 30 per cent of non-resident parents never see their child, we can estimate that up to 802,387 children in lone-parent families never see their father. However, this does not include the many children in step-families, many of whom will also not see their non-resident fathers, so we can estimate that at least this number of *all* children who do not live with their father. And the ONS survey found that the figure rises to 40 per cent when including those non-resident fathers who see their child twice a year or less – raising the estimate to over a million children who have no meaningful contact. Thus, although there is an absence of reliable data on father absence, it is clear that this is a significant problem, and at the most conservative end of the Fatherhood Institute's estimate, corroborated by the ONS survey, there are about a million children who have no contact with their father.

66 Calderwood L, 'The First Age' in Stewart I and Vaitilingam R (Eds.) *Seven Ages of Man and Woman*, Swindon: Economic and Social Research Council, 2000

67 ONS, *Families and Households 2012*, Op. cit.

68 Fatherhood Institute policy briefing, *Addressing Fatherlessness: how Government can strengthen the active presence of fathers in their children's lives* October 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2012/addressing-fatherlessness-a-fatherhood-institute-policy-briefing/> (15/04/13)] However, study was also small-scale, and as the group of fathers who have no involvement is difficult to identify, so the figure is disputed.

69 Ibid p1

70 ONS, *Non-resident parental contact, 2007/8: A report on research using the National Statistics National Omnibus Survey produced on behalf of the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Children, Schools and Families*, Omnibus Survey Report No. 38, 2008 [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rellifestyles/non-residential-parental-contact/2007-08-results/non-residential-parental-contact--2007-2008-results.pdf> (29/04/13)]

71 Ibid. The ONS survey was of non-resident *parents*. We do not know how these percentages of non-resident parent contact correlate with numbers of *children* in families who have regular or no contact with their non-resident fathers. So our estimate uses this survey as a rough proxy, assuming a ratio of 1:1.

72 Ibid

According to one survey, by the end of childhood, a youngster is considerably more likely to have a television in his bedroom than a father living at home.⁷³

However, there is a lack of hard data on the extent of father involvement which can range from full engagement to total absence and estrangement, as highlighted by the quote below.

'The term "dadlessness" can be rather histrionic. Anything less than three days' a week contact between a father and children means that the father is not recognised as a primary carer, receive no child support, are not entitled to a spare room in social housing, etc. Fathers who have up to three days' contact are therefore below the radar. We need to see the full spectrum of father involvement.'

Scott Colfer, Manager of <http://YoungDads.tv> (information service for young fathers), in evidence to the CSJ

Nevertheless, if significant numbers of non-resident parents are in no contact at all with their children, according to the studies cited above, this is clearly a major cause for concern.

75 per cent of the British public think fatherlessness is a serious problem.⁷⁴

1.1.4.2 Father involvement from birth

About 85 per cent of births are to fathers and mothers who live together (married or cohabiting).⁷⁵ Most of the remaining couples not living together are still in a relationship, and many of these move in together within nine months of the birth. Surveys have suggested that only four per cent of mothers are not involved with the father of the child, but even in this small group, ten per cent of the births were attended by the fathers suggesting some contact.⁷⁶ Thus we can infer that around one in 28 children are born into families where they are very unlikely to have any contact with their father from birth.

This is roughly confirmed by the number of sole registrations on birth certificates. If a baby is born to an unmarried mother, the mother's name is on the birth certificate automatically, whereas the father's is not. To be included, fathers have to be present at the registration of the baby or submit

73 Based on a survey carried out by ChildWise research agency that found 79 per cent of children aged 5–16 had a television in their bedrooms (cited in Margo S, *The Good Sleep Guide for Kids*, Vermilion, 2010). See *The Daily Telegraph*, *Charity shouldn't begin at home for Save the Children*, 7 September 2012

74 CSJ, *Norgrove Report fails children by not giving fathers access rights*, says Centre for Social Justice, 2011 [accessed via: <http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/media-centre/press-releases-2012-13/press-release-29> (17/01/13)]

75 Williams, R 'If we want fathers to change their ways, we need to first change ours' in Family and Parenting Institute, *Where now for parenting? Perspectives on parenting, policy and practice*, 2011, pp68–70

76 *Ibid*

a form declaring paternity, which also requires the mother's approval. In England and Wales in 2011, 41,818 children (5.7 per cent) did not have a father registered on their birth certificate.⁷⁷

Sole registration is an indicator of previous and future family instability: evidence from the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) showed that at the time of birth 51 per cent of sole registrants were not in any relationship.⁷⁸ Three years after the sole-registered birth, the natural father was only present in the household in one in six (17 per cent) of cases.⁷⁹

Male teachers

In communities where there is a shortage of father involvement, the presence of other positive male role models is vital. Considering the many hours children spend in school during the week, having a positive male role model at school may be a good opportunity to mitigate negative effects of poor, low or no father involvement.⁸⁰ Yet staggeringly, one in four English primary schools has no full-time qualified male teacher, and 80 per cent of state-educated boys are in primary schools with three or fewer full-time qualified male teachers.⁸¹

Over 360,000 boys (15 per cent) are taught in state-funded primary schools without a single full-time male teacher.⁸²

Worryingly, our research found that in one local area of particular deprivation, Lewisham, London, one third of the primary schools have no qualified, full-time male teachers.⁸³ This is concerning given that the Lewisham Deptford parliamentary constituency has the highest percentage of families with children headed by lone parents (58 per cent, compared to the UK parliamentary constituency average of 25 per cent) and Lewisham East constituency has the second highest, at 56 per cent.⁸⁴ Where there are higher numbers of lone parents and children not living with their fathers, the presence of male teachers may be more important.

Absence of male teachers is more pronounced in primary schools than secondary schools, but in November 2011 there were five publicly-funded secondary schools (not girls' schools) which had fewer than ten per cent qualified full-time male staff.⁸⁵

- 77 ONS, *Characteristics of Mother 1, England and Wales, 2011*, Table 2: Live births by age of mother and registration type, 24 January 2013 [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcn%3A77-241261> (28/01/13)]
- 78 Graham J, Creegan C, Barnard M, Mowlam A, McKay S, *Sole and joint birth registration: Exploring the circumstances, choices and motivations of unmarried parents*, the National Centre for Research and the Institute of Applied Social Sciences, University of Birmingham on behalf of the DWP, 2007 p16 [accessed via: <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/664774/sole%20and%20joint%20birth%20registration%20research%20report.pdf> (15/01/12)] NB although 51 per cent said they were not in a relationship at the time of birth, 27 per cent of those respondents did actually register the birth jointly
- 79 Ibid p29
- 80 Evening Gazette, *Are there enough men in teaching?* 14 September 2011; The Times, *Miss, I'm losing out. This classroom's too girlie*, 26 August 2011
- 81 Hansard, 'Primary Education: Teachers' HC Deb, 8 November 2012, c693W [accessed via: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm121108/text/121108w0001.htm#121108w0001.htm_wqn45 (29/04/13)]; Hansard, 'State-funded primary schools: Number of boys known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals in schools with no qualified full-time male teachers', January 2012 [accessed via: http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2012-1607/PQ126209_v2xlsx-LP.xlsx (17/01/13)]; Hansard, HC Deb, 19 December 2012, c846W [accessed via: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm121219/text/121219w0003.htm#1212203000764> (20/05/13)]
- 82 Hansard, 'State-funded primary schools: Number of boys known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals in schools with no qualified full-time male teachers', January 2012 [accessed via: http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2012-1607/PQ126209_v2xlsx-LP.xlsx (17/01/13)]
- 83 Hansard, 'Primary schools with fewer than 5 per cent, fewer than 10 per cent and no full-time male qualified teachers in service', November 2011 [accessed via: http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2012-1628/PQ_2012_126100_Revise.xlsx-LP.xlsx (17/01/13)]
- 84 ONS, Lone parent families with dependent children by parliamentary constituency, 2010 [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-what-we-do/FOI/foi-requests/people-and-places/lone-parent-families-with-dependent-children-by-constituency/index.html> (29/04/13)]
- 85 Hansard, HC Deb, 10 December 2012, c104W [accessed via: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm121210/text/121210w0004.htm#1212116000636> (20/05/13)]

1.1.5 Teenage pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy can be closely associated with previous and future family breakdown.⁸⁶ Research has found that mothers' unstable and dysfunctional family backgrounds can be associated with teenage pregnancy: common prior experiences for teenage parents 'include family conflict and breakdown, sometimes caused by violence, which could lead to living in care.'⁸⁷ Research in the US on 'fragile families' has shown that mothers in fragile families are disproportionately young and more likely to have been in their teens at the time of their first birth.⁸⁸ We go on to explore this association further, and the way in which teenage pregnancy can be a consequence of family breakdown, in Chapter 2.

Teenage pregnancy is not necessarily negative in itself, but it must be seen in the context of disadvantage and limited options open to the young women who tend to become pregnant this early. There is also a strong correlation between educational failure and teenage pregnancy. Studies have shown that over a third of girls with between one and four GCSEs at grades D to G had been pregnant at least once, against just six per cent of those with eight or more GCSEs grade A* to C.⁸⁹

There is also a particularly clear association between low income and teenage pregnancy.⁹⁰ Rates of teenage pregnancy in the most deprived ten per cent of wards are four times higher than those in the ten per cent least deprived.⁹¹ The socio-economic association is starker for teenage motherhood: the rate of births to under-18 year olds in the ten per cent most deprived wards is nine times higher than the ten per cent least deprived wards.⁹² Young women who become pregnant are more likely to be eligible for free school meals at the age of 16 and have parents with lower educational attainment who work in 'more routine occupations'.⁹³ Given this association, and the fact that it tends to lead to poorer outcomes for children, high rates of teenage pregnancies are a cause for concern.

In 2011 there were 31,051 under-18 conceptions in England and Wales, and 5,991 under-16 conceptions.⁹⁴

86 See Chapter 2

87 Harden A, et al, 'Teenage pregnancy and social disadvantages: systemic review integrating controlled trials and qualitative studies, *British Medical Journal*, 339: b4254, 2009, p6

88 Kalil A and Ryan R, 'Mothers' Economic Conditions and Sources of Support in Fragile Families', *Future of Children*, 20, 2, 2010, pp39–61

89 DfE, *Youth Court Study & Longitudinal Study of Young People In England: The Activities and Experiences of 18 year olds: England 2009*, 22 July 2010, p50

90 Social Exclusion Unit, *Social Exclusion Unit Report on Teenage Pregnancy, 1999*, Cm 4342, HMSO cited in CSJ, *Fractured Families*, December 2006

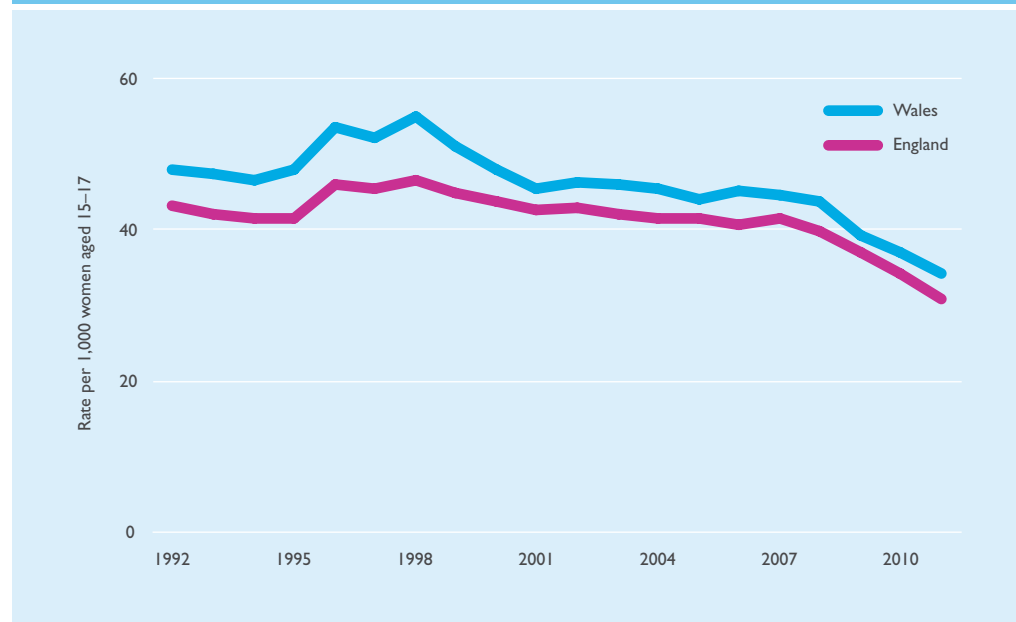
91 DfE, *Youth Court Study & Longitudinal Study of Young People In England: The Activities and Experiences of 18 year olds: England 2009*, London: DfE, 22 July 2010

92 Ibid

93 Ibid

94 ONS, *Conception Statistics, England and Wales, 2011*, Table 6, 26 February 2013 [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-294336> (07/05/13)]

Figure 11: Conception rate per 1,000 women under 18 years old (1998–2010)⁹⁵



As the graph above shows, there has been an overall decline in teenage pregnancy in England and Wales, with under-18 conceptions falling by 24 per cent between 1998 and 2010, to the lowest rate in over 20 years.^{96, 97} The national under-18 conception rate for 2011 was 30.9 conceptions per 1,000 girls aged 15–17 – the lowest rate since records began in 1969, when the rate was 47.1 (although many of these births in 1969 would have been to married mothers).⁹⁸

Despite this overall fall in teenage pregnancy rates, the rate is still unacceptably high. In 2013 UNICEF found the UK to be the third highest out of the 29 most developed countries in terms of teenage fertility (30 births per 1000 girls aged 15–19) and it was one of only three of these countries which saw an increase since 2003.⁹⁹

Some parts of the UK – often seaside and rural as well as deprived urban local authority areas – still experience particularly high levels of teenage pregnancy, though it remains an issue across nearly all areas.^{100, 101} The North East has the highest regional teenage conception

95 ONS, *Statistical Bulletin: Conceptions in England and Wales, 2011*, 26 February 2013, Figure 5 [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/conception-statistics--england-and-wales/2011/2011-conceptions-statistical-bulletin.html#tab-Under-18-conceptions-by-area-of-usual-residence> (07/05/13)]

96 ONS, *Conceptions in England and Wales, 2010*, 26 February 2013, Table 6 [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/conception-statistics--england-and-wales/2010/rft-conception-statistics-2010.xls> (09/01/13)]

97 Teenage Pregnancy Independent Advisory Group, *Teenage pregnancy: Past successes – future challenges*, December 2010 [accessed via: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Past%20successes%20-%20future%20challenges.pdf> (24/01/13)]

98 ONS, 'Teenage pregnancies at lowest level since records began', *Conception Statistics, England and Wales, 2011*, 26 February 2013 [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/conception-statistics--england-and-wales/2011/sty-conception-estimates-2011.html> (29/04/13)]

99 UNICEF, *Child well-being in rich countries: A comparative overview*, Innocenti Report Card 11, April 2013

100 Bell et al, 2004 and Uren, Sheers and Dattani, 2007 in The Tavistock Institute, *The Effectiveness of Straight Talking: Listening, Hearing and Remembering*, May 2009 [accessed via: http://www.straighttalking.org/documents/STRAIGHT_TALKING_evaluation_2009.pdf (09/01/13)]

101 Hansard, Written answers and statements, HC Deb 17 March 2011, c614w [accessed via: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110317/text/110317w0005.htm#11031785003253> (07/01/13)]

rate, nearly eight points higher than the English average.¹⁰² Greater Manchester and South Yorkshire also have teenage conception rates seven points higher than the national average.

It is essential then to recognise that against the national decline, teenage pregnancy is still particularly pronounced in some areas and has even risen:

- Corby, for example, saw a rise from a three-year average of 55 under-18 conceptions per 1,000 in 2006–2008 to 58.3 over 2009–2011, against the national average three-year rate of 34.1 per 1,000 for England and Wales.
- Redditch in Worcestershire saw an increase in under-16 conceptions from an average 7.4 over 2006–2008 to 10.0 over 2009–2011, against a national average of 6.7.
- Blackpool's three-year average from 2009–11 for under-18 conceptions (58.5 per 1,000) was almost twice the national average (34.1).
- Middlesbrough Unitary Authority (UA) had an under-16 conception rate over 2009–11 72 per cent above the national average (12.4 compared to 6.7) and Halton UA had just under twice the national average (13.3).¹⁰³

Figure 12: Teenage pregnancies (under 18) by local authority, 2011¹⁰⁴

Area of usual residence	Conception rate per 1,000 women under 18
Blackpool UA	58.1
Corby	57.9
Hastings	57.0
Merthyr Tydfil	54.1
Burnley	53.2
Torbay UA	53.1
Manchester	52.5
Kingston upon Hull, City of UA	50.4
Nottingham UA	49.5
Middlesbrough UA	48.9
Coventry	48.9
Walsall	48.5
Norwich	48.1
Southampton UA	47.4
Redcar and Cleveland UA	47.0
Barking and Dagenham	46.3
Sandwell	46.1
Thanet	45.6
St Helens	45.4
Tameside	45.2
Mansfield	44.5

102 ONS, *Conception Statistics, England and Wales, 2011*, Op. cit. The data for 2012 has not been released yet.

103 Ibid, 'Annual Table 6: Under 18 conceptions (numbers and rates) and outcome, 1998–2011'

104 Ibid

The wards with the highest teenage conception rates are located in particularly deprived areas:¹⁰⁵

- Nelson (Great Yarmouth)
- Cliftonville West (Thanet District Council)
- Middlehaven (Middlesborough Council)
- Stranton (Hartlepool Council)
- Folkestone Harvey Central (Shepway District Council)
- Rhyl West (Denbighshire Council)
- Plas Madoc (Wrexham Council)
- Grosvenor (Wrexham Council)
- Mancroft (Norwich City Council)
- Victoria (Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council)

Following a report from the Social Exclusion Unit, the previous government set up the Teenage Pregnancy Unit in 1998 with a ten-year strategy to reduce teenage conceptions. The aim was to halve the under-18 conception rate, to bring about a decline in the under-16 conception rate, as well as to increase teenager participation in education, employment and training in order to reduce the risk of social exclusion that makes teenage pregnancy more likely.¹⁰⁶ This seems to have been effective to some degree, though the timescale for delivery has been criticised as too short by the Teenage Pregnancy Independent Advisory Group amongst others.¹⁰⁷ And while the under-18 conception rate has fallen, it has not been halved. Overall it is clear that there is still a considerable way to go towards reducing teenage pregnancies.

1.2 Cohabitation, marriage and divorce

1.2.1 Cohabitation

According to the Office for National Statistics, cohabiting families are the 'fastest growing family type in the UK'.¹⁰⁸ The number of people cohabiting in the UK has doubled since 1996 to 5.9 million people in 2012,¹⁰⁹ increasing enormously from fewer than one in 100 adults under the age of 50 in the 1960s to one in six in 2011.¹¹⁰

105 Nick Hurd MP, Minister for the Cabinet Office, Written answers to questions, Hansard, HC Deb. 7 January 2013, c30W [accessed via: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm130107/text/130107w0001.htm#13010716003417_29/04/13]

106 Teenage Pregnancy Unit, *About the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy*, [accessed via: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20071001180723/http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/health/teenagepregnancy/about/> (09/05/13)]

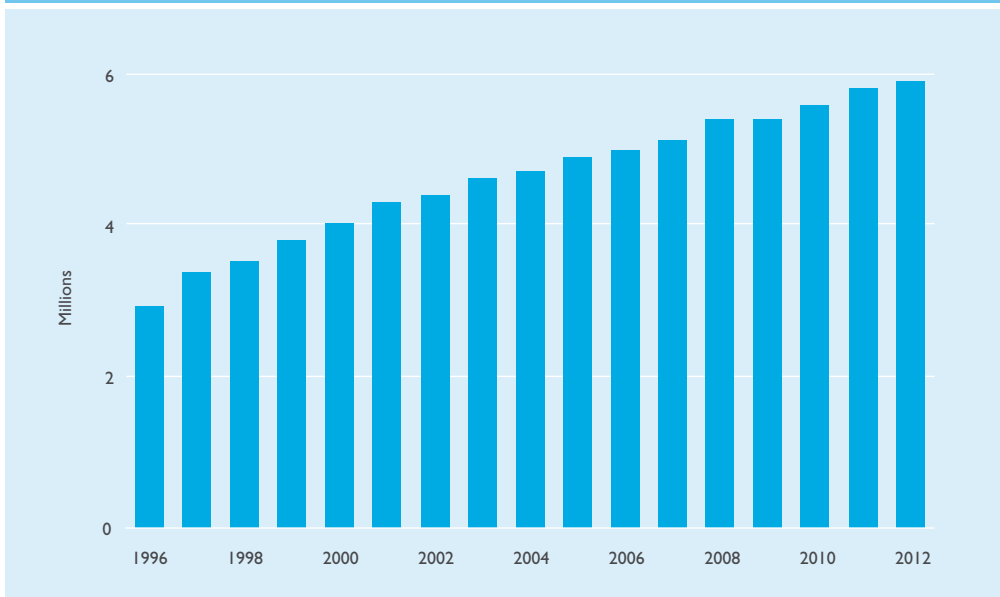
107 Teenage Pregnancy Independent Advisory Group, *Teenage Pregnancy: Past successes – future challenges*, Op. cit.

108 ONS, *Short report: Cohabitation in the UK in 2012*, 1 November 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/family-demography/families-and-households/2012/cohabitation-rpt.html> (02/01/13)]

109 Ibid

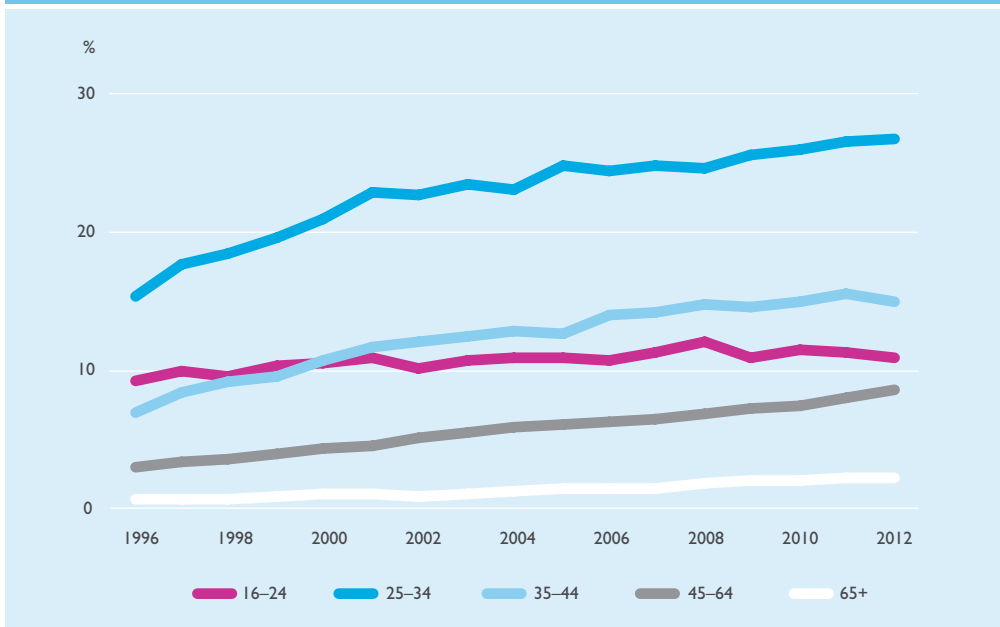
110 Beaujouan E and Bhrolchain MN, 'Cohabitation and marriage in Britain since the 1970s', *Population Trends* nr 145, ONS, Autumn 2011

Figure 13: People cohabiting in the UK, 1996 to 2012¹¹¹



A report in 2012 revealed that while cohabitation has increased across all ages, the sharpest percentage increase between 1996 and 2012 was amongst the over 65s (although over 65s still represent the smallest age group in terms of numbers cohabiting).¹¹²

Figure 14: Percentage of people cohabiting by age group¹¹³



111 ONS, Short report: Cohabitation in the UK in 2012, Op. cit.

112 Ibid

113 Ibid

Since the early 1980s, cohabitation has been the most common form of first live-in relationship, which is now stabilising at approximately 85 per cent of all couples.¹¹⁴ It is estimated that approximately 55 per cent of cohabitations lead to marriage, which has remained largely consistent for the last 30 years.¹¹⁵

The UK has the fourth highest percentage of cohabiting people aged 24–34 (22 per cent – almost twice the OECD average of 12 per cent), and the tenth highest percentage of cohabiting people of all ages over 20 (8.7 per cent compared to the average of 6.8 per cent).¹¹⁶

The number and percentage of dependent children living in opposite sex cohabiting couples have doubled, from 0.9 million in 1996 to 1.8 million in 2012 – the UK has seen an extra 925,000 children living in cohabiting-couple families since 1996.¹¹⁷

The rise in cohabitation is important, because this trend is closely related to the increase in lone parenthood and in children ceasing to live with both parents.

