

# Center for Marriage and Families

FACT SHEET NO. 2, FEBRUARY 2006

## The Scholarly Consensus on Marriage

**MARRIAGE IS** an important social good, associated with an impressively broad array of positive outcomes for children and adults alike. Marriage is an important public good, associated with a range of economic, health, educational, and safety benefits that help local, state, and federal governments serve the common good.

— *Sixteen social scientists, Why Marriage Matters, Second Edition: Twenty-Six Conclusions from the Social Sciences, 2005*

**RESEARCH CLEARLY** demonstrates that children growing up with two continuously married parents are less likely than other children to experience a wide range of cognitive, emotional, and social problems, not only during childhood, but also in adulthood. Although it is not possible to demonstrate that family structure is the cause of these differences, studies that have used a variety of sophisticated statistical methods, including controls for genetic factors, suggest that this is the case. This distinction is even stronger if we focus on children growing up with two happily married biological parents.

— *Paul R. Amato, "The Impact of Family Formation Change on the Cognitive, Social, and Emotional Well-Being of the Next Generation," The Future of Children, Fall 2005*

**IN ADDITION** to high poverty rates, single motherhood is a proxy for multiple risk factors that do not bode well for children ... Although we cannot say whether these marital-status differences are due to marriage per se or something about the parents who marry, there are theoretical reasons for believing that father absence and high levels of union instability are harmful to children. Child development theory, for example, tells us that nonresidential fathers are less likely to bond with their children, sociological theory tells us that father absence reduces children's access to social capital, and some economists have argued that low contact between fathers and children reduces altruism. Moreover, the fact that married fathers have been increasing the amount of time they spend with their children suggests that father absence may become even more important in the future.

— *Sara McLanaban, 2004 Presidential Address, Population Association of America*

**FEW PROPOSITIONS** have more empirical support in the social sciences than this one: Compared to all other family forms, families headed by married, biological parents are best for children.

— *David Popenoe, Professor of Sociology, Rutgers University*

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**THE LEGAL BASIS** and public support involved in the institution of marriage help to create the most likely conditions for the development of factors that children need most to thrive — consistent, stable, loving attention from two parents who cooperate and have sufficient resources and support from two extended families, two sets of friends, and society.

— *Mary Parke*, *Are Married Parents Really Better for Children? What Research Says About the Effects of Family Structure on Child Well-Being*, *Policy Brief, Center for Law and Social Policy, May 2003*

**A LARGE BODY** of social science research indicates that healthy, married-parent families are an optimal environment for promoting the well-being of children. Children raised by both biological parents are less likely than children raised in single- or step-parent families to be poor, to drop out of school, to have difficulty finding a job, to become teen parents or to experience emotional or behavioral problems. Children living with single mothers are five times as likely to be poor as those in two-parent families.

— *Marriage Promotion in Low-Income Families, Fact Sheet, National Council on Family Relations, April 2003*

**IN THE PARTISAN** minefield of American welfare policy, a powerful consensus has emerged in recent years among social scientists, as well as state and federal policy makers. It sees single-parent families as the dismal foundries that produced decades of child poverty, delinquency and crime. And it views the rise of such families, which began in the early 1960's and continued until about five years ago, as a singularly important indicator of social pathology. From a child's point of view, according to a growing body of social research, the most supportive household is one with two biological parents in a low-conflict marriage.

— *Elaine Harden*, "Two-Parent Families Rise After Change in Welfare Laws," *New York Times, August 12, 2001, page one*

## *Quotable*

If enough marriages had taken place to return the incidence of single parenting to 1970 levels, and the incomes of the men and women were combined, the poverty rate among children in 1998 would have fallen by about a third.

— *Isabel V. Sawhill*,  
"The Behavioral Aspects of Poverty," *The Public Interest*, Fall 2003