Family Matters

A Report to
The Home Secretary
The Rt Hon Jack Straw MP

from
The Lords and Commons Family
and Child Protection Group
Chairman: Lord Ashbourne

15 July 1998
Lords and Commons Family and Child Protection Group

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Introduction

The Lords and Commons Family and Child Protection Group is an all party group of members of both Houses of Parliament plus their professional advisers. They are grateful to the Home Secretary for the interest he has shown in this report, for the help he has given through his Family and Community Unit at the Home Office, and for his willingness to receive and to respond to this report.

The motivation for commissioning the report is the growing concern among members of both Houses of Parliament in the face of mounting evidence of the breakdown of the family in Britain and its effects upon the lives of children. The report was commissioned with a view to providing a realistic assessment of the facts, and some positive suggestions towards the formation of Government policy, which may help to strengthen family life and alleviate the suffering involved in the breakdown of relationships within family life.

There has been a growing interest in the family in Britain throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Early post World War II studies such as Townsend’s work on family life in East London, and more recently the important work of Elizabeth and John Newsom have stimulated interest in examining the changing patterns of family life in the context of social change. The past twenty years has seen an explosion of studies analysing every aspect of family life and noting the different family types which have been evolving. This work has been aided by the considerable advances in statistical analysis made possible by more detailed information gathered by the Office of National Statistics, and by the advances in computer technology.

In this report the compilers and consultants have drawn together a large number of the most recent studies and compared and analysed the findings in the studies. Each of these studies has looked at a particular aspect of the family and provided important data on the subject. This report uses that data to provide a holistic view of the family in Britain at the end of the century. Each of the studies provides a piece of the jigsaw and this report attempts to bring together the pieces to form a more complete picture.

This is an appropriate time to undertake such an exercise since the family in Britain has been undergoing rapid and radical changes over the past thirty years. Sufficient detailed information is now available to enable us to look back at the changes which have occurred, assess their outcomes and analyse the trends. These trends provide important indicators of the future of society in Britain as we prepare to enter the new millennium.

The large numbers of separations and divorces which have occurred during the past thirty years is a unique phenomenon in British social history. Behind the statistics lie the human lives involved and an immense amount of personal suffering, broken dreams and lives permanently damaged. Many of those involved in broken relationships, especially the children, are innocent victims of disputes which were not of their own making and conflict into which they were unwillingly drawn.

The end of the century gives an opportunity to look back and trace the path of social change which has led to the present situation. As we approach the twenty-first century this gives the opportunity to assess the direction we are taking in the family life of the nation. This enables the formulation of policies of creative social change to promote the health and well-being of future generations in the nation.
Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the help of many individuals and organisations. We have listed them in section 12 and want to acknowledge their help and thank them for their input. These organisations have contributed so much useful research and resources that we had an enormous volume of material to study. Their readiness to assist is an indication of the importance of the issues concerning the family in Britain today.

Our contributors were in strong support of our attempt to study such a wide variety of the material available and to examine the trends and outcomes for the family and especially children. We appreciate that a substantial amount of time was spent in answering our questions and ensuring that we had access to key research documents. They also provided many useful recommendations, we are most grateful for that.

We would like to thank our Chairman, Lord Ashbourne and the committee of the Lords and Commons Family and Child Protection Group for their support and challenging comments. We worked to a fairly tight timetable in order to meet the requirements of the parliamentary group. We trust that we have fairly summarised the research data and presented an accurate picture.

We want to thank the Home Office for their positive assistance in providing advice and in facilitating the visit of the Home Secretary, The Rt Hon Jack Straw MP to respond to this report in an address to the Family and Child Protection Group.

Family Matters will be part of a continuing debate. We are pleased to have been privileged to contribute to the debate. We trust that the outcome will benefit the nation’s families and children.
3: Demography

3.1 Marriage and Divorce

The basic statistics of marriage and divorce are well known. For the past thirty years the number of first time marriages has been in decline, while over the same period, divorce has been on the increase. The number of remarriages has, however, risen slightly since the early 1970s as seen in figure 1 below. This shows that despite the level of human failure in marriage relationships, marriage as an ideal is still highly regarded in Britain. This is confirmed by numerous attitude surveys.