The CSJ's evidence-gathering has established the importance of marriage to relationship stability. This is an evidence-led argument, and not a moral judgement: in 2001 Census data showed that 97 per cent of all couples still together by the time a child is 15 were married;¹¹⁸ in 2013, data from Understanding Society showed that amongst parents who remain together by the time their child is aged 15, 93 per cent are married.¹¹⁹ Parents' relationship type is correlated with the risk of separation; the Institute of Fiscal Studies has found that parents who cohabit are approximately three times more likely than those parents who are married to have separated by the time the child reaches the age of five.¹²⁰

However, the authors concluded that it was not possible to identify any causal link here, and instead attributed this correlation to 'selection' factors:

'Our findings suggest that while it is true that cohabiting parents are more likely to split up than married ones, there is very little evidence to suggest that this is due to a causal effect of marriage. Instead, it seems simply that different sorts of people choose to get married and have children, rather than to have children as a cohabiting couple, and that those relationships with the best prospects of lasting are the ones that are most likely to lead to marriage.'

This is a common objection to arguing that the type of relationship matters. Rather than the relationship type affecting those in it, the objection runs, different types of people engage

114 Hayward J and Brandon G, *Cohabitation: An Alternative to Marriage*, Cambridge: Jubilee Centre, June 2011

115 ONS, *Short Report: Cohabitation in the UK, 2012*, Op. cit. Hayward J and Brandon G, *Cohabitation: An Alternative to Marriage*, Op. cit.

116 OECD, *OECD Family Database*, SF3.3: Cohabitation rate and prevalence of other forms of partnership, OECD, Paris, 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.oecd.org/social/soc/41920080.pdf> (10/04/13)]

117 ONS, *Families and households, 2012*, Op. cit.

118 CSJ, *Forgotten Families?: The vanishing agenda*, Op. cit. (Comparable data from the 2011 Census will not be released until Summer 2013)

119 Benson H, *The myth of 'long-term stable relationships' outside marriage*, The Marriage Foundation, May 2013 [accessed via: <http://www.marriagefoundation.org.uk/Web/OnlineStore/Product.aspx?ID=147> (28/05/13)]

120 Goodman A, and Greaves E, 2010, *Cohabitation, Marriage and Relationship Stability*, Institute for Fiscal Studies Briefing Note 107 in HM Government, Social Justice Outcomes Framework, October 2012, p7

in different types of relationship. The report, however, acknowledged the danger of 'over-controlling' for certain unobserved characteristics or factors (such as relationship quality) which could be significantly influenced by marriage itself. Over-controlling would understate any actual effects of marriage, although we agree that failure to control at all would overstate its effect.

The question of the 'marriage effect' and causation versus correlation is still a matter of considerable, vigorous debate. However, explanations that focus entirely on factors such as education and socio-economic status are only one side of the picture. As *Fractured Families* stated, 'This is undoubtedly true in part. For example, those less educated or on lower income are less likely to marry in the first place and more likely to divorce if they do marry'.¹²¹ However, to hold that any correlation is entirely due to such 'selection' factors seems to be to hold that the decisions and the promises people make have no influence on their motivation and behaviour – an unrealistic assumption. And the explanation that it is simply that different people get married does not square with aspirations to marry, which are high across all social groups,¹²² and with the fact that half of cohabiting couples do eventually marry. Further, there is evidence to suggest that the relationship form does make a difference. Benson notes:

'A review by Wilson and Oswald ... lists 23 longitudinal studies that provide compelling evidence of a causal link between marriage and health, mental health and longevity. The authors conclude that "the size of the health gain is remarkable. It may be as much as the benefit from giving up smoking". Additional studies also illustrate how marriage – but not cohabitation – improves well-being, relationship quality and relationship stability'.¹²³

Even after controlling for socio-economic status and education, research shows cohabiting couples are between two and 2.5 times more likely to break-up than equivalent married couples.¹²⁴ Research shows that those couples who have children are at a greater risk of relationship dissolution than those cohabiters and married couples without.¹²⁵ Fewer than one in ten married parents have split by the time a child is five compared with more than one in three who were not married.¹²⁶ The research shows that when the child reaches the age of five, the separation rate is six times greater for couples who were cohabiting at the point of their first child's birth, as opposed to married. (Where parents were not living together

121 CSJ, *Fractured Families*, London: CSJ, December 2006 p122

122 See below, page 69 onwards

123 Benson H, *The conflation of marriage and cohabitation in government statistics – a denial of difference rendered untenable by an analysis of outcomes*, Bristol: Bristol Community Family Trust, September 2006

124 Benson H, *Married and unmarried family breakdown: Key statistics explained*, Bristol: Bristol Community Family Trust, January 2010

125 Ibid

126 Millennium Cohort Study (MCS, Wave 3) in CSJ, *Forgotten Families?, The vanishing agenda*, London: CSJ, October 2012

when a child is born, the break-up rate five years later is a staggering 60 per cent.)¹²⁷ Although the likelihood of cohabittees' separation reduces with child's age, it remains four times as high when the child is 16.¹²⁸

Analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) revealed that over the first five years of the lives of the children in the sample, 88 per cent of married parents were still married and living together, compared to 67 per cent of cohabiting couples (23 per cent of whom had gone on to marry).¹²⁹ Children born to cohabiting parents were almost three times as likely as those born to married parents to be no longer living with their parents by the age of five (28 per cent compared to ten per cent).¹³⁰ We discuss a compelling explanation for the relative instability of cohabitation in the next section.

1.2.2 Marriage

The corollary to the rise in cohabitation has been the decline of marriage. Although weddings abroad may skew the number of marriages to some extent, figure 3 shows that the proportion of those who are married has also decreased. Overall, a long-term decline in the number of marriages has been recorded since 1972, although there were some slight increases between 2002 and 2004, and between 2007 and 2008.

Rates of marriage and divorce vary with ethnicity with Asian groups in the UK more likely to be married than either White or Black groups.¹³¹ (Having a child within a cohabiting relationship was rare amongst Asian women and less common among Black mothers than amongst White mothers.¹³²) In 2011:

- 7 per cent of all married people and 1.9 per cent of divorced people were Asian/British Asian/Chinese while this group represented 3.3 per cent of the total population;
- 1.9 per cent of married people and 2 per cent of divorced people were Black/African/Caribbean/Black British people, while this group accounted for 7.5 per cent of the population;
- 89.6 per cent of married people and 95 per cent of divorced people were White, and 86 per cent of the population were White.¹³³

Marriage rates (marriages per 1,000 adults) have also declined significantly.

¹²⁷ Ibid

¹²⁸ Hayward J and Brandon G, *Cohabitation: An Alternative to Marriage*, Op. cit.

¹²⁹ Kiernan K and Holmes J, *Fragile Families in the UK: evidence from the Millennium Cohort Study*, Op. cit.

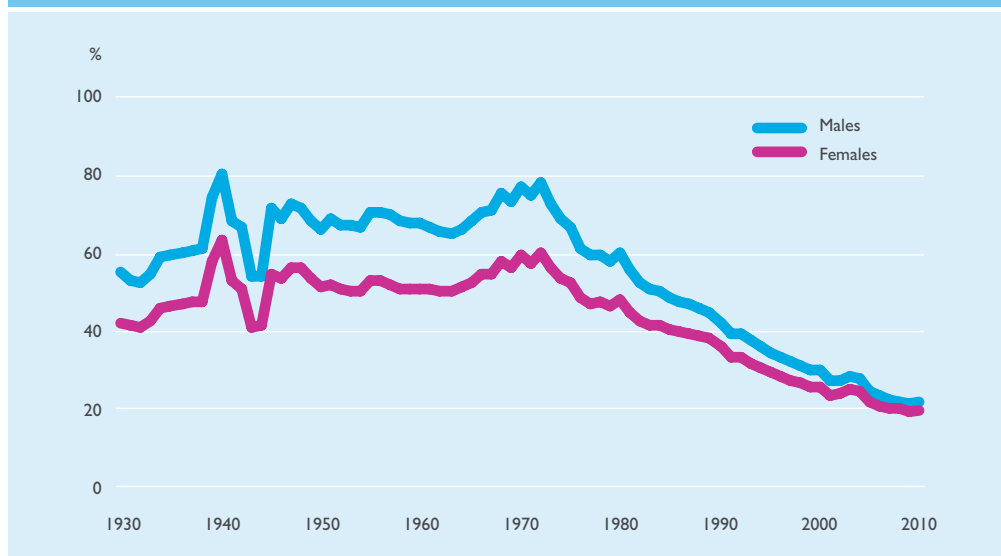
¹³⁰ Ibid

¹³¹ Ibid

¹³² Ibid

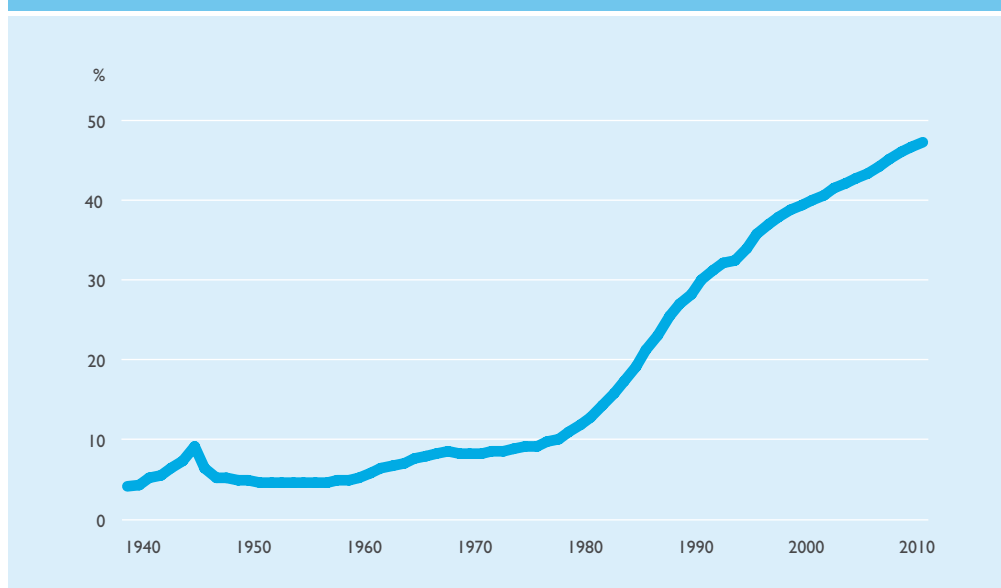
¹³³ ONS, *Ethnicity and National Identity in England and Wales 2011*, 11 December 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rpt-ethnicity.html> (13/05/13)]; ONS, *People married and divorced by ethnic group 2002–2012* [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/what-we-do/publication-scheme/published-ad-hoc-data/population/april-2013/married-and-divorced-people-by-ethnicity.xls> (13/05/13)]

Figure 15: Marriage rates (marriages per 1,000 unmarried males/females aged 16 and over) 1930–2010¹³⁴



However, married couples are still the most common family form, with 62 per cent of families with children being in married-couple families.¹³⁵

Figure 16: Births outside of marriage¹³⁶



This decline in marriage has also had staggering effects on the number of children born within marriage. In 1971, 91.6 per cent of births in England and Wales were within marriage,¹³⁷ but

¹³⁴ ONS, *Statistical bulletin: Marriages in England and Wales*, Op. cit.

¹³⁵ ONS, *Families and households 2012*, Op. cit.

¹³⁶ ONS, *Birth Summary Tables – England and Wales*, 2011, 17 October 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-276693> (13/05/13)]

¹³⁷ Millennium Cohort Study (MCS, Wave 3) in CSJ, *Forgotten Families?*, Op. cit. p2

by 2011 this had dropped to just 53 per cent.¹³⁸ Considering the aforementioned association between birth within marriage and family stability, this trend is particularly concerning for children's welfare.

1.2.2.1 Why marriage matters

A plausible explanation of the relative stability of marriage is found in 'commitment theory' which suggests that those who marry are more likely to stay together as a result of the interaction of two key elements: 'dedication' – the motivation of an individual to maintain and improve his/her relationship – and 'constraints' – those features which increase the cost of leaving the relationship.¹³⁹

Such constraints offer an explanation for why low-quality relationships continue: despite low satisfaction and low dedication, it may be perceived to be too costly to leave the relationship. For example, sharing accommodation involves a big constraint in terms of the emotional and financial costs involved in leaving; one can't simply walk away. The birth of a child is an even more obvious constraint. Where partners have explicitly and consciously decided to commit to a relationship, such a 'constraint' may be experienced positively – a child can be a joy.¹⁴⁰

When constraints are experienced without the dedication which may transform them into positive experiences, couples may still stay together because of what is called 'inertia': constraints make it harder to exit the relationship but it is not necessarily of the kind of quality that will survive significant challenges over time.

Where dedication is absent, the build up of constraints can lead to couples 'sliding' into relationships. But the gradual increase in constraints is very different from *deciding* – consciously committing.¹⁴¹ Cohabiting relationships therefore offer less stability because they have constraints without the same level of dedication as marriage. The inertia of cohabitation – the gradual build-up of constraints that make exiting more difficult – leads to some high-risk relationships continuing through to pregnancy and birth, which then becomes one constraint too many, leading to the breakdown of the relationship.

Relationships are particularly vulnerable at key transition points, including moving in together, the birth of the first child, redundancy, children leaving home, retirement and illness.¹⁴² Children born to unmarried parents are likely to have 'higher risk of family instability, fewer parental resources and poorer outcomes' compared to those children born to married parents.¹⁴³ Research shows that parental marriage at birth has a lower association with relationship instability than cohabitation or single parenthood at birth.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ Ibid

¹³⁹ Stanley S and Rhoades G, 'Marriages at Risk: Relationship formation and opportunities for relationship education', pp21–44 in Callan S and Benson H (eds), *What Works in Relationship Education?*, Doha, Qatar: Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development, 2009; Stanley S and Markman H, 'Assessing Commitment in Personal Relationships', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 54, 1992, pp595–608

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, and Stanley S, Rhoades G, and Whitton, S, 'Commitment: Functions, Formation, and the Securing of Romantic Attachment', *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 2, 2010, pp243–257

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p252

¹⁴² Relate, in evidence to the CSJ November 2012

¹⁴³ Ibid; see also Kalil A and Ryan R, 'Mothers' Economic Conditions and Sources of Support in Fragile Families' *Future of Children*, 20, 2, 2010, pp39–61; Waldfogel J, Craigie T and Brooks-Gunn J, 'Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing' *Future of Children*, 20, 2, 2010, pp87–112

¹⁴⁴ Ibid

1.2.3 Divorce

The latest figures from the ONS show that approximately 42 per cent of marriages are expected to end in divorce. This marks a slight decline from 45 per cent in 2005.¹⁴⁵ And as we can see in figure 17 below, the number of actual divorces has decreased. The ONS note two trends that may explain this: the age at which people get married has increased (see above), and cohabitation has increased.¹⁴⁶ Additionally, immigration from Asian countries may have contributed in small part, since as noted above, Asian married couples are much less likely to divorce.

Figure 17: Number of marriages and divorces, 1931–2011 (England and Wales)¹⁴⁷

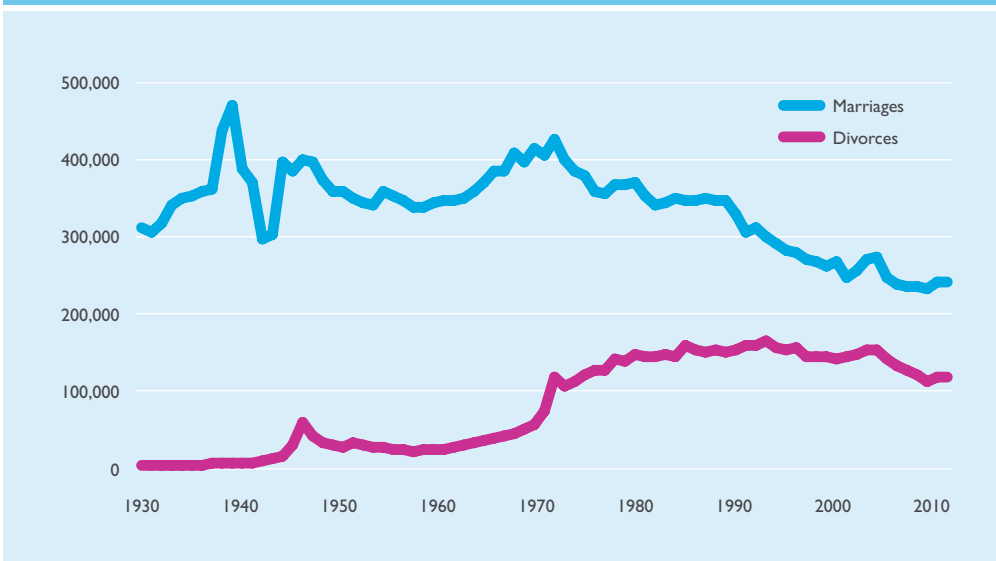


Figure 17 above illustrates the historic trends of marriage formation and dissolution. It is worth noting the following key events as having notable effects on trends as illustrated in the graph: World War II (1939–1945), which saw increased women's participation in the labour force (and therefore a reduction in people who were financially dependent on a partner) as well as couples separated for long periods and enormous social upheaval; the Divorce Reform Act (1969) which made it easier for couples to separate; and the Asylum and Immigration Act (2004), which tackled 'sham marriages' – where individuals married in order to remain in the UK.

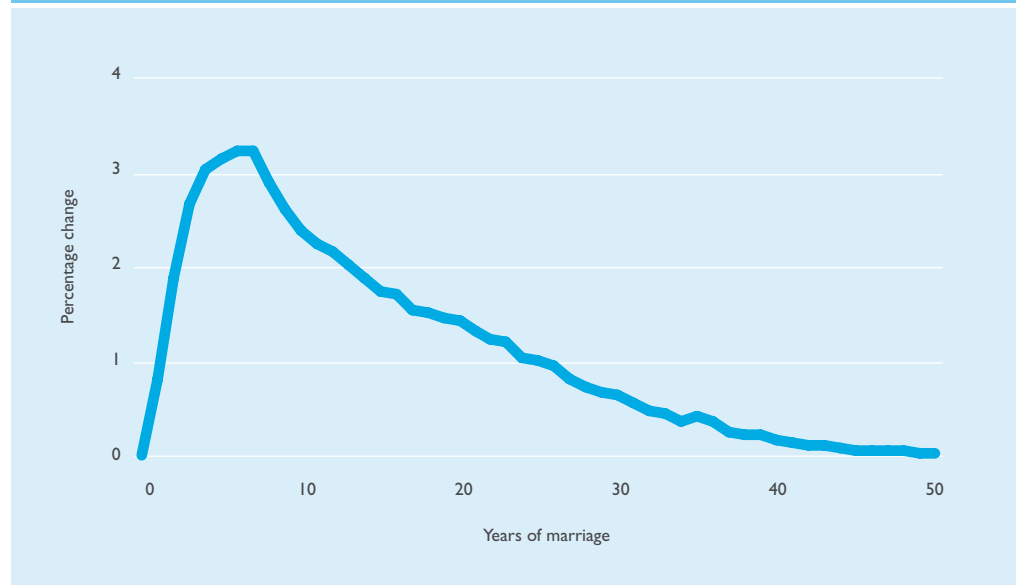
The percentage of marriages ending in divorce increases rapidly over the first ten years but after the eighth year of marriage it decreases.

¹⁴⁵ ONS, *Divorces in England and Wales – 2011*, Op. cit.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid

¹⁴⁷ ONS, *Divorces in England and Wales – 2011*, 20 December 2012 [accessed via: http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_291750.pdf (02/01/12)] (2012 figures will not be released until December)

Figure 18: Average likelihood of divorce by next anniversary¹⁴⁸



Despite the decrease in divorces in recent years, one in three marriages now ends in divorce, and of those divorces, 20 per cent of men and 19 per cent of women will be divorcing for at least the second time.¹⁴⁹ This must be seen within the context of the long-term trend of declining number of marriages, which research shows may be due to couples increasingly cohabiting rather than marrying.¹⁵⁰

Divorce rates have been gradually falling since 2003, with the exception of 2010 when rates increased.¹⁵¹ The proportion of marriages ending in divorce has generally increased for those marrying between the 1970s and early 1990s: 22 per cent of marriages in 1970 had ended in divorce by the fifteenth wedding anniversary, while 33 per cent of marriages in 1995 ended after the same period of time.¹⁵² Moreover, the proportion of divorcees for whom the divorce is not their first has increased and the percentage of divorcees where the marriage was the first for both parties has declined since the 1970s, although it seems to have largely levelled off since the turn of the Millennium. However, a recent report has shown that 'second marriages overall do consistently better than first marriages', with couples where at least one is marrying for the second time facing an estimated 31 per cent risk of divorce, compared to a 45 per cent risk for first marriages.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Ibid

¹⁴⁹ ONS, *Measuring national well-being: Households and families, 2012*, 26 April 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/wellbeing/measuring-national-well-being/households-and-families/art---households-and-families.html#tab-Families> [31/05/12]]

¹⁵⁰ Beaujouan E and Bhrolchain MN, 'Cohabitation and marriage in Britain since the 1970s,' Op. cit.

¹⁵¹ NB After six consecutive years of divorce rates falling, in 2010, the divorce rate rose for the first time since 2003; ONS, *Measuring national well-being: Households and families, 2012*, 26 April 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/wellbeing/measuring-national-well-being/households-and-families/art---households-and-families.html#tab-Families> [31/05/12]]

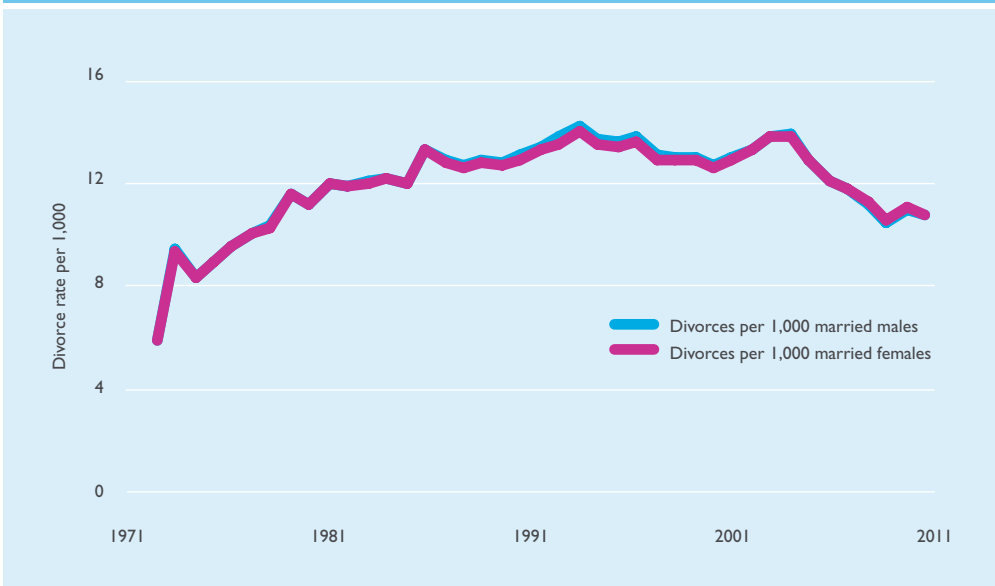
¹⁵² ONS, *Divorces in England and Wales 2010*, Op. cit.

¹⁵³ Benson H, *Second Marriage: Triumph of decision over hope?* The Marriage Foundation, May 2013

There is some evidence that the proportion of marriages ending in divorce has stabilised for those who have married most recently.¹⁵⁴ After ‘two generations of tumultuous change’:

‘Following a steady two-thirds fall in marriage rates since 1970 – as more people divorced, delayed or shunned marriage altogether – marriage appears to have bottomed out. Divorce rates have been virtually unchanged for two decades now since their six-fold rise during the 1960s and 1970s.’¹⁵⁵

Figure 19: Divorce rates over time¹⁵⁶



The effect of straitened economic conditions – the financial crisis and continuing recession – on divorce rates is debated. Some suggest that the financial pressures associated with the recession delay both marriage and divorce due to the associated costs.¹⁵⁷ Contrastingly, research by the Institute for Social and Economic Research has found that relationship dissolution can be linked to unemployment: people of either gender who lose their job are also more likely to lose their partner.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ ONS, *Marriages in England and Wales – 2010*, Op. cit.

¹⁵⁵ CSJ, *Fractured Families*, London: CSJ, December 2006

¹⁵⁶ ONS, *Marriages in England and Wales – 2010*, Op. cit.

¹⁵⁷ Bradford Wilcox B, *The Great Recession's Silver Lining?* in Bradford Wilcox B and Marquardt E (eds), *The State of Our Unions 2009: Marriage in America, Marriage & Money*, Institute for American Values, University of Virginia [accessed via: <http://stateofourunions.org/2009/SOOU2009.pdf> (02/01/13)]

¹⁵⁸ Blekesaunce M, *Unemployment and partnership dissolution*, Institute for Social and Economic Research, 2008 [accessed via: <https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/publications/working-papers/iser/2008-21.pdf> (07/05/13)] cited in Vaitilingam R, *Recession Britain: Findings from economic and social research*, London: Economic and Social Research Council, 2011

chapter two

The consequences of family breakdown

Family breakdown matters because of the huge impact it can have on individuals, families, and society. Family breakdown often places terrible personal strain on all those involved, affecting childhood and adulthood in many different ways, playing an under-acknowledged role in loneliness amongst older people and, in turn, placing a strain on communities and services.

2.1 Financial costs of family breakdown

The financial cost of family breakdown to UK society is staggeringly high. This year it has reached £46 billion a year – over £10 billion more than the Government's defence budget.¹⁵⁹ This is the equivalent of every single tax payer in the UK paying £1,541 each year to pick up the pieces.¹⁶⁰

Family breakdown is associated with numerous poor outcomes, including mental and physical ill-health, addiction to drugs and alcohol, worklessness, educational failure, debt and poverty. The reactive costs of these associated outcomes are illustrated in the table below. There is an urgent need for early intervention to ensure that individuals, families, our society and the economy do not continue to pay such a heavy price.

¹⁵⁹ The Relationships Foundation, *Counting the Cost of Family Failure 2013 Update*, Cambridge: Relationships Foundation, March 2012; HM Government, *Spending Review 2010*, Table A.9: Total Departmental Expenditure Limits [accessed via: http://cdn.hm-treasury.gov.uk/sr2010_annexa.pdf (22/02/13)]

¹⁶⁰ The Relationships Foundation, *Counting the Cost of Family Failure 2013 Update*, Op. cit.

Figure 20: The estimated costs of family breakdown¹⁶¹

	£ (billion)	£ (billion)
Tax and Benefits		
Tax Credits	9.79	
Lone parent benefits	3.83	
		13.62
Housing		
Housing benefit and council tax benefit	4.78	
Emergency housing following domestic violence	0.14	
		4.92
Health and Social Care		
Physical health	5.82	
Mental health	1.79	
Social services and care	5.51	
Children in care	2.98	
		16.1
Civil and Criminal Justice		
Police	5.09	
Prisons	1.05	
Court and legal services	0.56	
Legal aid	0.88	
Child maintenance and Enforcement Commission	0.51	
		8.09
Education and Young People NEET		
Disciplinary and behavioural problem	1.46	
Vandalism and criminal damage in schools	0.61	
Free school meals	0.24	
Education Maintenance Allowance	0.18	
Tertiary education	0.17	
Young people NEET	0.67	
		3.34
Total cost		46.07

This exorbitant cost means that the Government's paltry £7.5 million a year to put 'relationship support on a stable footing' amounts to about £1 in preventative spending for every £6,000 pounds of reactive spending.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Ibid. (The sum of the items comprising the subtotals differs slightly due to rounding up.)

¹⁶² Speech by Prime Minister, David Cameron, *Speech on families and relationships*, 10 December 2010 [accessed via: <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/speech-on-families-and-relationships/> (20/03/13)]; Conservative Home, 'Harry Benson, *Nearly one in two fifteen year olds experience family breakdown. That fact should shock us*, 20 February 2013 [accessed via: <http://conservativehome.blogs.com/platform/2013/02/harry-benson.html> (20/02/13)]

Interestingly, the bulk of this spend is on the separation of unmarried couples. Of every £7 spent by the state on family breakdown among young families, £1 is spent on those who have divorced, £4 is spent on unmarried dual-registered parents who have separated and £2 is spent on sole-registered parents.¹⁶³ Thus the surge in the numbers and proportions of people parenting children outside of stable couple relationships is particularly costly.

2.2 Outcomes for children who experience family breakdown

'My parents split up when I was seven and I do think it affects you ... things like you wet the bed for longer, still having accidents at night when you're ten or eleven, that shouldn't be happening and it's not a nice thing to have to put up with. Everyone in my family has been divorced two or three times, that's why I won't get married.'

A taxi driver in the North West's story

The greatest victims of family breakdown are children. The fact that there are 2.5 million separated families in Great Britain, with around 300,000 families separating each year, matters because of the extensive evidence showing that the stability of the family environment in which a child grows up contributes significantly to their future life outcomes.¹⁶⁴ A child of separated parents is more likely to:

- Grow up in poorer housing;
- Experience behavioural problems;
- Perform less well in school and gain fewer educational qualifications;
- Need more medical treatment;
- Leave school and home when young;
- Become sexually active, pregnant or a parent at an early age; and
- Report more depressive symptoms and higher levels of smoking, drinking and other drug use during adolescence and adulthood.¹⁶⁵

The importance of family stability to children's educational outcomes is seen most strikingly amongst looked-after children, only 15.5 per cent of whom pass both English and mathematics GCSE compared to 58.7 per cent of all other pupils.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Benson H, *Family breakdown in the UK: it's NOT about divorce*, December 2010 [accessed via: <http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/UserStorage/pdf/Pdf%20reports/FamilyBreakdownIsNotAboutDivorce.pdf> (18/04/13)]

¹⁶⁴ Cited in National Audit Office, 2012, *Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission: Cost Reduction*. In *HM Government Social Justice Outcomes Framework*, Op. cit.

¹⁶⁵ Pryor J, and Rodgers B, *Children in Changing Families*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001 cited in Mooney A, Oliver C and Smith M, *Impact of Family Breakdown on Children's Well-Being: Evidence Review*, London: Department for Children, Schools and Families, June 2009, p7

¹⁶⁶ DfE, *Outcomes for Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England, as at 31 March 2012*, Statistical First Release [accessed via: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/191969/SFR32_2012Text.pdf 29/04/13]]

Studies have also suggested a strong correlation between unstable families and educational failure.¹⁶⁷ US research has shown that children of divorced mothers and children in stepfamilies are almost twice as likely to fail in school and repeat a grade when compared with children raised by both biological parents in an intact family, while children raised by a never-married mother are more than twice as likely to repeat a grade when compared with children raised in intact marriages.¹⁶⁸ It has also been found that children from divorced families are almost twice as likely to be expelled from school as are children from intact families, and children of single, never-married parents are more than four times more likely to be expelled.¹⁶⁹

Children's social, emotional, and behavioural competency and mental health are closely related to the quality of their relationship with their parents and to family breakdown.¹⁷⁰ Supportive family relationships improve children's mental and physical health and the positive effects of this continue to be felt well into adulthood. One study showed that 60-year olds still suffered the long-term effects of childhood stress brought on by the psychological trauma of having parents split up.¹⁷¹

2.2.1 Children in lone-parent households

A quarter of all families with dependent children – nearly two million – are now lone-parent families.¹⁷² It is vital to acknowledge the additional difficulties faced by single parents. We are not suggesting that they cannot raise children well or give them an environment where they can flourish and achieve. Many single parents do precisely that. However, while many are able to provide positive nurturing environments despite limited resources and extra pressures on time, on average there are clearly differences for child outcomes.

Lone parents tend to have worse mental health, including depression and low self-esteem, which make it much harder for them to meet their children's emotional and other needs and can manifest as poorer parenting.¹⁷³ Research shows that the highest levels of conflict between children and mothers are reported by children of lone parents, particularly those who either entered lone parenthood from cohabitation or remained in lone parenthood from birth to three years.¹⁷⁴

Single-parent families are the most likely household type to be living in financial poverty. Lone parents are 2.5 times more likely to be living below 60 percent of median income than couple

167 US National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, Wave II, 1996

168 Dawson D, 'Family Structure and Children's Health and Well Being: Data from the 1988 National Health Interview Survey of Child Health', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 53, 1991, pp573–584

169 US National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, Wave II, 1996

170 Mooney A, et al Op. cit.

171 International Centre for Lifecourse Studies in Society and Health, 'Bridging social and biological sciences' in Callan S, 'Measuring poverty: Parents and families are the key', *Society Central*, 3 December 2012, Society Central [accessed via: <http://societycentral.ac.uk/2012/12/03/measuring-poverty-families/> (24/01/13)]

172 ONS, *Families and Households, 2012*, Table 3: Families with dependent children, United Kingdom, 1996–2013, 1 November 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcn%3A77-278923> (08/02/13)]

173 Kiernan K and Holmes J, Op. cit.

174 Ibid

parents.¹⁷⁵ In 2011, 41 per cent of children from lone-parent families were in households living on less than 60 per cent of median income after housing costs, against 23 per cent of children from two-parent families.¹⁷⁶

Case study: Effects of family breakdown on parents and children¹⁷⁷

This mum came to us in a very distressed state. She had three young children all aged under five and her husband had left them. Mum had suffered with panic attacks since she was a young girl and the enormity of her circumstances was too overwhelming for her to deal with on her own. Her main priority was where to live. She was in private rental and her husband had always dealt with all the finances. The rent was very high and the property was damp and unsafe. The landlady when approached had been quite intimidating and threatening. We made an appointment for her at Shelter and one of us accompanied her on the visit to give her moral support and to explain, later, things she hadn't fully understood. She had to make endless phone calls to sort the finances out and with very little credit on her mobile she was very thankful to be able to use the office phone. We also gave her regular crèche sessions for all the children so that she could attend solicitors, the council offices and family mediation. The children were understandably very upset when they first came to us, particularly the youngest. However, with regular attendance they are now starting to settle.

65 per cent of children aged 12–16 in low-income households (the bottom 20 per cent) do not live with both birth parents – 26 percentage points higher than the figure for better-off households.¹⁷⁸ In the UK, 46 per cent of children in lone-parent families were in relative poverty in 2009/10 compared with 24 per cent of those living in couple families.¹⁷⁹ One study found that when children were aged three, the likelihood of being in the bottom income quintile was 21 per cent for those whose parents were married, 38 per cent among cohabiters, but at 81 per cent for those living in lone-parent families.¹⁸⁰

'As a result of growing up in deprivation many of the families we work with simply don't access the many opportunities Brighton has to offer. There are families here whose kids have never been to the beach for example. It's not always the cost but that they don't see this as being as part of their world.'

Anne McLaren, Project Manager at Fun in Action (a befriending service for children and young people from disadvantaged lone parent families in Brighton and Hove), in evidence to the CSJ

175 CSJ, *Fractured Families*, Op. cit.

176 DWP, *Households Below Average Income: An analysis of the income distribution 1994/95–2010/11*, Table 4.5 db, London: DWP, June 2012

177 Case study provided by The Family Haven in evidence to the CSJ

178 DWP, *Social Justice: transforming lives – One year on*, Op. cit.

179 JRF, *Poverty: The role of institutions, behaviours, and culture*, June 2012, p7

180 Kiernan K, McLanahan S, Holmes J, and Wright M, *Fragile families in the US and UK fragile families*, 2011. Working paper WP 11-04-FF; Centre for Research on Child Well-Being, Princeton University [accessed via: <http://crcw.princeton.edu/workingpapers/WP11-04-FF.pdf> (02/04/13)]

Becoming a lone parent obviously increases the chances of low income due to the reduction in household income and other resources. Lone parenthood carries a higher risk of poverty not only because lone parents' incomes tend to be lower, but also because they are less financially resilient: having no financial cushion, they are more vulnerable to ordinary problems such as unexpected job loss, illness or the need to repair a car.¹⁸¹ It is also harder for a household headed by only one adult to increase their working hours whilst caring for children.

2.2.2 Multiple transitions

The clear association between family type and family stability to which we have already extensively referred also holds when we look at multiple relationship transitions, that is where family structures change repeatedly, such as when new partners are introduced to the family home and parents have further children with different partners: ten per cent of single mothers had a child with a new partner by the time their child born at the beginning of the study was five, compared to 2.4 per cent of cohabiting mothers and only 0.5 per cent of married mothers.¹⁸²

Where family structures change again and again, such as with the introduction of new partners to the family home after previous relationships have broken down, this has a particularly negative effect on children. US studies have shown that children living in unstable families were found to have lower cognitive scores than in stable families¹⁸³ and behavioural problems are known to intensify with each additional change in family structure a child experiences.¹⁸⁴ Research using the Millennium Cohort Study here in the UK found that 'It is particularly noticeable that mothers who re-partner are less likely to have a good relationship with their child, are less likely to engage in educational activities and are more likely to use negative discipline'.¹⁸⁵ Again, US research shows that children who experienced two or more transitions in family structure are more likely to show disruptive behaviour, to have poorer emotional adjustment and to be lower achievers at school, and school students who have experienced more than one transition in family structure have a higher likelihood of dropping out of school.¹⁸⁶

2.2.3 Children without fathers

95 per cent of people think fathers are important to children's wellbeing.¹⁸⁷

181 Kalil A and Ryan R, 'Mothers' Economic Conditions and Sources of Support in Fragile Families, *Future of Children*, 20, 2, 2010, pp39–61

182 Kiernan K and Holmes J, *Fragile Families in the UK: evidence from the Millennium Cohort Study*, Op. cit

183 Craigie T, *Effects of Paternal Presence and Family Instability on Child Cognitive Performance*, Working Paper 08-03FF, Princeton: Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, 2008 cited in Waldfogel J, Craigie T, and Brooks-Gunn J, 'Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing' *The Future of Children*, 20, 2, 2010, pp87–122

184 Osborne C and McLanahan S, 'Partnership Instability and Child Wellbeing' *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69, 2007, pp1065–83 cited in Waldfogel J, Craigie T, and Brooks-Gunn J, 'Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing' *The Future of Children*, 20, 2, 2010 pp87–122

185 Kiernan K and Holmes J, *Fragile Families in the UK: evidence from the Millennium Cohort Study*, Op. cit.

186 Kurdek L, Fine M and Sinclair R, 'School Adjustment in Sixth graders: Parenting transitions, Family Climate, and Peer norm effects' *Child Development*, 66, 1995, pp430–445 in Fomby P and Cherlin A 'Family Instability and Child Well-Being' *American Sociological Review*, 72, 2, 2007, pp181–204; Martinez C and Forgatch M, 'Adjusting to Change: Linking Family Structures Transitions With Parenting and Boys' Adjustment' *Journal of Family Psychology*, 16, 2002, pp107–117 in Fomby P and Cherlin A, Op. cit.

187 CSJ/YouGov polling of 1,722 British adults, November 2012

The negative effects of parental separation on children tend to be all the more pronounced where family break-up leads to father absence or a sharp reduction in father involvement. It is clear that children growing up without fathers are, on the whole, more vulnerable because of the many positive contributions that available, engaged and committed fathers make to children's wellbeing.

'Families matter. I don't doubt that many of the rioters out last week have no father at home. Perhaps they come from one of the neighbourhoods where it's standard for children to have a mum and not a dad...where it's normal for young men to grow up without a male role model, looking to the streets for their father figures, filled up with rage and anger. So if we want to have any hope of mending our broken society, family and parenting is where we've got to start.'¹⁸⁸

Rt Hon David Cameron MP

Having a father involved in their lives boosts children's self-esteem and confidence. School-aged children with good relationships with their fathers are less likely to experience depression, exhibit disruptive behaviour, or to lie than children without good father-child relationships.¹⁸⁹ Similarly, girls who have fathers involved in their lives often have stronger self-esteem than girls who do not.¹⁹⁰ Children with absent fathers are also at an increased risk of depressive and psychiatric disorders.¹⁹¹

'Where father and mother are separated, continued contact with fathers is mostly non-existent. A lot of kids have never met their fathers. They lack male role models to give them a rounded view of what it is to be male and suffer from a lack of self-esteem: when asked, their anger about this loss comes out in descriptions of their fathers as a "waste of space", and in describing themselves as "rubbish".'

Anne McLaren, Project Manager at Fun in Action, in evidence to the CSJ

188 Speech by Prime Minister David Cameron, *The fightback after the riots*, 15 August 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/pms-speech-on-the-fightback-after-the-riots/> (17/01/13)]

189 Mosley J and Thompson E, 'Fathering behavior and child outcomes: The role of race and poverty' In Marsiglio W (Ed.), *Fatherhood: Contemporary theory, research, and social policy*, 1995, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. pp148–165

190 Ibid

191 Bifulco et al, 'Childhood adversity, parental vulnerability and disorder: examining intergenerational transmission of risk', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 114, pp331–345 cited in Andrews K, *Maybe 'I do': modern marriage and the pursuit of happiness*, 2012, Connor Court

Children who live with their fathers are more likely to have good physical and emotional health, to achieve academically, and to avoid drugs, violence, and delinquent behaviour.¹⁹² However, growing up without a 'father or father figure' makes the transition to adulthood more complicated; and the positive involvement of a father in a child's life can act as a protective factor against issues like educational failure and anti-social behaviour.¹⁹³

A poll of young people who did not have fathers in their lives has shown that they believe that they are more likely to be involved in anti-social behaviour (80 per cent), crime (76 per cent) and take drugs (69 per cent).¹⁹⁴ They also believe that the absence of a father makes them more likely to feel insecure – an important reflection of their self-perception and vulnerability.¹⁹⁵

Young people without fathers are a risk of earlier sexual activity, therefore the children of absent fathers are more likely to become young parents themselves, outside of stable relationships, and repeat the cycle of family breakdown. According to the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles, children from lone-parent households were more likely to have become sexually active before the age of 16,¹⁹⁶ and girls from lone-parent households were 1.6 times more likely to become mothers before the age of 18.¹⁹⁷ Boys without involved fathers are more likely to go on to have at least one child by the age of 23; those who lost their fathers before the age of seven were particularly affected and were nearly seven per cent more likely to become young fathers.¹⁹⁸

In America and New Zealand, girls with absent fathers were found to have teenage pregnancy rates seven to eight times higher than those girls who had meaningful contact with their fathers, after taking into account other factors such as stress of divorce and loss of income.^{199, 200}

192 Horn W and Sylvester T, *Father facts: 4th Edition*, 2002, National Fatherhood Initiative; U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), *The relationship between family structure and adolescent substance abuse*, 1996, Rockville, MD: National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information; Harper C and McLanahan S 'Father absence and youth incarceration', paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, San Francisco, CA, 1998; Brenner E, *Fathers in prison: A review of the data*, 1999, Philadelphia, PA: National Centre on Fathers and Families

193 Williams R, 'If we want fathers to change their ways, we need to first change ours', pp68–70 in *Where next for parenting?*, Family and Parenting Institute, October 2011 [accessed via: http://www.familyandparenting.org/Resources/FPI/Documents/PW_FULL_VERSION_18_10.pdf (16/01/13)]; Fatherhood Institute, *Research Summary: Anti-social Behaviour and Fatherhood*, 7 October 2007 [accessed via: <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2007/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-anti-social-behaviour-and-fatherhood/> (16/01/12)]

194 Glynn M and Addaction, *Dad and Me: Research into the problems caused by absent fathers*, 2011

195 Ibid

196 Wellings K, Nanchahal K and MacDowall W, 'Sexual behaviour in Britain: Early heterosexual experience' *The Lancet*, 388, pp1843–50 cited in CIVITAS, *Experiments in Living: The Fatherless Family*, London: CIVITAS, September 2002 [accessed via: <http://www.civitas.org.uk/pdf/Experiments.pdf> (16/01/13)]

197 CIVITAS, *Experiments in Living*, Op. cit.

198 London School of Economics and Political Science, *Boys with absent fathers more likely to be young fathers*, 7 September 2011 [accessed via: http://www2.lse.ac.uk/newsAndMedia/news/archives/2011/09/absent_fathers.aspx (06/08/12)]

199 Wellings K, et al, Op. cit.

200 Ellis B et al, 'Does father absence place daughters at special risk for early sexual activity and teenage pregnancy?' *Child Development*, 74, 2003, pp801–821 cited in Andrews K, *Maybe 'I do': modern marriage and the pursuit of happiness*, 2012, Connor Court

81 per cent of those polled think it important that children grow up living with both parents wherever possible.²⁰¹

What lack of a father can mean for an individual young person is illustrated by the story below:

Case study: The effects of father absence²⁰²

Josh Bailey's (name has been changed) dad lost interest in him a long time ago, and life with his mum, – who's had a string of live-in boyfriends – has been pretty chaotic. Drugs, alcohol and violence have more or less constantly featured in his mum's relationships, yet every time a man walks out the door for the last time, Josh's behaviour takes a turn for the worse. Some kind of bond had formed, hope had briefly flickered that maybe this man would stay. He struggles at school – ten years old, he should be achieving at level 6, instead he's more at level 3 – yet he barely misses a day. The stability and safety he craves are only found at school but he was becoming increasingly uncontrollable, the volatility of his behaviour mirroring life at home.

There are small signs of hope: Josh has a mentor called Dave, from the award-winning organisation TwentyTwenty, who takes him swimming and helps him apply the same discipline to the rest of his life that he has learned in the pool. The big test of whether there is any lasting change is just around the corner – his mum's latest relationship is on the rocks. Josh is bracing himself for yet another rejection.

TwentyTwenty are just one of a very large number of organisations who tell a depressingly similar story: family breakdown and father absence can wreak havoc in children's lives, especially when life is difficult in other ways.

Personal account of living in a low-income London borough with high levels of father absence:

'A myth has grown up in parts of the black (and the white) community around here that children don't need a dad, almost as if it's a luxury, not a necessity.