Nothing has replaced the desire of most people to be in a happy and fulfilling marriage with a member of the opposite sex. Thus, despite Britain having the second highest divorce rate in the European Union, marriage as the ideal way of life and the ideal family type, is by no means outmoded. (Belgium’s recent divorce law reform pushed them above Britain as the country with the highest divorce rate).

3.2 Cohabitation

Cohabitation was common in nineteenth century Britain but virtually disappeared during the first half of the twentieth century. The rise in cohabitation is one of the major social changes that has occurred during the past thirty years. Prior to 1965 it was only common in the UK among the emigrés from the Caribbean where among the rural working people cohabitation was the norm. Since 1970 there has been a steady increase in the number of cohabiting couples. Today the majority of couples who marry for the first time cohabit for a period before their marriage. This practice is even more prevalent among those who enter a second marriage as shown in figure 2.

Cohabitation, however, does not build a secure relationship in the experience of the vast majority of cohabitees. The average duration of a cohabitation relationship is estimated to be less than three

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**Figure 1**

Marriages and Divorces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>First Marriages</th>
<th>Divorces</th>
<th>Remarriages</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1993</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: STJ8

**Figure 2**

Premarital cohabitation by women: First and second marriages: Great Britain

% who cohabited premaritally

*First marriage, Second marriage*

Source: General Household Survey
increase was from 9% in 1981 to 27% in 1996-97. By comparison, the rise in the number of divorced women cohabiting has been smaller – with an increase from 20% to 32% over the same period. The comparative trends can be seen in figure 3.

3.3 Sexual Behaviour

The National Survey of Sexual Behaviour (published in *Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles* 1994, Oxford) gave details of the patterns of sexual behaviour among adults in the UK over the past five years. Figures 4 and 5 show the proportion of men and women who have been monogamous (one sexual partner during the past five years), serially monogamous (a new sexual relationship after another has finished), or have had concurrent sexual partners (several sexual relationships at the same time).

The figures show that the vast majority of married people are faithful to their marriage partner; 90% of men and well over 90% of women. This contrasts with the behaviour of those in unmarried cohabiting relationships where only 43% of men and 60% of women are faithful to their partner. In fact the sexual behaviour of cohabitees approximates more closely to that of divorced persons than that of married couples. These figures disprove the popular impression that most married couples are having affairs. They also underline the difference in ‘commitment’ between those who have entered into a formal marriage and those who have simply agreed to live together in an informal relationship.
3.4 Births Outside Marriage

According to figures from the Office of National Statistics (ST27) and their counterparts in Scotland and Northern Ireland more than a third of all babies in the UK were born outside marriage in 1995. This proportion rose to 35% in 1996. There are some quite striking regional variations which are shown in Figure 6 with areas in South Wales, the North East, the North Midlands and Belfast having live births outside marriage of 38% and over.

This represents a major change in British social history. From the earliest time when records are available until the 1960s, illegitimacy had remained consistently low.

Figure 7 shows the pattern of births outside marriage from 1870 to 1970. It shows that the only time the rate rose above 5% was during the Second World War. Even though the rise from 1950 to 1970 was steep the proportion was still below 10%. This was not exceeded until the late 1970s, as figure 8 shows. But since then, the rate of increase has been steep and shows no sign of abating.

These figures give an indication of the major change in the structure of the family in Britain at the end of the twentieth Century. They also indicate major changes in parenting and child rearing which are the main focus of this report. It is important to note that the majority of the live births outside marriage are jointly registered. It is also significant that, according to Social Trends, ‘half of women in England and Wales who were unmarried at their first birth were married by the time their second child was born’ (p50). The major social change in terms of marriage, family and sexual behaviour has taken place since 1971, when three quarters of all conceptions were within marriage – that rate had fallen to around half in 1994, and the downward trend continues.
Lone Parents

The General Household Survey shows the rapid increase in the number of lone parents since 1971 (see figure 9). The great majority of single parents are lone mothers. The proportion of lone fathers has remained the same throughout the period of rapid social change from 1971 to the present time. The sharpest increase in the number of lone parents has been since the mid 1980s. This is due to more single women becoming lone mothers rather than to an increase in the divorce rate. The 1996/97 figures show that two fifths of lone mothers were single.