*In this community, too many people are ashamed of the wrong things – like not having the latest 50-inch plasma TV on the wall or, for women, not being able to cook. I'm not an advocate of publicly shaming people, but it is shameful when children have never met their biological father. They may say they don't care, but their heart wants a dad, deep down, even if they say something different. I see far too many boys playing football and think: what a shame their dad isn't watching them play.'*²⁰³

Without a positive paternal influence, there can be particularly severe consequences; one study suggested that boys who grew up apart from their biological fathers were at least two

201 CSJ/YouGov polling of 1,722 British adults, November 2012

202 Case study provided by TwentyTwenty (support service for young people), to the CSJ

203 Gray S, *The black community knows that David Cameron has a point about runaway dads*, The Telegraph, 22 June 2011

to three times more likely to end up in prison than those who had grown up with both parents.²⁰⁴

‘After the riots, I am even more convinced about the importance of fatherhood. We can no longer afford for fathers to either opt out of or be shut out of family life. In particular, two dysfunctional models of fatherhood need to be addressed: the absent father and the disengaged father.’²⁰⁵

David Lammy MP for Tottenham

Analysis of 4,000 young offenders by the Youth Justice Board found that 70 per cent were from non-intact families.²⁰⁶ The CSJ’s extensive research conducted for *Rules of Engagement*²⁰⁷ showed that 76 per cent of children and young people in custody had an absent father and 33 per cent an absent mother; ²⁰⁸ negative father involvement and wider family breakdown can have a profound effect on children who end up as young offenders.

- 27 per cent of young men and 55 per cent of young women said they had spent some time in local authority care;
- 39 per cent had been on the child protection register or experienced neglect or abuse at some stage;
- 28 per cent had witnessed domestic violence;
- 18 per cent had a father or step-father involved in criminality.²⁰⁹

The absence of father involvement leaves a hole that 30 per cent of the young people surveyed by Addaction felt could be filled by someone with ‘street credibility’.²¹⁰ In communities where family breakdown is rife, this leaves ample opportunity for gang influence. The extensive research which underpinned our 2009 report on street gangs, *Dying to Belong* concluded that ‘family breakdown, and in particular fatherlessness, appears to be a key driver of gang culture’.²¹¹

As we showed in Chapter one, Liverpool has five of the top 15 local areas (LSOAs) for lone parenthood. A ‘Family Impact’ service in Liverpool working with families in the midst of crisis situations, for example where children are on the edge of care, or a parent is in prison or in the throes of addiction, spoke about the relationship between fatherlessness and

204 Harper C and McLanahan S, ‘Father Absence and Youth Incarceration,’ *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 2004, pp369–397

205 Lammy D, *Out of the Ashes: Britain after the riots*, London: Guardian Books, 2011

206 The Relationships Foundation, *The Cost of Family Breakdown is Criminal*, 9 February 2011

207 CSJ, *Rules of Engagement: Changing the heart of youth justice*, London: CSJ, January 2012

208 This data refers to a survey of 15–18 year olds. Summerfield A, *Children and Young People in Custody 2010–11: An analysis of the experiences of 15–18-year olds in prison*, London: HMI Prisons and Youth Justice Board, 2011

209 Jacobson J et al, *Punishing disadvantage: a profile of children in custody*, London: Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p51; see also Ministry of Justice, *Transforming Youth Custody: Putting education at the heart of detention*, February 2013 [accessed via: <https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/transforming-youth-custody> (25/02/13)]

210 Glynn M and Addaction, *Dad and Me*, Op. cit.

211 CSJ, *Dying to Belong*, London: CSJ, 2009

unemployment: a 'crisis of masculinity' in which taking responsibility for your family or contributing to your community had become, for many young men, alarmingly rare.

'When you sit and talk to lads of that age, often it seems that this is the first time someone has talked to them about values and where they come from.'

Seamus Walsh, PSS (a social enterprise delivering family support), in evidence to the CSJ

2.3 Teenage parenthood

Young parenthood is often associated with highly unstable relationships, and teenage mothers are more likely to become lone parents.²¹² Tragically, teenage parenthood often threatens to repeat existing cycles of instability and family breakdown: studies have shown that daughters of teenage mothers are more likely to become teenage parents themselves.²¹³ Children from separated families are also more likely to become parents at a young age: 25 per cent of women whose parents had separated became teenage mothers, compared with 14 per cent of those whose parents stayed together.²¹⁴ Girls from divorced families between the ages of 7 and 16 are almost twice as likely to go on to become teenage mothers as those whose parents remained married.²¹⁵ More recent studies have also shown that the 'likelihood of having a teenage birth in Britain is consistently 2 to 2.5 times higher for a daughter of a teenage mother',²¹⁶ and that intergenerational factors were a major thematic finding.²¹⁷

Not only are children of teenage mothers more likely to spend time in a lone parent family, they are also at increased risk of poverty, inadequate housing and poor nutrition.²¹⁸ An evidence review published in the *British Medical Journal* concluded that 'Although teenage pregnancy can be a positive experience ... it is associated with a wide range of subsequent adverse health and social outcomes'.²¹⁹ The same review found that young parents also reported a lack of confidence, low self-esteem, and high anxiety levels.²²⁰

212 Swann K, Bowe K, McCormick G and Kosmin M, *Teenage pregnancy and parenthood: a review of reviews*, Health Development Agency, February 2003

213 Ibid; Ermisch J and Pevalin D, *Who has a child as a teenager?*, ISER working paper 2003–30, Colchester: ISER, University of Essex, 2003 cited in CSJ, *Fractured Families*, December 2006

214 Botting B, Rosata M and Wood R, 'Teenage mothers and the health of their children', in ONS, *Population Trends* 93, Autumn 1998, pp20–28; Kieman K, 'Lone motherhood, employment and outcomes for children', *International Journal of Law, Policy and the family*, 10, 1996, pp233–249

215 Botting B et al, Op. cit.

216 Rendall M, 'How important are inter-generational cycles of teenage motherhood in England and Wales? A comparison with France', in ONS, *Population Trends* 111, Spring 2003, pp27–37

217 Whitehead E, 'Understanding the association between teenage pregnancy and inter-generational factors: A comparative and analytical study', *Midwifery*, 23, 2009, pp147–154

218 Swann et al, *Teenage pregnancy and parenthood*, Op. cit.

219 Harden A, et al 'Teenage pregnancy and social disadvantages: systemic review integrating controlled trials and qualitative studies', *British Medical Journal*, 2009, 339: b4254

220 Ibid

The children of teenage mothers tend to do worse at school and are more likely to end up unemployed.²²¹ 16.9 per cent of persistently workless families have a mother who was a teenager at the birth of their child.²²²

2.4 Outcomes for adults

Family breakdown also affects older people profoundly. Our recent report *The Forgotten Age* described how divorce and separation have led not only to more older people living alone but also to estrangement or a lack of contact between younger people and their ageing parents.²²³ Polling for the CSJ in 2011 revealed that 40 per cent of the 246,000 people by themselves on Christmas Day had family living in the UK.²²⁴

Family breakdown has also led to a significant cultural shift affecting the willingness of many family members to provide care. Eminent sociologist Anthony Giddens explains that in a high-divorce society, with its implicit understanding that relationships are not permanent, relationships are 'subject to greater negotiation than before'.²²⁵ This means that whereas previously 'kinship relations used to be a taken-for-granted basis of trust; now trust has to be negotiated and bargained for and commitment [between families] is as much of an issue as in sexual relations'.²²⁶ This has clear implications for the care of older family members: if willingness to care for older family members depends on the quality of the relationships, in-family older-age care will be less forthcoming.

Family breakdown also causes an additional strain on housing markets; both in social and private housing, given that those families who formerly lived together in one household will require two houses in place of one if adults separate. Existing housing is less efficiently used, since fewer people are in residence, and additional housing is required for the partner who leaves the home.

Family breakdown can also be a driver of poor mental health – research cited in the CSJ's two major reports on the links between poor mental health and wider disadvantage emphasise how much it can compromise adult and child wellbeing and be a driver for serious problems in later life.²²⁷

- Children with separated, single or step-parents are 50 per cent more likely to fail at school, have low esteem, struggle with peer relationships and have behavioural difficulties, anxiety or depression.

221 Department of Health and Department for children, schools and families, *Teenage Parents Next Steps: Guidance for Local Authorities and Primary Care Trusts*, 2007 [accessed via: http://www.change4children.co.uk/uploads/Teenage_Pregnancy_Next_Steps_For_LAs_And_PCTs.pdf (15/15/13)]

222 Schoon I, Barnes M, Brown V, Parsons S, Ross A and Vignoles A, *Intergenerational transmission of worklessness: Evidence from the Millennium Cohort and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England*, London: Institute of Education and National Centre for Social Research, DfE, September 2012

223 CSJ, *The Forgotten Age: Understanding poverty and social exclusion in later life*, London: CSJ, 2010

224 CSJ Press Release: *Family breakdown wreaks emotional havoc at Christmas for the elderly*, 26 December 2011 [accessed via: <http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/media-centre/press-releases-2012-13/press-release-20-02/05/13>]

225 Giddens A, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992

226 Ibid

227 CSJ, *Mental Health: Poverty, Ethnicity and Family Breakdown*, Interim Policy Briefing, London: CSJ, 2011 and CSJ, *Completing the Revolution: Transforming Mental Health and Tackling Poverty*, London: CSJ, 2011

- CSJ/YouGov polling of 1,005 British adults who had experienced mental health problems (or were a close friend or relative of someone who had) found that half thought family breakdown caused poor mental health;
- Family breakdown and early separation from a parent as well as unemployment, living alone and limited social networks, affect rates of psychosis in the African-Caribbean population where there is a greater prevalence of these factors.

Child maintenance

An issue that has risen as a key concern regarding the involvement of separated parents is child maintenance. In his comprehensive 2006 report on child maintenance, Sir David Henshaw recommended that:

The state should only get involved when parents cannot come to agreement themselves, or when one party tries to evade their responsibilities ... Parents who are able to should be encouraged and supported to make their own arrangements. Such arrangements tend to result in higher satisfaction and compliance and allow individual circumstances to be reflected.²²⁸

In response to this, the last Labour administration repealed section 6 of the Child Support Act 1991 that forced all parents claiming certain benefits to use the Child Support Agency. The current Coalition Government has sought to increase the number of families making private arrangements for child maintenance and has built on Henshaw's recommendations by proposing a charge for the use of the statutory scheme as a means to incentivise family-based arrangements. The Government has made £20 million available to support parents to collaborate around child maintenance. However, it is not clear that a readiness to promote collaboration exists within the support services that parents engage with, and many of the organisations working with separated families start from the individual rights of their members. This could continue to leave many families reliant on the statutory scheme or without effective arrangements.

While child maintenance is often regarded as being a critical component in the alleviation of child poverty, where families are either unemployed or on low income, even where arrangements are effective, there is simply a transfer of scarce resources between one household and another.²²⁹ The statutory scheme is based on the principle that only one parent may receive maintenance and only the paying parent has their income assessed when the calculation is made. By contrast, in Australia, both parents' incomes are considered equally, and the percentage of care each parent provides is taken into account when a calculation is being made.²³⁰ In Norway, the maintenance cost of a child is shared proportionately between the parents according to their incomes.²³¹ This approach emphasises the shared responsibility of financial provision for children post separation and reduces the potential for children to experience poverty when they are in the care of the paying parent.

228 Sir David Henshaw's report to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, *Recovering child support: routes to responsibility*, Sir David Henshaw, London: The Stationery Office, July 2006

229 It is suggested that of those within the statutory maintenance scheme, 518,700 were not in employment; 120,200 were in employment with an annual net income of less than £9,500. A further 170,400 were in employment with an annual net income of more than £9,500 but less than £14,000; information from a freedom of information request by Dr CM Davies, in evidence to the CSJ, 2012

230 Australian Department of Human Services, *Child Support Assessment* [accessed via: <http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/child-support/child-support-assessment> (20/05/13)]

231 Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration, in Centre for Separated Families, *Child Maintenance: History, Behaviour and Child Poverty*, [accessed via: <http://www.separatedfamilies.info/policy-makers/child-maintenance-reforms-2011/child-maintenance-history-behaviours-child-poverty/> (20/05/13)]

It appears that an inconsistency exists between the way that paying parents are treated within the statutory maintenance scheme (where there is an automatic responsibility to pay) and by the tax and benefits system (where there is no recognition of a financial parenting responsibility).²³² This anomaly not only disregards the parenting commitment of the paying parent, but appears to increase the risk of children experiencing poverty when they are in their care and increases the likelihood of that commitment becoming unsustainable.

2.5 Government action on family breakdown

In scant recognition of the enormous cost of family breakdown in economic, social and health terms, the Government has committed £30 million to funding relationship support programmes between 2011 and 2015, including marriage preparation, counselling and relationship education.²³³ The government has also launched the CANparent trial which runs until 2014 and offers universal parenting classes for all parents of children aged 0–5 in three trial areas.²³⁴

Where family breakdown may be unavoidable, the government hopes to reduce its negative impact. In July 2012 the Department for Work and Pensions launched an Innovation Fund to help families who have separated to reduce conflict. The fund comprises £14 million, as part of the £20 million committed to supporting separated families in the Social Justice Strategy.²³⁵ The fund has two stated aims which are to:

- 'Test a range of interventions to understand what is effective in encouraging collaboration and reducing conflict amongst separating and separated parents', and
- 'Increase the number of children benefiting from child maintenance arrangements by reducing conflict and improving collaboration between separated and separating parents. This will be achieved by developing effective interventions that help parents work together to make their own arrangements and avoid using the courts or the statutory child maintenance system.'²³⁶

In April 2013 it was announced that over a quarter of a million separated parents would benefit from £6.5 million of support from this Innovation Fund to help them work together for the sake of their children. New funding was awarded to seven voluntary and third-sector organisations to give around 280,000 separated families creative and targeted help to collaborate in their children's interests. In addition, a government-funded web app 'Sorting out Separation', designed to help parents minimise the impact of separation on their children, was launched in November 2012.²³⁷

232 Paying parents on income related benefits must pay a minimum of £5 per week (this may double to £10 per week), but no recognition of this is made in the benefits received, and they are regarded as single adults by tax credits.

233 DWP, *Social Justice: transforming lives – One year on*, 7 May 2013

234 Ibid

235 Ibid

236 DWP, *Innovation Fund: Help and Support for Separated Families*, 9 April 2013, [accessed via: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/supplying-dwp/what-we-buy/general-goods-and-services/innovation-fund-separated-fam/> (07/05/13)]

237 DWP Press release, *Government funds new innovative support for separated parents*, 10 April 2013, [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-funds-new-innovative-support-for-separated-parents> (07/05/13)]

Although any measures to tackle family breakdown and support families are welcome, in comparison with the estimated annual £46 billion cost of family breakdown, the 300,000 families who separate and the almost 21,000 new lone parent households which are formed each year, such measures fall a long way short of what is required. For example, the parenting classes have only been taken up by two per cent of eligible parents.²³⁸

238 The Guardian, *Free parenting classes scheme in meltdown*, 24 March 2013

chapter three

The causes of family breakdown

The underlying causes of family breakdown are extremely varied and complex. Families fail to form or split up for an enormous range of reasons. However, there are some common themes that seem to affect large numbers of families, particularly those in areas of great disadvantage. This chapter considers some of the factors which have been driving family breakdown over the past few decades.

3.1 Cultural change

There has been a long-term trend in family formation away from married-couple families towards cohabiting-couple families and lone parents. Cohabitation has become far more socially acceptable and many couples who marry cohabit first. The rise in numbers of unmarried families with dependent children has unsurprisingly been accompanied by a general decline in marriage numbers and rates over time.

Divorce has also become easier and more socially acceptable over the latter half of the twentieth century. Numbers remain high although divorce rates have now slightly dipped (see Chapter 1). The continuing rise of family instability and family breakdown cannot therefore be attributed to divorce but rather to the breakdown of unmarried parents' relationships.

3.2 Environment and experience

There is a clear association between poverty and family breakdown, as we showed in the previous chapter, and as evidenced in the fact that 65 per cent of children aged 12–16 in low-income households do not live with both parents – 26 percentage points higher than the figure for better-off households.²³⁹ The CSJ has argued for the need to understand the

²³⁹ See 2.2.1

bidirectional causal relationship between poverty and family breakdown. On the one hand, financial pressures can put additional stress on relationships, leading to relationship dissolution. On the other, family breakdown can lead to poverty: both directly through diminished income and fewer opportunities to increase work due to childcare, and indirectly, as a result of complex and interconnected factors including parental mental ill-health and emotional difficulties. These may lead to harsher parenting or neglect, children's mental ill-health and emotional difficulties, children's behaviour problems which may result from both the above, failure at school, lack of work opportunities, etc.

3.2.1 Low income as a driver of instability

Just as financial pressures can be a result of family breakdown, it can also be a driver of it. Financial difficulties can place enormous pressures on couples' relationships, lead to conflict and increase the likelihood of separation. (Relate found that money rated as the top cause of arguments among couples.²⁴⁰) Unemployment creates a higher risk of relationship breakdown,²⁴¹ as does becoming a parent, due to the added stress of financial insecurity and struggling to make ends meet.²⁴²

Impact of debt

The tension and financial hardship caused by debt can also contribute to family breakdown: and then, subsequently, be worsened by it. One study found debt to be a major cause of family conflict, with one in five parents reporting conflict over serious financial worries and debt.²⁴³ Citizens Advice found that three-quarters of people in 2012 said debt was affecting their mental health. Over half said their money problems were causing problems in their relationships with their partner; and one in three said that they had a detrimental impact on their relationship with their children.²⁴⁴

3.2.2 Financial pressures as a contributor to instability

There is a well-established body of evidence showing that financial pressures can be significant barrier to stable couple and family formation, thereby contributing to family breakdown and lone parenthood. Evidence from the US suggests that a dearth of economic opportunities for men have led to low-income couples delaying marriage and to low-skilled women having children alone.²⁴⁵ Here in the UK, lone parenthood has also been linked to rising male unemployment.²⁴⁶

240 Relate Arguments Survey, Consumer Research, 1998 cited in CSJ, *Fractured Families*, London: December 2006

241 See Blekesaunce M, *Unemployment and partnership dissolution*, Institute for Social and Economic Research, 2008 [accessed via: <https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/publications/working-papers/iser/2008-21.pdf> (07/05/13)] cited in Vaitilingam R, *Recession Britain: Findings from economic and social research*, London: Economic and Social Research Council, 2011

242 See CSJ, *Fractured Families*, Op. cit. p98–99

243 4Children, *The Enemy Within: 4 million reasons to tackle family conflict and family violence*, London: 4Children, March 2012

244 Reported in The Daily Telegraph, *Debt is affecting our mental health, say three in four*, 19 December 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/personalfinance/borrowing/9755389/Debt-is-affecting-our-mental-health-say-three-in-four.html> (02/04/13)]

245 Lundberg S. and Pollak R, 'The American family and family economics'. *NBER Working Papers 12908*, National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc., 2007, cited in Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Poverty: The role of institutions, behaviours, and culture*, June 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/poverty-culture-behaviour-full.pdf> (02/04/13)]

246 Rowthorn R, and Webster D, 'Male worklessness and the rise of lone parenthood in Great Britain', *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 1, 1, 2008, pp69–88

Financial insecurity often inhibits people from settling down. The stark decline in marriage in the UK is not driven by a decline in aspiration to marriage. Marriage is held to be an important institution across social classes and age groups. One poll found that 56 per cent of people believe marriage is very important to them personally and 24 per cent believed it to be quite important. The same poll found that similar numbers from all classes believed in the importance of marriage:

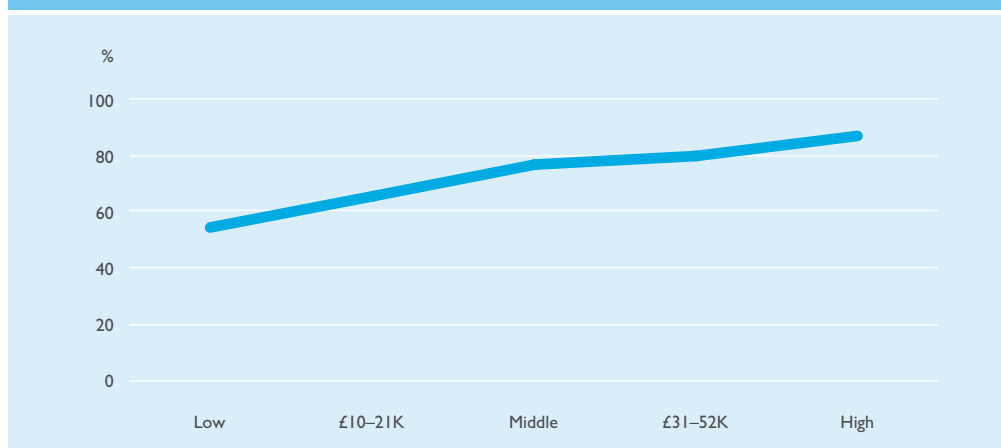
- 58 per cent of people in the AB social class believed it to be very important;
- 53 per cent of those in C1;
- 55 per cent in C2; and
- 60 per cent in DE.²⁴⁷

Another poll found that 59 per cent of people believe that marriage plays an important role in British society, with 78 per cent believing that it should do so, with a fairly even spread across age and social classes:

- 72 per cent of 18–24 year olds believing it should play an important role;
- 70 per cent of 25–39 year olds;
- 77 per cent of 40–59 year olds;
- 87 per cent of those aged 60+;
- 78 per cent of classes A, B, and C1 believing this; and
- 77 per cent of classes C2, D, and E believing it.²⁴⁸

Despite these attitudes, the last major cohort study showed that around half of new parents on an income of less than £10,000 a year are married compared to nearly 90 per cent of those earning an annual salary of more than £52,000 (figure 21 below). Despite widespread aspiration to marriage, among lower income groups there appear to be greater cultural and economic barriers to marriage.²⁴⁹

Figure 21: Proportion of new parents who are married (by income)²⁵⁰



247 Poll on behalf of The Sunday Telegraph by ICM Research, July 2007 [accessed via: http://www.icmresearch.com/pdfs/2007_july_suntelegraph_marriage_poll.pdf (10/04/13)]

248 Polling by YouGov, 10–11 April 2011 [accessed via: http://cdn.yougov.com/today_uk_import/yg-archives-pol-yougov-genmarriage-180411.pdf (05/04/13)]

249 The Opinion Research Business, *Young People's Lives in Britain Today*. London: The Opinion Research Business, 2000

250 Millennium Cohort Study (MCS, Wave 3) in Centre for Social Justice, *Forgotten Families?*, London: Centre for Social Justice, October 2012

Research has shown that people from disadvantaged backgrounds value marriage highly but believe they are currently unable to meet the high standards of relationship quality and financial stability they believe are necessary to sustain a marriage and avoid divorce.²⁵¹

Quotes from qualitative US research illuminate the kind of reasoning that is prevalent in poor communities on the subject of marriage:

'I don't really know [why they hadn't married] 'cause the love is there ... trust is there. Everything's there except the money.'

'Money means ... stability. I don't want to struggle, if I'm in a partnership, then there's no more struggling.'

'I'm still financially unstable ... I don't want to impose that upon anybody else.'²⁵²

One survey found that poor unmarried mothers believed that 'marriage ought to be reserved for couples who can support what some of them term a "white picket fence" lifestyle' – a standard of living including a mortgage on a modest home, a car and some furniture, some savings, enough money left over to pay for a 'decent' wedding'.²⁵³

There is no doubt that here in the UK the cost of a wedding can hold people back. A recent poll, for example, showed that 42 per cent of couples who are living together said that they were delaying marriage because of the cost of the wedding.²⁵⁴

'Cultural expectations are changing ... many people feel social pressure to have 'the big wedding', as seen on TV, but cannot afford it ... marriage seems prohibitively expensive and unobtainable.'

Paula Pridham, Director of Services, Care for the Family, in evidence to the CSJ

Social and cultural factors therefore profoundly affect the ability of disadvantaged people or those with lower incomes to realise the strong aspiration to marriage which is held across

251 Edin K and Reed JM, 'Why Don't They Just Get Married? Barriers to Marriage among the Disadvantaged', *The Future of Children* 15, 2, 2005, pp 117–137

252 Smock P, Manning W and Porter M, "'Everything's There Except Money': How Money Shapes Decisions to Marry Amongst Cohabitors', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, 2005, pp 680–696

253 Edin K and Reed JM, Op. cit.

254 OnePoll polling for Seddons of 3,500 UK adults, 'Co-habiting Couples', Table: Relationship Status, 17 December 2012 [accessed via: http://www.presswire.com/releases/National_poll_offers_unique_insight_into_couples_relationships/1632 (19/02/13)]

society. The perceived requirement of financial self-sufficiency for both partners, aversion to divorce, and the presence of children by other partners all operate as barriers to marriage.²⁵⁵

3.2.3 Personal experience

People's previous personal experiences have an effect on whether they are likely to suffer family breakdown. Children whose parents split up often then go on as adults to see their own families split in a cycle of family breakdown, and children from separated families are more likely to form partnerships and become parents at a young age, as we saw earlier in the previous chapter. Even after controlling for childhood poverty and behavioural and educational problems, children from families which had experienced divorce were still 40 per cent more likely to become parents early.²⁵⁶ Furthermore, men and women who grow up in broken families were more likely to separate from their cohabitating partners and have children outside of marriage – or indeed, any partnership.²⁵⁷

'Many of the young people we work with have very low self-esteem. Many have never had a male role model and consequently have very low expectations. Young women's mums have been subject to domestic abuse, and the daughters therefore see it almost as the norm.'

Centre Manager, a Community Resource Centre, in evidence to the CSJ

A review of evidence on the predictors of relationship breakdown by One Plus One suggested that demographic factors including early age at marriage, pre-marital conception, premarital cohabitation, previous partnership breakdown and parental divorce are more predictive of later marital breakdown compared to socioeconomic factors.²⁵⁸ Thus family instability can be passed down through the generations. Studies have found that women who spend part of their childhoods in lone-parent families are more likely to have their own marriages break up, and that parental divorce increases the likelihood of subsequent generation's divorce.²⁵⁹ The consequences can harm the individual, their families and future relationships. In particular, the lack of self-esteem that may ensue can lead to low expectations and getting into bad quality and even abusive relationships, which then eventually break down. However, this cycle of family breakdown is not pre-determined, and some people subject to such dysfunction have also shown great resilience.

255 Edin K and Kefalas M, *Promises I Can Keep*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2005; see also Cherlin A, 2004, 'The Deinstitutionalisation of American Marriage', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66, November 2004, pp848–86; Gillis J, 1985, *Far better, for worse: British marriages, 1600 to the present*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press; de Waal A, *Second Thoughts on the Family*, London: Civitas, 2008; Hayward J and Brandon G, *Cohabitation: An Alternative to Marriage*, Jubilee Centre: Cambridge, June 2011

256 CIVITAS, *Experiments in Living: The Fatherless Family*, Op. cit.

257 Ibid, p11

258 Clarke L and Berrington A, *Socio-demographic predictors of Divorce*, London: One Plus One, 1999, and Smart C, Stevens P, *Cohabitation Breakdown*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2000, both cited in *One Plus One, Understanding couple relationship breakdown*, 2010 [accessed via: [http://www.nct.org.uk/sites/default/files/related_documents/Research%20overview-%20Understanding%20couple%20relationship%20breakdown%20\(2010\)_1.pdf](http://www.nct.org.uk/sites/default/files/related_documents/Research%20overview-%20Understanding%20couple%20relationship%20breakdown%20(2010)_1.pdf) 02/04/13]]

259 McLanahan S and Bumpass L, 'Intergenerational Consequences of Family Disruption', *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, 1, 1988, pp130–152; Feng D, et al, 'Intergenerational Transmission of Marital Quality and Marital Instability', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 61, 2, 1999, pp451–463; Amato, Paul R. and Jacob Cheadle, 'The Long Reach of Divorce: Divorce and Child Well-being Across Three Generations', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, 1, 2005, pp191–206

'Many lone parents we work with have poor mental health, low confidence and self-esteem, and "baggage" from the past. This then leads them into inappropriate relationships. Many don't feel deserving of a better relationship and have low expectations for themselves.'

Lorraine Barrett, Centre Manager, Family Haven, in evidence to the CSJ

'Key causes of family breakdown here seem to be fathers' addiction (either alcohol or drugs) and domestic violence. Fathers' low confidence, poor self-esteem and sense of inadequacy due in part to either unrecognised or not-dealt-with dyslexia and/or poor parenting experiences and lack of lack of a reliable male role model in their own childhoods.'

Anne McLaren, Project Manager at Fun in Action, in evidence to the CSJ

There are proven links between educational failure and family breakdown.²⁶⁰ Low educational attainment is a driver as well as a consequence of family breakdown: less well-educated adults are more likely to experience family breakdown.²⁶¹ Analysis of the MCS data on 15,000 mothers with three-year-old children found that the risk of family breakdown was significantly higher amongst couples with less education, independent of age, income, marital status, ethnic group and receipt of benefits. The odds of splitting up were 82 per cent higher for mothers with no qualifications compared to mothers with NVQ level 4. Further, 42 per cent of married or cohabiting mothers with no qualifications had split before their child's third birthday, compared to five per cent of mothers with NVQ level 5.²⁶²

3.3 Barriers in social policies and public services

It has become clear to us that, while seeking to solve particular social problems, governments and public services have inadvertently created barriers to family stability. The unintended consequences of these barriers in fiscal policy, the law and public services can inadvertently encourage people to make decisions which make them and their families vulnerable and dependent.

260 See 2.2. For further research, see for example, Dawson DA, 'Family Structure and Children's Health and Well Being: Data from the 1988 National Health Interview Survey of Child Health', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 53, 1991; Sarantakos S, 'Children in three contexts: family education and social development', *Children Australia*, 21, 1996; and McLanahan S and Sandefur G, *Growing Up With a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*, Harvard University Press, 1994

261 Ermisch J, *Premarital cohabitation, childbearing and the creation of one-parent families*, ESRC Research Centre on Micro-Social Change, Issue 95, Part 17, 2001; Benson H, *The conflation of marriage and cohabitation in government statistics – a denial of difference rendered untenable by an analysis of outcomes*, 2006, Bristol Community Family Trust, cited in CSJ, *Fractured Families*, London; December 2006 p76

262 CSJ, *Fractured Families*, Op. cit.

3.3.1 Father involvement

‘We must make sure that our public services are “father-proofed”, so that the state does not come between a good father and his children.’

David Lammy MP ²⁶³

A significant barrier to fathers' involvement in the lives of their children is a perception that children may be unaffected by lack of father involvement – or even better off as a result of it. Services, policies and legal processes are often perceived to focus on the mother-child relationship only.

‘Social barriers to father involvement are eroding; there is more shared care between parents than ever before. But the law has seen only small, incremental progress and hasn't caught up with the lived experience of families.’

Families Need Fathers, in evidence to the CSJ

Yet there is significant rhetorical support from across the political spectrum to challenge any such inherent biases. The Coalition Government has recently signalled a commitment to:²⁶⁴

‘... encourage the full involvement of both parents from the earliest stages of pregnancy, including by promoting a system of shared parental leave, and to extending the right to request flexible working to all employees.’

However, the CSJ's research has shown that there is still an extremely long way to go before men are fully included by services affecting their children. One study found that young fathers were ‘mostly ignored, marginalized or made uncomfortable’ by services, despite desiring information, advice and inclusion...²⁶⁵ leading to the conclusion that this ‘hudge[s] fathers away from their children’ and can be a driver of father absence.²⁶⁶

An evaluation of the Sure Start pilot programme aimed at supporting teenage parents found that it ‘was successful in addressing the crisis needs of pregnant and parenting young women

263 Lammy D, *Out of the Ashes: Britain after the riots*, London: Guardian Books, 2011

264 DfE, *Children and Families 2013*, 18 April 2013 [accessed via: <http://www.education.gov.uk/a00221161/children-families-bill> (18/04/13)]

265 Quinton D, Pollock S and Anderson P, *The Transition to Fatherhood in Young Men: Influences on Commitment: Summary of Key Findings*, Bristol: School for Policy Studies, Bristol University, cited in Fatherhood Institute, *Fatherhood Institute Research Summary: Young Fathers*, December 2010 [accessed via: <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-young-fathers/> (15/04/13)]

266 Fatherhood Institute policy briefing, *Addressing Fatherlessness*, Op. cit.

and in helping them develop skills to prepare themselves for parenting and further educational opportunities', but that 'overall, the programme was less successful at... supporting young fathers.' In other words, it did not increase the likelihood that young men would be able to play their role before, during and after birth.²⁶⁷

Fathers have often been portrayed as inherent threats to mothers and children and required to prove their fitness to have a relationship with their children. There may be some instances where a child is better off without their father's involvement, for example, in some cases of domestic abuse – although the CSJ's report on domestic violence stressed that many perpetrators desire a more positive relationship with their children, and this can be a powerful motivator for change. Ignoring the importance to children of relationships with fathers also rules out opportunities for transformation.²⁶⁸ However, services' frequent exposure to this sort of case can create the misleading and profoundly unhelpful impression that all fathers are domestic abusers.

'About 60–70 per cent of referrals to Islington involve domestic violence. Since staff know this, there is a tendency to exclude men, which then reinforces the stereotype.'

Gavin Swann, Operational Manager, Children in Need Service, Islington, in evidence to the CSJ

This then prevents fathers who are abusing children from being expected to change and misses an opportunity for transformation, as social services are not working with them. It also works to exclude fathers who could provide positive fathering and who are not a risk.

'You make the effort, fathers will engage.'

Gavin Swann, Operational Manager, Children in Need Service, Islington, in evidence to the CSJ

'One of the main problems is that while there are services out there, they're often badly advertised. One young dad involved with Young Dads TV had walked past a children's centre regularly without knowing what it was or what it offered for three years.'

Scott Colfer, Manager of <http://YoungDads.tv> (information service for young fathers), in evidence to the CSJ

267 Social Science Research Unit and Institute of Education, *Supporting teenagers who are pregnant or parents, Sure Start Plus National Evaluation: Executive Summary*, May 2005, [accessed via: <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/s/sure%20start%20plus%20national%20evaluation%20%20executive%20summary.pdf> (09/05/13)]

268 CSJ, *Beyond Violence: Breaking cycles of domestic abuse*, London: CSJ, July 2012, p135–139

Owen Thomas, the Service Development Manager (Fathers and Parenting) for *Working With Men*, a charity supporting positive male activity and engagement, explains that fathers face cultural and social barriers to active engagement in the prevalent 'gendered conceptions of parenthood' that often see fathers as detached providers and disciplinarians, and mothers as carers:

'Men fall very easily into a "provider" role, but fathers need to be recognised as parents.'

This perception affects men's access to information and support:

'Men are less forthright in asking for advice, and due to the dominant perception of masculinity which sees that men ought to have control, lack of knowledge is seen as weakness ... You wouldn't expect to open the bonnet of a car and change the spark plugs with no training, yet we expect fathers to be fathers without any training, without any help.'

Owen Thomas, Service Development Manager (Fathers and Parenting), *Working With Men*, in evidence to the CSJ

Craig Pendle, a social work student working for the Teenage Parents Project in Bristol, who is developing a new service specifically for young fathers, agrees:

'The biggest issue for engaging fathers so far is the societal/cultural expectation is that fathers do not involve themselves in services. Men are seen as providers, not as engaged parents ... services for young parents tend to have a feminine environment.'

Craig Pendle, *Teenage Parents Project*, in evidence to the CSJ

This perception becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, reinforcing men's perceptions of their own roles. Yet research shows that the vast majority of young fathers want to be involved in the lives of their children, that many young fathers report that fatherhood has given their lives meaning, and that where disinterest is expressed, this is mainly associated with financial insecurity or confusion about how to care for babies and young children.²⁶⁹ 'Young fathers who are not engaged with their children are normally anguished by that fact' and 'only a small percentage show[ed] no intention of supporting their partner and children'.²⁷⁰

269 Rhein et al, 'Teen father participation in child rearing: family perspectives', cited in Fatherhood Institute, *Fatherhood Institute Research Summary: Young Fathers*, Op. cit.

270 Osborn M, *Being there: Young men's experience and perception of fatherhood*, unpublished PhD thesis, Norwich: Angela Ruskin University, cited in Fatherhood Institute, *Fatherhood Institute Research Summary: Young Fathers*, Op. cit.

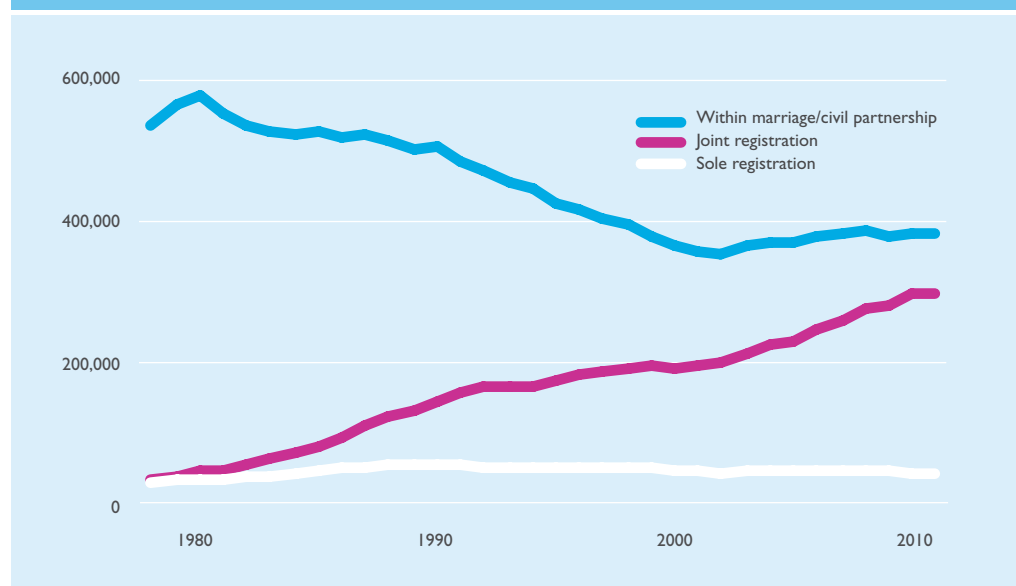
Care for the Family found that where parenting courses were labelled as such, they had a very low rate of father participation. But when they ran a parenting course that was labelled 'How to Drug Proof Your Kids', with parenting not mentioned in the title at all, the focus being on making things better for your child, they achieved a 25 per cent father participation rate – very high for such courses.²⁷¹

3.3.1.1 Legal recognition of paternity

If a baby is born to an unmarried mother, the mother's name is on the birth certificate automatically, whereas a father's is not. He would have to be present at the registration of the baby or submit a form declaring his paternity for his name to be present on the certificate. The mother's approval is also required for the father's name to be included.

Sole registrations have remained relatively stable since 1978 (4.7 per cent against 5.8 per cent in 2011, and has plateaued particularly since the turn of the millennium (see figure 22 below).²⁷² The most observable trend is the fall in within-marriage registration alongside the very significant increase in joint registrations outside of marriage.

Figure 22: Birth registrations 1978–2011²⁷³



In 2007 the last government planned to make registration of the father's name on birth certificates compulsory.²⁷⁴ Historically, mothers had to register their child's birth within 42

271 Paula Pridham, Care for the Family, in evidence to the CSJ

272 ONS, *Characteristics of Mother 1, England and Wales, 2011*, Table 2: Live births by age of mother and registration type, 24 January 2013 [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcn%3A77-241261> (28/01/13)]

273 Ibid

274 BBC News, *Birth certificates to name father*, 15 June 2007 [accessed via: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/6756381.stm> (25/04/13)]

days, but the father's registration was conditional upon the mother's consent and a court decision on the basis of the child's best interests. The proposal was to go further than is currently the case and make father registration compulsory, except where it would be 'unreasonable' – for example, where the mother did not know where the father was, where the mother did not want the father named due to a coercive relationship or where the child was the result of rape, or where there were child welfare concerns.

In 2009, despite some strong opposition (from those who argued that the law could harm vulnerable women), this proposal was passed into law as part of the Welfare Reform Act 2009. Then Work and Pensions Secretary James Purnell argued that

'It is crucial that both mum and dad recognise the role they play in their child's life and how that shapes their child's identity.'²⁷⁵

The Act not only required mothers to name the child's father, but also threatened a £200 fine and a seven days' jail sentence for perjury for mothers who gave false names. However, although the Bill put compulsory joint registration on the statute books, the new Coalition Government decided not to press with its enforcement in 2010. And in 2011, Education Secretary Michael Gove said that he would repeal the law.²⁷⁶

However, in 2011 the Prime Minister and Conservative ministerial colleagues were considering returning to obliging fathers to be named on birth certificates. They argued that unmarried mothers who were trying to cut a father out of his child's life should be forced to acknowledge his role, men ought to be given a right to insist upon a paternity test if necessary, and 'feckless fathers who refuse to be named on a birth certificate should – like mothers who decline to name a father – be liable for a fine, expected to be £200'.²⁷⁷ This proposal has now been shelved, with some Conservative ministers citing objections from their Liberal Democrat Coalition partners.²⁷⁸

The issue has not gone away, however, and the Fatherhood Institute are continuing to call for joint registration:

'As long as fathers are not required to be named the birth registration process strongly suggests that motherhood is mandatory whilst fatherhood is optional.'²⁷⁹

275 The Daily Telegraph, *Mothers to name child's father on birth certificate*, 3 June 2008

276 Daily Mail, *Now single mums don't have to name the father on child birth certificates*, 25 February 2011

277 Daily Mail, *Lib Dems block move to name the father on all birth certificates*, 19 March 2012

278 Ibid

279 Fatherhood Institute policy briefing, *Addressing Fatherlessness*, Op. cit.

Father involvement in the Children and Families Bill

The Children and Families Bill 2013 would give fathers and partners a right to unpaid time off work to attend antenatal appointments.²⁸⁰ It will implement the commitments the Government made in response to the Family Justice Review, including limiting the time that courts can take to consider whether a child should be taken into care, and making sure that more families try the mediation route before applying to court. The Bill also provides statutory recognition that children are better off with both parents remaining involved in children's lives, where there is no risk of harm.

However, the CSJ is concerned that the Bill has failed to address a problem the Review was set up to tackle – that of 'Section 8 cases' (or Care and Contact Orders). The Government's consultation document, *Co-operative Parenting Following Family Separation: Proposed Legislation on the Involvement of Both Parents in a Child's Life*, used the phrase 'retain a strong and influential relationship with his or her child' to describe the Government's intention in relation to shared parenting.²⁸¹ But this intention is not reflected in the wording of the Bill which replaces the words 'strong and influential relationship' with 'involvement'.

The Family Justice Review Final Report states that 'courts start from the principle that contact with both parents will be in the interests of the child, unless there are very good reasons to the contrary'.²⁸² It is therefore difficult to see how the Bill will do anything other than codify the courts' existing application of Section 1 of the Children Act 1989 (welfare of the child), which stated that 'When a court determines any question with respect to (a) the upbringing of a child; or (b) the administration of a child's property or the application of any income arising from it, the child's welfare shall be the court's paramount consideration'.²⁸³ The 2013 Bill does not seem to address fatherlessness, and it is not clear that anything will change in contested 'Section 8' cases.

The House of Commons Justice Committee's fourth report – pre-legislative scrutiny of the Children and Families Bill is quite telling in this regard. The report concludes that '...the draft clause has been included not to effect any change in Court orders but to tackle a perception of bias within the Courts'.²⁸⁴ And Hon Mr Justice Ryder, in evidence to the Justice Committee, during pre-legislative scrutiny of the Children and Families Bill, has said that 'the draft clause... is not likely to change practice'.²⁸⁵ The Government also appears to have backed down on its proposals to strengthen the enforcement of 'Contact Orders'.

3.3.2 Welfare

3.3.2.1 Teenage pregnancy and benefits

Straight Talking, a CSJ Alliance charity employing teenage parents to educate young people about early parenthood has highlighted how teenage pregnancy is not always 'unplanned' or 'unwanted' but can also be chosen when it makes 'sense in the worlds inhabited by young

280 DfE, *Children and Families 2013*, 18 April 2013 [accessed via: <http://www.education.gov.uk/a00221161/children-families-bill> (18/04/13)]

281 DfE, *Co-operative Parenting Following Family Separation: Proposed Legislation on the Involvement of Both Parents in a Child's Life*, [accessed via: Institute of Education, <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/14682/> (20/05/13)]

282 Family Justice Review Panel, *Family Justice Review: Final Report*, November 2011 [accessed via: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/181133/FJR-2011.pdf (10/05/13)] paragraph 4.20

283 Children Act 1989 [accessed via: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/section/1> (20/05/13)]

284 House of Commons Select Committee, *Pre-legislative scrutiny of the Children and Families Bill: Fourth Report of Session 2012–2013*, Volume 1, 14 December 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmjst/739/739.pdf> (10/05/13)] paragraph 153

285 *Ibid*, paragraph 159

mothers'.²⁸⁶ They have found that teenage pregnancy can 'make economic sense' in relation to housing and income. Research evidence also suggests that teenage parenthood may, in many instances, 'be a rational response to inadequate outside opportunities for young women and that it does not in itself lead to worse outcomes for parents and children'.²⁸⁷

Where money is tight, becoming a parent can initially boost income through child benefit and child-related tax credits. It can also lead to higher priority for social housing.

However, this is rarely or simply a matter of economic opportunism. The CSJ has heard how, for some teenage mothers, the decision to have a baby can be born out of low self-esteem, underachievement at school and poor prospects for employment or training. Also, Straight Talking has seen how many teenage mothers' aspirations lie in 'trying to recreate the family they'd never had, or they'd lost'.²⁸⁸ Poignantly, teenage pregnancy can be an attempt to find purpose and meaning in the midst of educational failure, economic dependency and other forms of disadvantage.

3.3.2.2 Couple penalties

'The benefits system can unwittingly support people to be living separately. If two parents live together, they may not be able to claim the same level of benefits. If a mother has a child and a council house, then moves in with someone else, they may lose out, particularly if the new partner is working. Its complex but for some it seems at times to work better not to cohabit. Parents have told us: "I will lose money if we live together; therefore it is better on my own".'

Anne McLaren, Project Manager, Fun in Action, in evidence to the CSJ

It is important to distinguish between financial penalties and material couple penalties. The latter are cases where couples have a lower material standard of living together than they would do if they lived apart. The former are where couples are deprived of some of the cost savings that living together brings, but experience no material loss compared to living apart. In 2009, the CSJ's report *Dynamic Benefits* estimated that 1.8 million couples were affected by a *material* couple penalty and identified three places in which couple penalties arise in the benefits system:

1. Amounts given to couples through Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefits and Jobseeker's Allowance were lower than the combined income of two single adults. (Using government

286 Duncan S, 'What's the problem with teenage parents? And what's the problem with policy?', *Critical Social Policy*, 27, 3, 2007, pp307–334

287 Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Poverty: The role of institutions, behaviours, and culture*, London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), June 2012

288 Straight Talking, in evidence to the CSJ

poverty scales, in order for couples to have equivalent income as two single individuals, after taking into account the savings of being a couple, couples needed 75 per cent of two single adults' combined income. However, the amounts given through these benefits comprised only 66 per cent of the combined income of two individuals.)

2. Inequalities between the amounts couples and single people could earn before benefit withdrawal: for Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support, earnings allowed before withdrawal were twice as high for lone parents as for couples with or without children.
3. Working Tax Credit gave as much money to couple families as to lone parents, failing to recognise the second adult.

Dynamic Benefits reported that between earnings of approximately £4,500 and £8,000, more than 50 per cent of couples experience a lower living standard together than they would apart.²⁸⁹

In 2010:

- 68 per cent of existing couples in the UK faced a couple penalty in the tax and benefit system, defined as 'when the tax and benefit system pays a married or cohabiting couple less financial support than if the partners lived (or claimed to live) apart',
- 27 per cent face neutrality, and
- Four per cent experience a couple premium, where their incomes are higher for being in a couple.²⁹⁰

The largest contributors to these penalties were jobseekers' allowance/income support/pension credit, child tax credit and working tax credit. For one in ten couples, the couple penalty in the tax and benefit system was at least 20 per cent of their net income. Of particular interest was the fact that 95 per cent of couples with children faced a couple penalty.²⁹¹

Such penalties are serious disincentives to couple formation.

Case study from *Straight Talking*, in evidence to the CSJ

I was living with my partner and 2 children and was returning to work after being on maternity leave. The only benefit that we were receiving was £20 per week child tax credits. We had to pay £113 a week rent, £174 a month council tax and £800 per month in childcare costs plus all our other bills and living expenses. We found that we were unable to keep up with all the bills despite cutting back and decided that my partner would have to move out as this was the only way we were going to be able to survive. As a single parent I receive £290 per week child tax credits and I have to pay £60 per week rent and £90 per month council tax. My tax credits pay for all of this and I still have some money left from them. The benefits system does not help families who want to live together; you have more money as a single parent.

289 CSJ, *Dynamic Benefits: Toward welfare that works*, London: CSJ, September 2009

290 IFS, *Couple Penalties and Premiums in the UK Tax and Benefits System*, IFS Briefing Note BN102, 2010

291 Ibid

Case study: Effects of the couple penalty²⁹²

Ellen and her partner have been a couple for nearly twenty years and have had three children together. However, because of the financial benefits of Ellen being a single parent, they avoided marriage for most of that time. 'He would stay with us for a while and would then stay with his parents for a while so that we weren't officially a couple.' This meant Ellen's partner had an unstable place in the life of the family.

Three years ago they decided to get married despite the financial consequences. Ellen says it has been the best thing for them. 'We are so much more secure now. We are so much closer. It is difficult financially but it is definitely worth it.'

Whilst it has been argued that the benefit system does not make people living together as couples better off if they separate,²⁹³ there is some evidence that Working Families Tax Credit caused a small but notable increase in the number of marriages dissolving amongst those in low-income households. One academic study has shown that

'The introduction of the Working Families Tax Credit led to a reduction in the gains from marriage for women in low-income households, with a two percentage point increase in the rate at which their marriages dissolved (which represents an almost 160 per cent increase in the divorce rate for these women).'²⁹⁴

It is undeniable that people on low incomes sometimes think twice before moving in together because of concerns about how their change in status may affect their income. Through our extensive research on the benefits system published in 2009, it became clear there are 'missing couples' in the lowest income level.²⁹⁵

Our research found that the proportion of people choosing to form couples decreases gradually as the earnings of the primary earner decreases.²⁹⁶ But for earnings below £15,000 per annum, there is a marked drop in couple formation, below the general trend. Fewer people on the lowest incomes are living together as couples.

The obvious disadvantages accrued through Housing Benefit rules could be a particular barrier to couple formation: parents or parents-to-be who live separately and can therefore receive Housing Benefit payments would not find that as a couple their Housing Benefit is twice what they received before. A related risk which can undermine couple formation in

292 Case study provided by Ellen (name changed) on a CSJ visit to Findlay Family Network in Glasgow.

293 Hirsch, D, *Does the tax and benefit system create a 'couple penalty'?* Joseph Rowntree Foundation Programme Paper, London: JRF, June 2012

294 Francesconi et al, 2009, *The Economic Journal*, 119, February, 2009, F1–F35

295 CSJ, *Dynamic Benefits: Towards welfare that works*, London: CSJ, 2009

296 Ibid

poorer communities involves social housing. Where two people living in separate social housing want to move in together; they will obviously face the prospect of losing one of their houses which can act as a huge disincentive to their moving in together.



Lone parents are disproportionately represented in the social housing population, reflecting the link between lone parenthood and poverty: 17.3 per cent of all people living in social housing are lone parents with dependent children, while 12 per cent of private renters are lone parents with dependent children, and only three per cent of owner occupiers are lone parents.²⁹⁷ Further, 44 per cent of lone parents live in social housing.²⁹⁸ This pattern has increased over time: a report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that the percentage of children in home-owning families born to lone mothers was unchanged for children between 1970 and 2000, while the proportion in social housing grew from six per cent to 28 per cent.²⁹⁹

The change to Universal Credit will eliminate some of these couple penalties, since it replaces some of the ‘worst culprits’ – Jobseeker’s Allowance, Income Support, Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit.³⁰⁰ Universal Credit assesses claimants by household, rather than by individual, and also introduces a single rate at which benefits taper off for the whole household, smoothing out some of the penalties which can occur where claimants have individual taper rates.

297 Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), *English Housing Survey: Headline Report 2010–11*, February 2012, Annex table 2 [accessed via: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6735/2084179.pdf (07/05/13)]

298 DCLG, *Survey of English Housing, Preliminary Report: 2007/08*, 2009, cited by Shelter, *Who gets social housing?* [accessed via: http://england.shelter.org.uk/campaigns/why_we_campaign/Improving_social_housing/who_gets_social_housing#_edn2 (10/05/13)]

299 JRF, *Growing up in social housing in Britain: A profile of four generations, 1964 to the present day*, London: JRF, June 2009

300 DWP, *Universal Credit: Welfare that works*, November 2010 [accessed via: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/181145/universal-credit-full-document.pdf (10/05/13)]

However, some penalties are likely to remain: the personal allowance (the maximum entitlement to Universal Credit payments) is higher for couples than for single people, but will not be twice as high. This means that a financial couple penalty will remain, although not necessarily a material one – they will not benefit from the entirety of the savings made by living together as a couple, but their living standard will not have fallen.

The Government's poverty scales, also used by the OECD, state that a childless couple needs 75 per cent of the combined incomes of two single people. Under Universal Credit, the maximum annual earnings allowed before benefit payments taper off is:

- zero for single adults, who have no earnings disregarded,
- £3,000 for a couple with no children,
- £5,700 for a couple with at least one child, and
- £7,700 for a lone-parent (and £7,000 for a disabled person).³⁰¹

Adults without children will therefore benefit in terms of the disregards by couple formation. But for adults with children, the story may be different. From the perspective of a lone parent in receipt of Universal Credit, a couple-forming financial penalty seems to remain, in the loss of £2,000. This does not necessarily mean a material penalty – it depends on whether the savings made through living together amount to more than this loss; however using the 75 per cent equivalence scale, a couple with children ought to be able to earn up to £5,775 (75 per cent of twice individual incomes – which would be £0 for a non-resident parent and £7,700 for a lone parent), so a material penalty of £75 remains in the disregards. However, from the other benefit-receiving potential partner's perspective (who may be the non-resident parent), there seems to be a financial premium to couple formation, since single adults are entitled to no disregards, while as a couple with children they may earn up to £5,700. So, for example, a man who works and fathers a child with someone who does not work, may have an incentive to couple formation in the form of the £5,700 disregard, while the mother may not have such a financial incentive.

3.4 Taxation

Until it was finally abolished by the then Chancellor Gordon Brown in April 2000, our tax system included a Married Couples Allowance. However, the UK is rare among European countries to not recognise marriage in the tax system. The majority of European countries, including France, Germany, Denmark, and Norway, recognise the role of a spouse who chooses to stay at home to care for the children while their partner works.

The CSJ has argued for the introduction of a transferable tax allowance for married couples, on the grounds that while it would provide only a modest increase in income, this modest sum makes a substantial difference amongst the poorest families.³⁰² It would also send a clear signal to people in those areas that the Government is supporting their aspiration.

³⁰¹ DWP, *Universal Credit: Welfare that works*, London: The Stationery Office, 2010

³⁰² CSJ, *Why is the Government anti-Marriage? Family Policy derived from strong evidence would lead to policies which supported Marriage*, London: CSJ, December 2009

Analysis by CARE and the IFS also shows the transferrable tax allowance that the CSJ has advocated would benefit the poorest families more in comparison to the richest than the Government's decision to increase the personal tax allowance.³⁰³ A transferable tax allowance would have a beneficial impact for the poorest, and reflect the strength of people's aspirations to marry across the socioeconomic spectrum. These aspirations are currently being thwarted, and it is important to address perverse incentives which make couple formation and marriage less possible for people on low incomes. Given that statistically marriage is the most stable form of relationship, and that most people aspire to marriage at some point, it is crucial to support marriage and remove barriers to marriage amongst the least well-off.

A transferable tax allowance for married couples was a Conservative manifesto pledge and a commitment in the Coalition Agreement, but it remains to materialise. However, Downing Street sources indicated that it will be introduced within six months from April 2013.³⁰⁴ Nevertheless, under the manifesto proposal, spouses not using all of their tax-free personal allowance, either because they stay at home or work part-time and earn less than the threshold for basic rate income tax, would be able to transfer just £750 of their benefit to their working partner:

Eligible couples where one partner is not using all the tax-free personal allowance and the other earns up to £44,000 would be up to £150 a year better off – just £2.88 a week. A fully transferable tax allowance, however, could benefit families by as much as £1,621 per year.³⁰⁵

303 CSJ, *It is time to back marriage*, London: CSJ, February 2012

304 Daily Mail, *Tax break for married couples 'within six months': Cameron ready to defy Osborne and Clegg to force policy through*, 26 April 2013 [accessed via: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2315309/Tax-break-married-couples-months-Cameron-ready-defy-Osborne-Clegg-force-policy-through.html> (26/04/13)]

305 CSJ, *It is time to back marriage*, Op. cit.

chapter four

Highly vulnerable families

Family breakdown is an issue across the whole country. However, there is also particularly intense family breakdown where complex issues besiege families and culminate in their children being on the edge of the care system. One in 200 children in England has been tipped over the edge and into the care of the state.³⁰⁶

Concerted action at every level of government and throughout society is urgently required if we are to ensure that this cycle of deprivation is not repeated or reinforced – the children of today's most complex families must not become the parents of tomorrow's.

In June 2010 Professor Eileen Munro was commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education to conduct a review of child protection in England. The final report, *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report – A child-centred system*, published in May 2011, concluded that child protection has become too focussed on compliance and procedures and has lost its focus on the needs and experience of individual children, and called for major culture change across children's services and child protection, which would develop a risk-sensible culture.³⁰⁷ This included 15 key recommendations aimed at ensuring that the system develops and values professional expertise, cutting bureaucracy and statutory targets, and empowering practitioners to make the best judgements about the welfare of children and young people. These recommendations are underpinned by eight principles:

1. The system should be child-centred;
2. The family is usually the best place for bringing up children and young people, but difficult judgements are sometimes needed in balancing the right of a child to be with their birth family with their right to protection from abuse and neglect;

306 DfE, *Children looked after by local authorities in England (including adoption)*, Table LAA1, 25 September 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/statistics/allstatistics/a00213762/children-looked-after-las-england> (14/02/12)]

307 Munro, E, *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report: A child-centred system*, London: DfE, May 2011

3. Helping children and families involves working with them and therefore the quality of the relationship between the children and family and professionals impacts on the effectiveness of help given;
4. Early help is better for children;
5. Children's needs and circumstances are varied so the system needs to offer equal variety in its response;
6. Good professional practice is informed by knowledge of the latest theory and research
7. Uncertainty and risk are features of child protection work;
8. The measure of the success of child protection systems, both local and national, is whether children are receiving effective help.³⁰⁸

The Government agreed with Professor Munro's analysis and published a formal Government response in July 2011.³⁰⁹ In December 2011, Tim Loughton, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Department gave an update to Parliament on progress being made across the range of commitments in the Government response to the Munro Review, which includes revisions to *Working Together to Safeguard Children* to reduce bureaucracy, decommissioning the National electronic Common Assessment Framework, and new, more child-centered OFSTED inspection arrangements.³¹⁰ However, the revised *Working Together* does not substantially address many of Munro's recommendations, and the retention of the inspection regime may mean that the centrally prescriptive culture may remain.

In May 2012 Professor Munro published her progress update on the reforms.³¹¹ Professor Munro's overall assessment was that 'progress is moving in the right direction but that it needs to move faster'. The Government has now appointed a Chief Social Worker – one of the recommendations of the Munro report.³¹² However, the British Association of Social Workers has also reported that progress on the ground has been limited and Munro's reforms are being undermined by increasing caseloads for social workers.³¹³ Also worrying is the omission of any mention of working in partnership with parents.

4.1 Complex families

There is no single cause of a 'dysfunctional' or complex family, and the issues facing individual families vary in severity and number due to a combination of risk factors from the family and wider community. As the CSJ outlined in *Breakdown Britain: Fractured Families*, familial risk factors include: 'neglect, abuse (sexual, physical and psychological), substance misuse, domestic violence, divorce and parental separation, illness (mental or physical) and disability'.

308 Ibid, p23

309 DfE, *Munro Review of Child Protection: government response*, 13 July 2011 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/munro-review-of-child-protection-government-response> (10/05/13)]

310 DfE, *Full response to Named Day Question*, 13 December 2012 [accessed via: <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/f/fullresponseqtim%20loughton20111213.pdf> (20/05/13)]

311 Munro E, *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Progress Report: Moving towards a child centred system*, 1 May 2012 [accessed via: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/180861/DFE-00063-2012.pdf (20/05/13)]

312 DfE Press Release, *First ever chief social worker for children and fast-track training to lead social work reform*, 17 May 2013 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/first-ever-chief-social-worker-for-children-and-fast-track-training-to-lead-social-work-reform> (20/05/13)] The Chief Social Worker appointed was Isabelle Trowler, a member of the CSJ Working Group on Family Breakdown.

313 Community Care, *What difference has Munro made to frontline social work?*, 28 May 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/articles/28/05/2012/118250/what-difference-has-munro-made-to-frontline-social-work.htm> (10/05/13)]

Environmental risk factors range widely across financial poverty, homelessness, lack of educational opportunities, poor housing, ethnicity, and family structure.³¹⁴

Research shows that family dysfunction and deprivation can be mutually reinforcing,³¹⁵ and parents in complex families have often had a dysfunctional background themselves, although many families facing extremely difficult circumstances are very resilient and raise children well despite all the odds stacked against them.

‘We learn parenting from our own experiences; the problems are intergenerational ... The main problem facing the families worked with clearly comes down to how they’d been parented themselves.’

Paul Youral, *Save the Family*, in evidence to the CSJ

The risk of child maltreatment, a key feature of complex families, is increased with circumstances associated with disadvantage, including:

- Disability, health problems and behavioural problems;
- Young parents;
- Large families;
- Poor parenting skills;
- Parental mental health problems;
- Parental substance abuse;
- Violence between adult family members;
- Parents who were abused or neglected as children;
- Social isolation; and
- Financial poverty.³¹⁶

Case study: A complex family³¹⁷

Parents Jane and Nick (names have been changed) had a high degree of mistrust of services and both parents had refused voluntary intervention when offered in the past. They received a 12-month Parenting Order and were referred by the court to a voluntary sector organisation after their 15-year old son, David, was arrested.

Their house was dirty, untidy and cluttered. The windows had been nailed shut in an attempt to keep David out of trouble. The garden was unsafe for children and was littered with seven fridges. And though David’s parents worried about his penchant for playing with fire, there were no smoke alarms. The parents had been issued with a warning over the poor condition of their property and threatened with eviction.

314 CSJ, *Fractured Families*, 2006, Op. cit.

315 NSPCC, *Poverty and child maltreatment*, London: NSPCC, April 2008

316 Meadows P et al, *The costs and consequences of child maltreatment: literature review for the NSPCC*, London: NSPCC, 2011

317 Case study given by a voluntary sector organisation delivering the Troubled Families programme in evidence to the CSJ

David and his younger brother couldn't share a room because of arguments; the younger brother shared a room with his two younger sisters. The girls had a serious and unaddressed head lice problem and had been misbehaving at school. David had been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and had been taking Ritalin once a day for eight years, and was also taking sleeping tablets. His parents found it hard to manage his behaviour and the bullying of his younger siblings. Their parenting styles varied between 'permissive' and 'authoritarian'; Jane relied on her husband to discipline the children, and he used threats of physical punishment to do so.

Nick stated that he was an alcoholic and 'drank every day and all day', occasionally disappearing for a few days at a time. Neither parent considered that this had any detrimental impact on their children, despite an incidence where Nick disappeared with all their money leaving no food or means of getting any for the children. Neither parent was in work.

Children who grow up in such complex families are more likely to experience negative life outcomes, including poor physical and mental health, educational underachievement, and unemployment.³¹⁸ Anti-social behaviour and offending compound these blighted life chances, harming the individual, their families and future relationships, and are significantly costly to wider society both economically and in terms of lost potential.

An example given by a senior probation officer in evidence to the CSJ highlighted how practice had changed due to increasingly complex families. In the past, they used a standardised family tree which included two parents and grandparents to establish an individual's potential support or risk factors within their family. Their view was that for offenders on community orders and licenses, 'support by the family far outweighs any other support ... Family is the starting point'.

Now, however, the probation service starts with a 'genogram' that represents increasingly complex family structures. In one high profile criminal case this was referred to as a 'genealogical bramble'.³¹⁹ The officer cited an example whereby one man had 23 children by 20 different women. He had no financial responsibility for 21 of these children: 'the level of family breakdown is dire'.

4.2 The Troubled Families programme

The Troubled Families programme is the most prominent example of a government initiative to work with complex families. In December 2011, Prime Minister David Cameron launched the programme to 'turn around' and change the lives of families who have severe, multiple, long-standing problems.

318 NSPCC, *Poverty and child maltreatment*, London: NSPCC, April 2008

319 The Independent, *Shannon Matthews' terrifying ordeal at hands of her own family*, 16 June 2010

'We have got to take action to turn troubled families around... We've also got to change completely the way government interacts with them; the way the state intervenes in their lives... We need to provide leadership at the top, action in local authorities and results on the ground.'³²⁰

Rt Hon David Cameron MP

So-called 'troubled families' are estimated to cost government approximately £9 billion every year (an average of £75,000 per family), £8 billion of which is reactive spending, leaving only one ninth (or 11 per cent) which focuses on prevention.³²¹ The programme invests £448 million in local authorities (up to £4,000 per family – 40 per cent of the estimated cost, with local authorities having to find the other 60 per cent), mostly on a payment-by-results basis, and runs from 2012 to the end of this Parliament in 2015.

In 2006, *Breakdown Britain: Fractured Families* emphasised the 'enormous difficulty in assessing the prevalence' of a concept like complex (or 'troubled') families. The Government has identified an apparent 120,000 of them across England in what is, in many ways, a continuation of the previous Labour Government's approach. Their 2007–2010 *Think Families* agenda identified two per cent of families as having 'multiple problems'.³²² The programme, now being led by Louise Casey out of the Department for Communities and Local Government, characterises troubled families as those who:

1. Are involved in youth crime or anti-social behaviour;
2. Have children who are regularly truanting;
3. Have an adult on out-of-work benefits;
4. Cost the public sector large sums in responding to their problems.³²³

To be part of the cohort, a family must meet either all of the first three criteria, or two out of three plus the fourth, locally defined discretion filter.³²⁴ The guidance from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on the fourth criterion is loose, and is intended to allow local authorities 'to draw on data sets which are specific to [local areas]... rather than part of national information collection systems'.³²⁵ The Financial Framework suggests that high-cost families could include a child on a Child Protection Plan, those subject

320 Prime Minister David Cameron, *Troubled families speech*, 15 December 2011 [accessed via: <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/troubled-families-speech/> (13/03/13)]

321 DCLG, *Helping troubled families turn their lives around*, 12 February 2013 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/helping-troubled-families-turn-their-lives-around> (13/03/13)]

322 Cabinet Office, *Reaching Out: Think Families*, London: Cabinet Office, June 2007 [accessed via: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/social_exclusion_task_force/assets/think_families/think_families_full_report.pdf (29/01/13)]

323 DCLG, *Helping troubled families turn their lives around: How the Troubled Families programme will work*, 10 January 2013 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/helping-troubled-families-turn-their-lives-around/supporting-pages/how-the-troubled-families-programme-will-work> (29/01/13)]

324 DCLG, *The Troubled Families Programme: Financial Framework for the Troubled Families programme's payment-by-results scheme or local authorities* March 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/2117840.pdf> (29/01/13)]

325 *Ibid*, p16

to frequent police call-outs, and those with health problems (including emotional and mental health, drug and alcohol misuse, long-term health conditions, domestic abuse, and under-18 conceptions).³²⁶

'Those families that come under the Troubled Families programme are terribly hard nuts to crack.'³²⁷

These are the families with entrenched, multiple problems that the CSJ's work has particularly focussed on. According to the Government, of those families included in the estimated 120,000 with multiple problems, over one third have children subject to a child protection order; and over half of all children who are permanently excluded from school in England and one in five young offenders will come under the Troubled Families programme.³²⁸

There has been widespread debate about this 120,000 figure. 'We obviously have got more [families than the Government's allocation]', said one local authority manager. The original survey of 7,000 families upon which the 120,000 estimate was based is now nine years out of date, and did not take into account a sampling error – had it done so the figure could be anywhere from zero to 300,000.³²⁹ More significantly, the criteria used to identify the original 120,000 estimate have since changed while the number has stayed the same.

Case study: Complex families worked with³³⁰

The organisation had started to work with families facing severe instability in 2011, before the Troubled Families programme was established. Although the restrictive financial framework and criteria almost stopped the organisation from bidding for the contract to deliver the programme, they are now delivering South Somerset's Family Focus programme, very much 'in partnership' with the local authority.

Family A

The family is composed of a single mother, who has been a victim of domestic violence in the past, and five children, three of whom are teenagers. There are issues with non-attendance at school for all five children. The family have major housing problems and they are under threat of eviction within the next few months due to the children's anti-social behaviour and complaints from neighbours. The eldest child is known to the youth offending team and recently has attempted suicide on more than one occasion. The two youngest children have recently been in trouble with the police and their behaviour is escalating. There is a problem too with anger management among the children. In the past, the mother has struggled to retain control within the family and has acknowledged that she needs help to turn the family situation around.

326 Ibid, p5

327 Senior probation officer, in evidence to the CSJ

328 DCLG, *The Troubled Families Programme: Financial Framework*, Op. cit. p1

329 Levitas R, *There may be 'trouble' ahead: what we know about those 120,000 'troubled families'*, ESRC Policy Response Paper Series No.3, 21 April 2012

330 Case studies provided by a voluntary sector organisation delivering a family support programme, in evidence to the CSJ

Family B

A single mother lives with her grown-up daughter, grandson and six other children, three of whom are teenagers. The grown-up daughter has severe mental health problems and does not leave the house very often. Consequently the mother is the main carer for the grandson. In the past, the mother has had to take the family to a refuge and has moved to various towns around the country. The third child does not go to school, but has a 'young person' mentor in place to support him. He is known to the youth offending team. Some of the other children have anger management problems, anxiety and also problems with school attendance. The family is known to the early intervention team and youth offending team. The mother is on benefits.

Family C

This family of a mother and two children were referred to the programme by the youth offending team. The mother also has a partner. She has pronounced mental health problems following long-term abuse experienced in her former relationship. The house that they live in has no heating and limited hot water. The mother's benefits were being withdrawn as it had been decided that she was fit to work. The elder child has been involved in anti-social behaviour, infrequently attends school and has complex emotional and behavioural needs. The younger child is also involved in anti-social behaviour and has poor school attendance.

4.2.1 Implementation

A network of Troubled Families coordinators have been appointed in local authorities to oversee the work of the programme, which includes compiling the list of families and tracking the outcomes achieved for all troubled families in their area. As of January 2013, 143 local authorities had appointed Troubled Families coordinators, out of 151—95 per cent.³³¹

The DCLG guidance on evidence and good practice recommends a tried-and-tested family intervention model of a dedicated, assertive key worker working intensively with a handful of families, giving practical, whole-family support while challenging families to improve. It draws on the success of the pioneering work of Action for Children and Dundee Council Housing Department's Families Project in the mid-1990s.

As of March 2012, around 10,000 families had already been involved with this family intervention approach, which has now been adopted by the Troubled Families programme and extended to a further 120,000.³³² DCLG's report on the academic evidence, local evaluations of practice, and what practitioners have reported works, identifies five crucial 'family intervention factors' which make up effective family intervention:

331 DCLG, *Deposited Paper DEP2013-0051* in response to PQ 135320 [accessed via: <http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2013-0051/135320Griffiths.xls> (02/05/13)]

332 DCLG, *Working with Troubled Families: A guide to the evidence and good practice*, December 2012 [accessed via: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/66113/121214_Working_with_troubled_families_FINAL_v2.pdf (12/04/13)]

1. A dedicated worker, dedicated to a family;
2. Practical 'hands-on' support;
3. A persistent, assertive and challenging approach;
4. Considering the family as a whole – gathering the intelligence;
5. Common purpose and agreed action.³³³

4.2.2 Emerging evidence

The early evidence the CSJ has gathered is indicative of the 'teething problems' of a programme still developing. Experience varies with local delivery, and many of the concerns raised here will not be pertinent to all local authorities, not least because some are delivering the programme through existing provision while others are commissioning out to the voluntary sector and developing new programmes.

Various issues are rising to the fore among local authorities and voluntary sector organisations involved in the Troubled Families programme. Local authorities' relationships with DCLG's Troubled Families team mean that evidence was largely given to the CSJ on condition of anonymity.

4.2.2.1 Identification, criteria and outcomes

Troubled Families coordinators (whose appointment is mandatory for councils) have currently identified over half of the 120,000 families targeted by the programme, with over 66,000 names and addresses in the system – 100 per cent more than councils were asked to have identified within the first year.³³⁴ However, given that the project seeks to turn around the lives of 120,000 families within a five-year period, the target set to identify only 30,000 families in the first year of operation seems extremely conservative. Local authorities have reported that by March 2013 they had successfully turned around the lives of, and received payment on the strength of these results, for 1,675 families or 1.4 per cent of the total.³³⁵

The top-down stipulation of involvement criteria by DCLG is clearly important for focussing the programme, but a number of charities have expressed concern that the process has excluded voluntary sector organisations, thereby 'taking away the resource of local knowledge', according to the Programme Coordinator of one voluntary sector organisation delivering a family support programme for the Troubled Families programme.

Some local authorities have struggled with the identifying process. Even where local authorities had already identified families of the highest need in their area, the process for drawing families into the actual programme was found to be time-consuming and cumbersome. Sharing information between local agencies requires many different steps and complex triangulation between the police, education authorities and the DWP.

³³³ Ibid

³³⁴ DCLG, *Troubled Families: progress information at March 2013 and families turned around at January 2013*, 13 May 2013 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/troubled-families-progress-information-at-march-2013-and-families-turned-round-at-january-2013> (13/05/13)]

³³⁵ Ibid

Payment-by-results

The funding allocated to the programme by DCLG is up to 40 per cent of the cost of extra interventions for the families – £4,000, mostly paid according to results, as illustrated in the below figure.

Figure 24: Financial resources for local authorities³³⁶

Total Funding available per family: £4000		
Year	Percentage of payment offered as up-front attachment fee	Percentage of payment offered as results-based payment in arrears
2012/13	80	20
2013/14	60	40
2014/15	40	60

As a consequence of the payment-by-results financial framework, there is a substantial 'burden of bureaucracy' to prove the outcomes of the programme. One local council told us how they had to set up two new databases to capture the results, in a slow process which delayed the start of the programme.

'We are not averse to the payment-by-results methodology...or the evaluation of the outcomes, but it is a big undertaking in a short space of time.'

Director of Child Protection, a London Borough Council, in evidence to the CSJ

Whether 'success' has been achieved within the programme is determined by families' results according to the programme's clear payment framework.³³⁷ Local authorities 'self-declare' the results, which must be verified internally; DCLG will carry out 'spot checks' in a few sample areas.

The following example shows exceptionally laborious processes: in one local authority a list was compiled of all young people with less than 85 per cent school attendance and three or more fixed-term exclusions; this was sent to the police who cross-reference it with crime and anti-social behaviour records; the list then went on to the DWP to check which parents were receiving out-of-work benefits; it was subsequently checked against criteria of local discretion such as mental health, substance misuse and domestic violence.³³⁸

'Putting together the data sharing agreements took 4 months; the collating of the list also took many months. That left just 5 weeks to attach the families in Year 1. Data sharing was a huge challenge. It didn't include the police or schools which were academies ... the lists were done backwards: the numbers were set centrally, then the local council [we] were told to find the names and addresses to fill the numbers. It should have been the other way around. We could have started months earlier if we had been able to start by asking schools, the police, etc.'

Programme Coordinator, a voluntary sector organisation delivering a family support programme

³³⁶ DCLG, *The Troubled Families programme: Financial framework*, Op. cit.

³³⁷ See *ibid*, p9 for a breakdown of the results-based payments from central government

³³⁸ Manager, local council, in evidence to the CSJ, January 2013

Some practitioners expressed concern to us that a number of the families identified as 'troubled families' according to the criteria were not in receipt of the expected high level of agency involvement. This raised the question of whether the Troubled Families criteria were correlating with the need on the ground, as families' circumstances can change more quickly than the process of identification – the data used can become out of date by the time a local authority is in a position to engage with a family.

'Data doesn't move as fast as families' progress does.'

Troubled Families manager, in evidence to the CSJ

'The challenges in the criteria are that children move schools, families move, and gathering complete data is difficult and can create extra bureaucracy.'

Ruth Beecher, Service Manager, Early Help for Families Targeted and Specialist Children and Families Services Children's Services, Islington Council, in evidence to the CSJ

(DCLG's Financial Framework document does recognise that 'families' needs are not static and will change over the course of the programme', and states that local authorities are expected to refresh their list at least annually to ensure they identify the right families to work with in subsequent years.³³⁹)

There are also some concerns that the criteria used to identify the 'troubled families' are too restrictive and do not fully capture the most vulnerable families with multiple complex needs. There seems to be some distance between the acknowledged complexity of the families and the simplicity of the criteria used for identifying them.

The Troubled Families programme has 'very clear cut measures in relation to criteria outcomes ... in real families, it doesn't always seem to translate that way.'

Saveria Moss, Programme Manager for Family Focus South Somerset

The Government's measures of results 'are largely the inverse of the "problem" criteria' and based around school attendance, anti-social behaviour and offending, and 'progress to work' or continuous employment.³⁴⁰

339 DCLG, *The Troubled Families programme: Financial framework* Op. cit.

340 Ibid

'The criteria for measuring success measure important things, but very measurable things. Other factors are much harder to measure, for example, stabilising someone's mental health. However, Islington is trying to capture other changes, including for example a reduction in violence in the home and using softer measures such as worker/family member questionnaires to measure the situation at the beginning and end of the intervention.'

Ruth Beecher, Service Manager, Early Help for Families Targeted and Specialist Children and Families Services Children's Services, Islington Council, in evidence to the CSJ

'Overall we support the Government's principles and investment in the Troubled Families Programme. The issues for us are that the payments-by-results criteria don't always coincide with the difficulties faced by families with multiple complex needs. We found that 28 per cent of the families we work with matched the payment-by-results criteria, so overall there is very likely a big dissonance between the families with multiple complex needs and the families local authorities would qualify to receive payments for if they got the results on anti-social behaviour or exclusions plus worklessness.'

Rhian Beynon, Head of Policy and Campaigns, Family Action, a voluntary sector organisation working with families with multiple complex needs and delivering the Troubled Families programme in some areas, in evidence to the CSJ

Narrow focus on these centrally-imposed criteria risk vulnerable families being missed:

'The criteria have been defined too narrowly. If a mother has five children and manages to get four of them into school but the fifth misses the exclusion/absence measure, this does not count as a success.'

Programme Coordinator, a voluntary sector organisation delivering a family support programme

Freedom of Information requests by the CSJ to local authorities have revealed that less than 16.5 per cent of all the families identified so far meet all three of the set criteria of youth crime or anti-social behaviour, truanting, and an adult on out-of-work benefits.³⁴¹

341 Freedom of Information request by the CSJ, March 2013

It has also been noted that the truancy and crime/anti-social behaviour criteria for identification and payment-by-results pick up families with older children more than those with younger children. This can sit uneasily with another priority of the Government which is to intervene early to tackle social problems most effectively.

'The criteria have a bent towards older children.'

Ian Langley, Strategic Lead, Supporting Troubled Families Programme, Hampshire County Council, in evidence to the CSJ

However, many practitioners recognise that some were necessary.

'The advantage of the DCLG criteria is that they focus attention on specific families with multiple and complex needs and what happens to them between point A and point B rather than addressing an isolated issue within the whole population, for example, anti-social behaviour across the borough.'

Ruth Beecher, Service Manager, Early Help for Families Targeted and Specialist Children and Families Services Children's Services, Islington Council, in evidence to the CSJ

Where the most vulnerable families are not identified by the three DCLG criteria, it is important that the Troubled Families Coordinator works closely with the voluntary sector to ensure that the most vulnerable are picked up and worked with.

'You can't tick every box; we recognise that the Government needed to specify some criteria ... Our Troubled Families Coordinator is aware of the problem of the most vulnerable families not being picked up, and we are ensuring that we pick them up. The voluntary sector here has been involved from day one and is consulted regularly.'

Mark Woodbridge, Service Manager, Catch-22, Wirral, a charity helping to turn chaotic lives around, in evidence to the CSJ

The flexibility in the fourth, local, criterion, enables the programme to capture a wider net of families than would be caught by only the three official criteria of worklessness, crime and anti-social behaviour, and school truancy or exclusion. But there are no funds through payment-by-results for any success specifically according to the 'local' criterion. Local authorities will not receive payment by results for these areas, and they will only receive the initial £3,200 attachment fee if the family also satisfies at least two out of the three government criteria.

It is beneficial that DCLG has built flexibility into the delivery of the programme, but it is concerning that the restrictive measures for success rather than individual families' needs are

driving the focus of some local authorities' work. Complex constructs, including mental health, aspiration and substance misuse are not being measured, so we would argue that it is hard to see how meaningful the 'turning around' of the families according to the programme's criteria will be. Many families are vulnerable, have many complex needs, and may even be on the edge of falling into the official Troubled Families criteria in future, yet do not currently meet them. Such families may have multiple problems recognised in the 'filter' criteria such as mental health problems, domestic violence, children on protection registers, physical health problems, substance addiction, etc. and yet not qualify for help through the programme because they do not meet two of the three official criteria. The CSJ's concern is that families who desperately need the whole-family approach of the Troubled Families programme may slip through the net, and this would be a tragic missed opportunity.

Further, although employment is a vital route out of poverty and parental employment is essential for families (the recent agreement between DCLG and the DWP to ensure greater coordination between the Troubled Families programme and Jobcentre Plus, and the advent of Troubled Families Employment Advisers, are welcome developments), it is problematic that one adult moving from out-of-work benefits into continuous employment counts as success.³⁴² The lives of those in the family are deemed to have been 'turned around' yet for some of the families experiencing the most intense family breakdown – including substance misuse or serious mental ill-health – pushing parents into employment is neither realistic nor desirable. Rather, the initial focus must be on their full recovery and health; only then will employment be able to be part of stabilising the complex family situation.

'Basic life skills are needed first; only once these are in place can parents enter the workplace, etc. Such key skills are crucial for getting families on the path to independence. For example: knowing how to move from powdered milk to bottled milk; how to put children to bed – going up with them, having a regular routine, reading a bedtime story, etc.; getting yourself out of bed first and getting children breakfast and getting them to school.'

Paul Voural, Save the Family

In summary, while providing some necessary guidance, the success criteria are limiting; the families experiencing the most intense levels of dysfunction should be looked at as a whole in terms of their progress towards familial stability and resilience. The case study below illustrates this well:

342 DCLG and DWP, *Delivery agreement: putting troubled families on the path to work*, March 2013 [accessed via: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136344/DWP_CLG_Troubled_Families.pdf (05/03/13)]

Case study: What constitutes 'success'?³⁴³

A family met the three government criteria for involvement in the Troubled Families programme: a 16-year-old child was not attending school and had offended in the past, and the mother was not in work. The mother also had a 17-year-old non-verbal autistic daughter for whom she was the full-time carer and a younger child who was doing well, but lacked attention because of the care needs of the eldest daughter.

Under the programme, work with this family would not constitute a success unless the mother entered sustained employment. But as she acted as a full-time carer, it would have been more expensive to pay for a full-time carer for the daughter with severe autism while the mother entered employment. In consultation with the mother, they concluded that employment was not an appropriate aim – rather they would ensure that the mother received support to be able to care for her autistic daughter, and give greater attention to her younger children.

The local authority in question emphasised that payment-by-results could not be the focus in cases like this. The council believed that the support provided had to go beyond aiming to stop families fulfil the Troubled Families criteria, to ensure that 'success' was individual to the family – even if that meant the Council would not receive the results-based payment.

There is support for this more nuanced approach: Director of the Troubled Families Team Joe Tuke explained that while the Payment-by-Results funding is an incentive for local authorities to achieve results, 'the reduction in "reactive" costs is the greatest prize'.³⁴⁴ And we found further evidence, beyond the case study above, that some local authorities are not being overly bound by the criteria when measuring the programme's effectiveness.

Councils' approaches to ensuring they meet the success criteria for results-based payment vary and appear to relate to their longer-term approach once the programme has ended. In order to build a sustainable intervention for the most complex families beyond Troubled Families, one council emphasised the importance of getting the payment: 'we don't want the council to fall off a cliff in 2015 when the programme ends'. Others, however, have said that they won't be chasing the results payment to ensure a) their focus is on the right outcomes for individual families and b) their ability to sustain appropriate support in the grounds that 'It takes months and months and years and years to change ingrained behaviour'.

'We haven't built in payment-by-results rewards into our budget; we are not dependent on success by these criteria.'

Ian Langley, Hampshire County Council, in evidence to the CSJ

³⁴³ Local authority Troubled Families programme manager, in evidence to the CSJ

³⁴⁴ Joe Tuke, speaking on the Troubled Families programme at Action for Children and St Mungo's event *Supporting homeless and vulnerable women and their children: Breaking intergenerational cycles of deprivation and neglect*, 26 April 2013

Islington Council, for example, have planned for the next nine years under Community Budgets, with three-year contracts renewed twice, subject to performance.³⁴⁵ This avoids the expensive re-tendering and potential service disruption of shorter-term contracts, and also ensures that the payment-by-results contracting does not lead to the prioritising of 'easier wins' or to resources required to make this work effectively being disproportionate to the payment-by-results element in the contract.

'The challenges in the criteria are that children move schools, families move, and gathering complete data is difficult and can create extra bureaucracy.'

Ruth Beecher, Service Manager, Early Help for Families Targeted and Specialist Children and Families Services Children's Services, Islington Council, in evidence to the CSJ

4.2.2.2 *The voluntary sector*

Voluntary sector organisations are uniquely placed to identify and work with families, and ultimately to change lives. Their independence from statutory agencies, with which families will have often had a long history of intervention, can give them an advantage when gaining families' trust.

'Voluntary sector organisations can find it easier to get through the door, since they are perceived as less of a threat. Statutory services can be perceived as threatening in terms of taking children away.'

Ian Langley, Hampshire County Council, in evidence to the CSJ

'Often these families we work with have had social workers and police involved for years ... There is extra trust in independent (voluntary sector) organisations that there sometimes isn't with statutory organisations; they are sometimes seen as less interfering and more supportive, and there is less fear that they will take children away from their parents; there is less threat attached.'

Steph Bolshaw, Director, Head of Youth Justice Service, Positive Steps, in evidence to the CSJ

There are concerns that this potential is not always being realised currently:

³⁴⁵ Ruth Beecher, Service Manager – Early Help for Families Targeted and Specialist Children and Families Services Children's Services, Islington Council, in evidence to the CSJ

'Councils have to look at how they're framing those contracts for the voluntary sector, and they could be doing more to involve the voluntary sector in tendering because we have specialisms, for example in mental health, and sometimes we're quite good at engaging with local families where they might be a bit distrustful of what they would see as the statutory services ... I don't think they're [councils] really realising the value of the voluntary sector and using perceptions of the voluntary sector to get in through the doors of people's homes.'³⁴⁶

Rhian Beynon, Family Action

55 per cent of local authorities who responded to a Freedom of Information request are not commissioning any of the delivery of the programme out to the voluntary sector, 42 per cent have commissioned some of the delivery, and three per cent have commissioned the entirety of the programme delivery out to the voluntary sector.³⁴⁷

The programme is currently voluntary and requires consent. Though some councils have recognised that gaining consent can be a challenge, the consensus expressed to the CSJ was that it was right to seek consent from families – 'all of us should bend over backwards to breakdown families' perceived confrontation' from agencies and intervention, said one manager.

'It ensures that we're doing the right thing and also helps families to realise that they have responsibility too.'

Saveria Moss, Programme Manager for Family Focus South Somerset, in evidence to the CSJ

It has also been suggested that consent would be easier to obtain where the voluntary sector organisation delivering the support asks for it from families.

³⁴⁶ Rhian Beynon, Head of Policy and Campaigns at Family Action – a voluntary sector organisation working with families with multiple complex needs and delivering the Troubled Families programme in some areas – in evidence to the CSJ.

³⁴⁷ Freedom of Information request by the CSJ, March 2013

Case study: Refusal to join the troubled families 'Family Focus' programme³⁴⁸

A programme manager made an initial approach to one of the families that met the Troubled Families' criteria. She was met by a mother and her 14-year-old daughter – it was mid-morning on a week day, and the daughter should have been at school. They had a very positive conversation, in which both mother and daughter expressed a desire to be involved in the programme. When the manager went back to gain formal consent from the pair, the mother had a dramatically different response: she said her husband had forbidden her to be involved and she slammed the door. Her husband had just returned home from prison for drug dealing and was now on probation.

This example shows the challenges that councils may face when trying to attach families to the programme who are experiencing the most intense family instability. The success in engaging such families will very much rely on the strengths and efforts of the local authority and/or voluntary sector organisation administering it. Flexibility and the ability of councils to think creatively will be vital to the success of the Troubled Families programme to reach the families with the most intense family breakdown.

Refusal of consent has not been a widespread issue: Freedom of Information requests by the CSJ to local authorities have revealed that less than one per cent of the families identified have refused to consent to the programme.³⁴⁹

4.2.3 Beyond 'troubled' families

The Government's willingness to invest in strengthening families is positive; however the Troubled Families programme does not exhaust the work required with complex families. The CSJ is concerned that action to address intense family breakdown must not be limited to just 120,000 families. As we said in our 2008 report *Breakthrough Britain: The Next Generation*:

'It is not doubted that some groups have fared worse than others, but a sole focus on these populations will fail a vast number who do not happen to be in a high-risk group.'³⁵⁰

The culture of family breakdown, characterised by dysfunctional relationships, lack of paternal involvement and relationship dissolution, affects disadvantaged communities far more deeply than is suggested by the criteria and figures of the Troubled Families programme. We recognise that a need for simplicity, given the complexity of the problems and the challenges of measuring outcomes in a payment-by-results system, meant that some clearly identifiable criteria were

³⁴⁸ Saveria Moss, Programme Manager for Family Focus South Somerset, in evidence to the CSJ

³⁴⁹ Freedom of Information request by the CSJ, March 2013

³⁵⁰ CSJ, *The Next Generation*, London: CSJ, 2008

necessary. This need for simplicity was all the more pronounced given the short time-span: Louise Casey was only appointed as Director in November 2011,³⁵¹ even though the programme was originally announced in December 2010, with Emma Harrison, the head of A4E, leading the pilot.³⁵² However, this report raises concern about those deprived families who are experiencing a very real breakdown in family life and stability, but who may not have met the Government's criteria when local authorities were drawing up lists of their most 'troubled families'. Many families are 'just coping', teetering on the edge of falling into the most troubled families:

'These are not the families who have experienced total breakdown; they are those families living on often distressingly low incomes, but nevertheless coping with limited intervention from government agencies. Their situations are precarious... it would take little more than one trigger event to tip them into a situation where they would require much more intensive formal support.'³⁵³

Other families have multiple complex needs and require a whole-family approach which joins up the work of various services, yet do not count as 'troubled'. Too narrow a focus risks neglecting these families.

'We know that for every family who we work with there is another one waiting to take their place. In order to stop this "flow" of families with multiple vulnerabilities, investment into early intervention is essential.

It is understandable why the Troubled Families Programme cannot include vulnerable families who have a lower level of need in the programme. Nevertheless, the Government does have a responsibility to ensure that these families are not ignored, given that evidence suggests the number of families with five or more vulnerabilities will increase by just over 14 per cent by 2015.

This is why initiatives across Government must be joined up to retain the focus on early intervention, so families can get the help they need as quickly as possible.'

Emma Scowcroft, Policy Manager, Action for Children, in evidence to the CSJ

351 DCLG Press Release: *Louise Casey CB takes up her new role as head of a new troubled families team*, 1 November 2011 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/louise-casey-cb-takes-up-her-new-role-as-head-of-a-new-troubled-families-team> (10/04/13)]

352 BBC News, *David Cameron pledge to help 'troubled families'*, 10 December 2010

353 Parker S and Pharaoh R, *Just Coping: A new perspective on low-income families*, Maidstone: Social Innovation Lab for Kent, July 2008

The Riots Communities and Victims Panel, established in the wake of the 2011 riots which affected cities across the country, emphasised the need to acknowledge that:

'Public services describe a group of approximately 500,000 'forgotten families' who 'bump along the bottom' of society.'³⁵⁴

These are the families that the CSJ's work has focussed on, and whom our Alliance charities come into contact with regularly.

Case study: Vulnerable and hard-to-reach family³⁵⁵

Both parents have substance misuse issues and have a history of non-engagement of services. Social Services are involved with the family and are very eager that the family have regular observation and support. The family has a sixteen-month-old baby and the parents are terrified that she will be removed into Care. We are encouraging them to work with Social services and reassuring them that as long as they can provide the right care for their child and not put her at risk, Social services will not look at removing the child. We are working hard to build up a good relationship with mum and to gain her trust. We are hoping that she will slowly learn to relax and mix with the other parents, many of who have had similar issues to deal with themselves. We have invited mum to take part in our next series of parenting classes and are encouraging her to try to engage with other parents so she can build up a support network of peers. It will be a long process but the fact that they have been attending is a step in the right direction.

It is crucial that these highly vulnerable families with complex needs are not left behind and forgotten.

4.2.3.1 After 2015

The CSJ applauds the existence of a programme to target support at families with some of the most complex problems in society. The broad aims of the programme are undeniably positive and the flexibility in the programme for local authorities to determine delivery is a vital aspect of its design. Nevertheless, the Government is claiming success for the Troubled Families programme too early. It is hard to understand why Rt Hon Eric Pickles has proclaimed that 'the Troubled Families programme is on track, changing families for the better and reducing their impact on the communities around them',³⁵⁶ when as of March 2013, 1,675 families have been 'turned around' – 1.4 per cent of the total number of families the programme is to work with – and just 13 councils (9 per cent) are responsible for 1,152 (over

354 Riots Communities and Victims Panel, *After the riots: The final report of the Riots Communities and Victims Panel*, 2012, p6 [accessed via: <http://riotspanel.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Riots-Panel-Final-Report1.pdf> (17/01/13)]

355 Case study provided by The Family Haven

356 DCLG and DWP, *Jobcentre Plus advisors for troubled families*, 4 March 2013 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-jobcentre-plus-advisers-for-troubled-families> (05/03/13)]

two-thirds) of these families.³⁵⁷ Local authorities have begun to work with 35,618 families at the end of the first year of the programme in March 2013 – falling short of the 41,835 families local authorities agreed to work with in the first year.³⁵⁸

Figure 25: Families identified, worked with and turned around³⁵⁹

	Families identified	Families worked with	Families turned around
Number	66,470	35,618	1,675
Percentage of total families	56.3	30.2	1.4

Those families that were announced as ‘turned around’ on 4 March 2013 are unlikely to be those with the most intense difficulties. For the programme’s success will be measured on narrow, prescriptive payment-by-results criteria that will restrict local authorities’ work with families unless they have the experience and boldness to ignore them where appropriate for individual cases. An important conversation must be had about specialist intervention for complex families beyond the end of the programme in 2015.

‘We’re not so short-sighted to think that all families will be sorted by 2015... [we aren’t taking] a finite, time-limited approach to helping families.’

A Programme Coordinator from a voluntary sector organisation delivering a family support programme

The main report from the Working Group on Family Breakdown after the second phase of research will make recommendations to be implemented before the next election as well as proposals for after the election in 2015, when the Troubled Families programme ends – including that it ought to be renewed, beyond its current time-frame, which is purely political, limited to this Parliament. This must be a long-term commitment, above party politics and parliamentary cycles: families’ lives are at stake.

4.3 The edge of care

For children to be on the edge of entering care, they have typically experienced some of the most intense forms of family breakdown and social disadvantage.

357 DCLG, *Troubled Families: progress information on the number of families worked with in year 1*, 13 May 2013 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/troubled-families-progress-information-on-the-number-of-families-worked-with-in-year-1> (13/05/13)]; DCLG, *Troubled Families programme progress at December 2012 and families turned around at January 2013*, 4 March 2013 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/troubled-families-programme-progress-by-december-2012> (13/03/13)]

358 Ibid

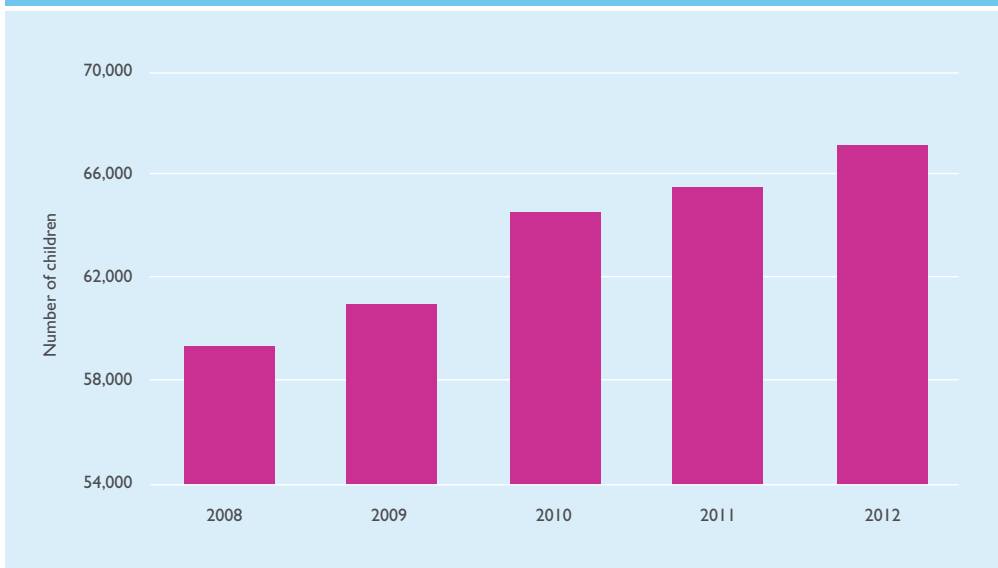
359 Ibid, and DCLG, *Troubled Families: progress information at March 2013 and families turned round at January 2013*, 13 May 2013 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/troubled-families-progress-information-at-march-2013-and-families-turned-round-at-january-2013> (13/05/13)]

'Taken as a whole, children in care come from poor and deprived backgrounds, they have usually experienced abuse and neglect, and they are more likely to have serious problems (such as behavioural or emotional difficulties, physical or mental health problems and educational under-performance) than most children.'³⁶⁰

Yet when discussing those on the edge of care, we must recognise the diversity of children within the care system itself. 'Care' is a highly complex intervention affecting a wide variety of different children, who experience different forms of care ranging from foster placements (around 70 per cent of all children in care), to placements at home with parents under court order, to various forms of residential provision, and adoption.³⁶¹

There were 67,050 children in care in England in 2012, ranging from new born babies to 17 year olds, who will enter different forms of care for variable lengths of time.³⁶²

Figure 26: Children looked after in care in England³⁶³



Children being taken into care are the symptom of social and family breakdown of the most profound kind.³⁶⁴ As the CSJ said in its 2008 report, *Couldn't Care Less*:

360 Forrester D et al, 'What is the Impact of Public Care on Children's Welfare? A Review of Research Findings from England and Wales and their Policy Implications', *Journal of Social Policy*, 38, 3, 2009 pp1–18

361 Ibid, p440

362 DfE, *Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England (including adoption and care leavers) – year ending 31 March 2012* [accessed via: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/167452/sfr20-2012nt_001.xls.xls (06/02/13)]

363 Ibid

364 Forrester D, 'Is the Care System Failing Children?', *The Political Quarterly*, 79, 2, April–June 2008, pp206–211

'The "triggers" for family breakdown are often well known by individual services long before children are taken into care. Their inability to deal with these issues is a major reason for the severe strains being placed on the care system. This failure results from an insufficient focus on whole family problems, inadequate investment in preventative policies and the ineffective use of the voluntary sector.'³⁶⁵

It is also important to recognise the effect of policy shifts, risk aversion, agencies' behaviour and thresholds on the numbers of children coming into care.

While outcomes of children leaving care tend to be poor and children leaving care have serious problems, Forrester et al found – in contrast to the widespread perception of public care in government, media and policy-makers – that 'there was little evidence of the care system having a negative impact on children's welfare. Indeed, in almost all of the studies children's welfare improved, while there was none in which it deteriorated.'³⁶⁶ Generally, care itself does not produce the poor outcomes seen in children who leave it – rather it is the reasons why they are in care in the first place, and what happens in their life before they enter care, as well as what occurs as and after they leave care which shape their outcomes.³⁶⁷ It is important to recognise that before entering care, 'the vast majority of children have experienced abuse and neglect, and most of the parents have drug or alcohol problems or mental illness' and '[h]igh proportions are experiencing domestic violence'.³⁶⁸ After care, on the other hand, poor services 'all too often squander the 'social capital' created through the positive impact of care'.³⁶⁹

'Instead of children receiving ongoing emotional and financial support as they move into adulthood, care ends somewhat arbitrarily at 18 (or earlier), and the support after care is time-limited and often not based on ongoing caring relationships.'³⁷⁰

Thus, it is problematic to compare the outcomes for children who have gone through care to those of the general population and conclude that it is a negative intervention. Rather, poor outcomes highlight a) how vital it is that this particularly vulnerable group receives excellent services, and b) why those on the edge of care require particular consideration.

365 CSJ, *Couldn't Care Less*, London: CSJ, 8 September 2008

366 Forrester D, et al, 'What is the Impact of Public Care on Children's Welfare?', Op. cit.

367 Ibid

368 Ibid

369 Ibid

370 Forrester D, 'Is the Care System Failing Children?', Op. cit.

Outcomes for care leavers

Education

- The attainment gap is stark: just 16 per cent of looked after children achieved the minimum standard of 5 A* to C grades in GCSE English and mathematics, against 59 per cent of other children;³⁷¹
- Seven per cent of young people who were looked after when aged 16 were in higher education at the age of 19 (this has remained consistent since 2008).³⁷²

Teenage pregnancy

- 'Teenage parents are more likely to be, or to have been, looked after children';
- By the age of 20, a 'quarter of children who had been in care were young parents, and 40 per cent were mothers';
- 'Among girls aged under 18 and still in care, the rate of teenage motherhood is around three times higher than the rate among all girls aged under 18 in England.'³⁷³

Offending

- Children in care, aged ten or above, are over three times more likely to be convicted or subject to a final warning or reprimand than other children based on 2011 figures.³⁷⁴

4.3.1 The role of the extended family

Where parents are unable to take care of their children, relatives or friends step in to care for them, in what is called 'kinship' or 'family and friends' care. Such carers are typically grandparents (44 per cent) or an older sibling (38 per cent).³⁷⁵ Kinship care can occur either informally, without the knowledge of involvement of local authorities, or as approved, formal foster placements made by local authorities with family or friends. Formal kinship care covers a range of different legal statuses, including where a kinship carer acts as an approved foster-carer; or who has a Residence, Special Guardianship or Adoption Order giving them parental responsibility.³⁷⁶

Since the 1989 Children Act was passed, local authorities are under a legal duty to consider placing looked-after children with family or friends wherever possible in the best interests of the child's welfare.³⁷⁷ The 2008 Children and Young People's Act reiterated that kinship care should be the first choice when children are not able to live with their parents.³⁷⁸

371 DfE, *Statistical First Release: Outcomes for Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England*, as at 31 March 2012, December 2012 [accessed via: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/191969/SFR32_2012Text.pdf (06/02/13)]

372 DfE, *Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2012*, 25 September 2012, [accessed via: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/167451/sfr20-2012v2.pdf (29/10/12)]

373 Department for Health, *Teenage Pregnancy: next steps for LAs and PCTs*, July 2007 [accessed via: http://www.change4children.co.uk/uploads/Teenage_Pregnancy_Next_Steps_For_LAs_And_PCTs.pdf (25/10/12)]

374 This figure pertains to the number of children in England aged 10+ on 31 March who had been looked after for at least twelve months in DfE, *Outcomes for Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England, as at 31 March 2011*, 14 December 2011 [accessed via: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/167194/sfr30-2011v3.pdf (29/10/12)]

375 Nandy S and Selwyn J, *Spotlight on kinship care: Using Census microdata to examine the extent and nature of kinship care in the UK*, April 2011, University of Bristol [accessed via: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/sps/research/projects/completed/2011/rj5314/execsum.pdf> (04/01/13)]

376 Nandy S and Selwyn J, 'Kinship Care and Poverty: Using census data to examine the extent and nature of kinship care in the UK', *British Journal of Social Work*, 1–18, May 9 2012

377 This was reinforced by the 2002 Adoption and Children Act and 2008 Children and Young Person Act; Department for Education, Family and friends carers, 26 April 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/childrenincare/a0065808/family-and-friends-carers> (04/01/13)]; Nandy S and Selwyn J, 'Kinship Care and Poverty: Using census data to examine the extent and nature of kinship care in the UK', *British Journal of Social Work*, 1–18, May 9 2012

378 Gautier A and Wellard S, *Giving up the Day Job? Kinship Carers and Employment*, London: Grandparents Plus, June 2012

'Families are for life, not just for childhood.'³⁷⁹

Evidence suggests that children living in disadvantaged circumstances are more likely to be in kinship care than those who are better off: there is a socio-economic gradient to the likelihood of being in kinship care.³⁸⁰ The majority of children enter kinship care as a result of damaging parental factors, including domestic abuse, family breakdown, substance or alcohol misuse, mental or physical illness, imprisonment or parental death.³⁸¹ Most (88 per cent) of children in kinship care have been abused or neglected while they lived with their parents, and more than a third have experienced the death of one or both parents.³⁸²

As the Department for Education highlights, the family circumstances of children in kinship care are similar to those taken into local authority care. A survey of grandparent carers found the reasons for their role in caring for grandchildren to be:

- 24 per cent due to parental inability to care, including abuse, neglect and domestic violence;
- 23 per cent due to parental desertion, a substantial proportion resulting from drug/alcohol abuse;
- 16 per cent due to family breakdown;
- 13 per cent due to parental illness, often mental illness;
- Ten per cent due to parental death, often also involving substance abuse, mental illness or violence.³⁸³

Although the research distinguishes between the other factors and 'family breakdown', we would argue that all of the five categories listed fall under family breakdown.

Figures on kinship care in the UK are relatively hazy. Despite the importance of reliable information for policy makers and practitioners, the UK 'has lacked a reliable and representative national portrait of kinship care' until recent analysis of the 2001 census data aimed to provide it.³⁸⁴ A large part of this is due to the extent of informal kinship care: in 2001, 95 per cent of children in kinship care were in informal arrangements (164,196 children compared to 9,004 in formal kinship care).³⁸⁵

379 Forrester D et al, 'What is the Impact of Public Care on Children's Welfare? A Review of Research Findings from England and Wales and their Policy Implications', *Journal of Social Policy*, 38, 3, 2009, pp439–456

380 Nandy S and Selwyn J, 'Kinship Care and Poverty: Using census data to examine the extent and nature of kinship care in the UK', *British Journal of Social Work*, 1–18, May 9 2012

381 DfE, *Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities*, 2010 [accessed via: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Family%20and%20Friends%20Care.pdf> (04/02/12)]

382 Buttle UK Press Release, *New Study Reveals the True Cost of Kinship Care*, 15 April 2013 [accessed via: <http://www.buttleuk.org/pages/press-releases.html> (25/05/13)]

383 Richards A, *Second Time Around: A survey of grandparents raising their Grandchildren*, Family Rights Group, 2001 in Hunt J, Presentation, 'Kinship care', Oxford University

384 Nandy S and Selwyn J, 'Kinship Care and Poverty: Using census data to examine the extent and nature of kinship care in the UK', *British Journal of Social Work*, 1–18, May 9 2012

385 Nandy S and Selwyn J, *Spotlight on kinship care: Using Census microdata to examine the extent and nature of kinship care in the UK*, April 2011, University of Bristol [accessed via: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/sps/research/projects/completed/2011/rj5314/execsum.pdf> (04/01/13)]

In 2011, 11 per cent of foster placements, 7,430 children, were with family or friends.³⁸⁶ This figure only includes formally recognised arrangements, and some estimate that there are up to 300,000 children in kinship care.³⁸⁷ Some argue that it is likely that the numbers in informal kinship care have increased due to the increasing problems of parental substance misuse³⁸⁸ – almost one million children in the UK live with adult drug users.³⁸⁹ Problematic parental substance misuse features in between 20–70 per cent of social workers' cases.³⁹⁰

Kinship care can be very positive, giving continuity and connectedness to children³⁹¹ – and it is for this reason that the Children and Young People's Act made clear that it should be the first choice.

However, kinship carers often face particular difficulties not faced by other carers as well as a lack of support. Nandy and Selwyn draw attention to concerns with the support given to kinship carers, who we know tend to be 'older, in poor health, less well-educated and financially worse off than unrelated foster-carers'.³⁹²

Case study

Amanda (name has been changed), 18 years old, will shortly graduate from Loughborough-based Twenty Twenty. This CSJ award-winning third sector organisation helps young people with difficult backgrounds who were not achieving in mainstream education get qualifications and launch themselves in life.

My mum and dad didn't want me; I was an accident ... not long after she had me my mum ended up in prison. My dad didn't want to know me, so I went to live with my Nana and Grandad, otherwise I would have gone into care. At first my mum didn't want contact, went off on her own until I was 5 or 6 but then she said she wanted to try to have a family and settle down. Nana and Grandad wanted to help her, so they moved nearby so I could live with my mum during the week and stay with them at the weekend.

It all began to go downhill though after a year. I will always remember watching her pour herself a vodka and coke when I was getting ready for school. I was in and out of school... my mum couldn't be bothered to take me or even to get me up. It was quite a long way, but I walked to school on my own from the age of six, and I was always late.

A guy moved a couple of doors down and she got together with him – one day she woke me up and said 'can you help me pack my stuff, I'm going off on holiday but I'll be back for you soon.' She drove off to be with him leaving me and my little brother alone in the house. Bear in mind I was only twelve years old.

386 The Who Cares Trust, *Kinship Care* [accessed via: <http://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/pages/kinship-care.html> (04/02/13)]

387 Family Rights Group estimated 200,000 to 300,000 children lived in kinship care arrangements, including temporary arrangements, based upon the 1998 and 2001 British Social Attitudes Survey. This was the first estimate and is the most widely cited figure; Richards A and Tapsfield R, *Funding Family and Friends Care: The Way Forward*, Family Rights Group, 2003 in Department for Education, *Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities*, 2010 [accessed via: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Family%20and%20Friends%20Care.pdf> (04/02/12)]

388 Nandy S and Selwyn J, 'Kinship Care and Poverty' Op. cit.

389 Manning V et al, 'New estimates of the numbers of children living with substance misusing parents: results from UK national household survey', *BMC Public Health* 9, 2009 [accessed via: <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/9/377> (21/02/13)]

390 Hayden, 'Parental Substance Misuse and Child Care Social Work: Research in a City Social Work Department in England', *Child Abuse Review*, 13, 2004, pp18–30

391 Green R, 'The Evolution of Kinship Care Policy and Practice', *Future of Children*, 14, 1, 2004, pp131–147

392 Nandy S and Selwyn J, 'Kinship Care and Poverty: Using census data to examine the extent and nature of kinship care in the UK', *British Journal of Social Work*, 1–18, May 9 2012

I went back to live with my Nana and Grandad but by then I thought the world was against me. I took it out on them, took it out on everyone and started hanging out with the wrong crowd. I was drinking and I started to go really downhill. By the time I was 16 I was living with my boyfriend, who was violent and possessive and didn't let me see my grandparents. We lived round the corner from my mum – one day I went to her in desperation, hadn't eaten for ages and had bruises all over me. She just passed me a box of Weetabix through the door and said 'go and sort your problems out'.

I finally split up with him and went back to my nana and granddad who just wanted to get me back into education. I was sent to Twenty Twenty and things finally began to turn around. I got my confidence back, it had all been knocked out of me. I used to wear piles of make up but now I don't wear any. Everyone just accepts me as I am. It's like a family here really, everyone's nice, everyone's treated the same, no matter what you've done.

Amanda is going to Loughborough College in the Autumn to do NVQs at levels 1 and 2.

The largest study of kinship care in the UK by Buttle UK and the University of Bristol found that most kinship care families are living in severe poverty as a result of caring for the children, with fewer than a third able to provide all the basic items widely considered to be necessities such as heating, cooked meals, winter clothes, etc.³⁹³ Further, 38 per cent of kinship children are being brought up by their sister or brother – the poorest of all informal kinship carers.³⁹⁴

Kinship carers are often grandparents: it is estimated that 25,000 family and friends carers are aged over 65, the majority of whom are grandparents.³⁹⁵ Since they tend to be older, kinship carers also may not have had parenting duties for some time and may need extra support.³⁹⁶ However, research in the US found that kinship carers not only tend to be poorer, older, etc., but that they receive less supervision, little advanced preparation, and fewer services than non-kinship carers, despite their needs tending to be greater.³⁹⁷ And here in the UK, the majority of kinship carers (73 per cent) have long-term health problems or disabilities and two-thirds are clinically depressed.³⁹⁸

Despite this, outcomes for the children in kinship care are at least as good as for those with unrelated carers.³⁹⁹ Kinship care can be beneficial for the children, particularly younger children in terms of continuity of relationships and placement, and a greater sense of security and belonging.⁴⁰⁰ Indeed, many children appear to do well in kinship care, with 68 per cent having a positive view of themselves as opposed to 63 per cent of children with unrelated carers.

393 Buttle UK Press Release, *New Study Reveals the True Cost of Kinship Care*, 15 April 2013 [accessed via: <http://www.buttleuk.org/pages/press-releases.html> (25/05/13)]

394 *Ibid*

395 Grandparents Plus, *Too Old to Care? The experiences of older grandparents raising their grandchildren*, London: Grandparents Plus, 2011

396 Green R, *Op. cit.*

397 *Ibid*

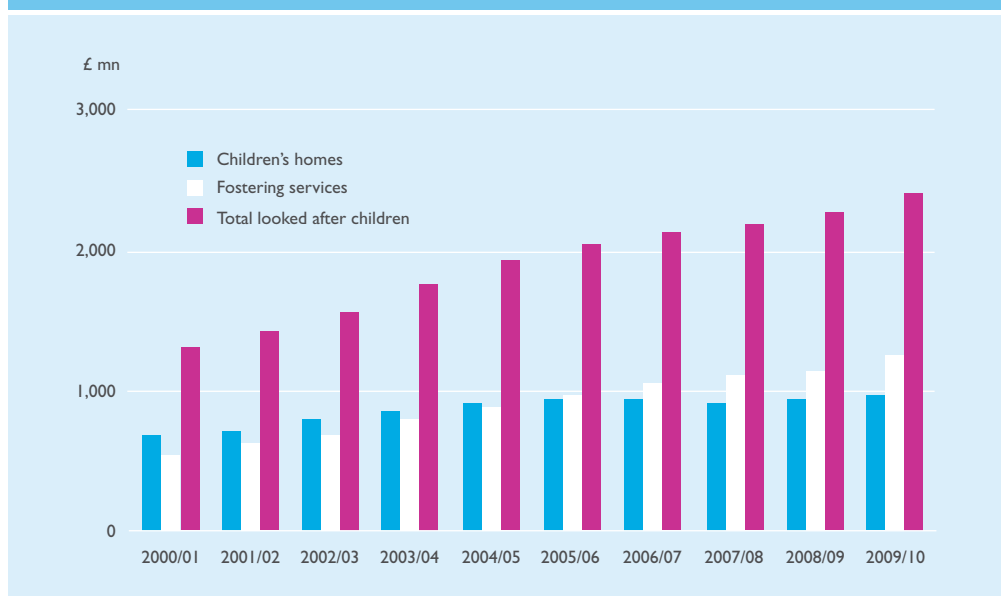
398 Buttle UK, *Op. cit.*

399 Nandy S and Selwyn J, 2012, *Op. cit.*

400 Lutman E, Hunt J and Waterhouse S, 'Placement stability for children in kinship care: A long-term follow-up of children placed in kinship care through care proceedings', *Adoption & Fostering*, 33, 3, 2009

Due to demographic patterns, it is possible that the option of kinship care will reduce over time. Some evidence suggests that 'over the next 15 years the proportion of the UK population aged 25 to 54 is predicted to fall, pointing to a reduced availability of younger people to provide care if parents are unable to do so'.⁴⁰¹ This would increase the bill of looked after children to the Government, which in gross expenditure reached almost two and a half billion in 2009/10, and which has increased year-on-year since 2000/01.⁴⁰²

Figure 27: Gross expenditure on children looked after in care in England 2000/1 to 2009/10⁴⁰³



401 Grandparents Plus, *Too Old to Care? The experiences of older grandparents raising their grandchildren*, London: Grandparents Plus, 2011

402 House of Commons, *Children in Care in England*, Standard Note: SN/SG/4470, Table 4, 1 May 2012

403 Ibid

Next steps

This 'State of the Nation' report highlights the dire economic and social imperative for government action to address the rise of family breakdown in the UK. While this is a national problem affecting all groups in society, we have shown that disadvantaged communities feel the damaging, intergenerational consequences of the decline in family stability most acutely.

In this report we have shown that family breakdown and instability is on the rise, and unless this is addressed, more and more children will see their families break up before they reach adulthood. We have found that this is not only a personal, emotional tragedy for these children; it also affects children's life chances, beyond childhood into adulthood. We have seen that children from broken families are more likely to live in poverty, fail at school, to experience further family instability, to become sexually active earlier and pregnant as teenagers.

The case for action is clear. Families are crucial to wellbeing, and a society in which this essential foundation is not supported but crumbling, and where families are left to fall apart, does an injustice to those who have to face its profound effects. Social justice demands this damaging tide be addressed. While this report paints a rather dismal picture at times, it does not have to be this way. It is crucial that we attempt to prevent family breakdown, and where this is not possible mitigate its worst effects.

Family relationships must be supported and strengthened. In the subsequent full report, the Working Group will consider how the UK can best tackle some of the key problems we have highlighted and propose solutions. At this stage, we have identified the central areas as: specialist intervention for complex families, father involvement, barriers to stability – including marriage – for the most disadvantaged, and the role of the extended family. The Working Group will consult widely on these areas to ensure that our evidence-gathering covers a breadth of geographies and experience, including experts from voluntary sector organisations, civil servants and local government. In doing so, we will make policy recommendations to ensure that the Government cannot make hollow statements and sit complacently. The destructive reality of intense family breakdown must be confronted to ensure that children are given the life opportunities they deserve.

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Breakthrough Britain II

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