![Graph showing the increase in lone parents from 1971 to 1996](image)

Despite the growth in single parent families most dependent children live in a family with two married natural parents. In 1979 83% of all children in Britain were living in such a traditional family, but by 1991/2 that proportion had dropped to 68%. This 14% drop in twelve years represents a movement of nearly one and a half million of the nation’s children away from traditional families into other types of family, and gives some indication of the extent of the breakdown of traditional family life in the 1980s.

Best estimates of the number of one-parent families in 1997 were 1.7 million – a massive rise from just over half a million in 1971. The number of dependent children in lone parent families in 1997 was estimated to be nearly three million (see figure 11).

The number of children currently living in one-parent families, estimated to be about 2.7 million represents one in five (20%) of all children. On the basis of current trends in partnership formation and dissolution whereby lone parenthood is often a phase between different relationships, it is estimated that half of all the nation’s children experience a period of living in a one-parent family due to the breakup of their parents’ marriage or cohabitation relationship.

Three thousand children every week experience the divorce of their parents. Probably an equal number experience the separation of parents from a cohabitation relationship.

![Graph showing the number of one-parent families and their dependent children](image)

### 3.5 Children and Family Types

Figure 10 shows the proportion of lone parents as a percentage of all families with dependent children. It can be seen that there was a steady rise from 1971 to 1994. The slight fall since then is probably accounted for by the increasing number of lone parents forming new partnerships and moving into cohabitation. About 21% of all families with dependent children in Britain are headed by a lone parent. This is three times the proportion in 1971.

![Graph showing the proportion of lone parents](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>OPFs (millions)</th>
<th>Dependent children in OPFs (millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>0.57</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1.70</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

*Note: Estimates for 1995 onwards are provisional.*

**Numbers of One-Parent Families (OPFs) in Great Britain and their dependent children**
4: The Family: Research

The Family - is it just another lifestyle choice?
This is the challenging title of a recent book, which argues that in the last thirty years many intellectuals have been scornful of the traditional family, condemning it as the prime source of repression. The most objectionable family influence was considered to be moral convention. Family life has been changing rapidly, particularly the loss of the male role. Professor A H Halsey, the distinguished Oxford sociologist is alarmed that so many children are born outside marriage and that the biological father often plays no part as a parent (FLC p vii).

Talcott Parsons states in Family Socialisation and Interaction Process that the basic and irreducible functions of the family are:

1. The primary socialisation of children, so that they can truly become members of the society into which they have been born
2. The stabilisation of the adult personalities of the population of society

Parsons was talking about the monogamous nuclear family and he regarded such a family as the historical and moral norm of western society. (FLC p1).

Jon Davies of the University of Newcastle challenges modern negative attitudes to the family - 'the only institution which can provide the time, attention, love and care is not just 'the family', but a stable two parent mutually complementary nuclear family. The fewer of such families that we have, the less we have of either freedom or stability' (FLC p7).

A fundamental challenge to the family is that society will be increasingly matrilineal and that the only indissoluble relationship will be that between a mother and her child. This was forecast in Relationship Revolution published by One Plus One in 1992 - by the year 2000 living together will be the norm and society will be matrilineal. Social Trends 1998 shows the sharp increase in single mothers, and particularly never married mothers. The absence of males in marriage as role models and providers is now having serious consequences (ST28).

We will consider the effects of these changes on the family and particularly the effects on children.

'Children matter - and they matter not just because they are tomorrow's adults. A decent society recognises its obligations and duties - one of which is to provide every child with a fair start. Children have a right to a good childhood' (TTIC p5). The Barnados report about investing in children summarises well the importance of a good family life for the child's sake and for its positive effect on the whole of society.

The Family is the pivotal security in any child's life. An NSPCC survey by MORI shows that the great majority of dependent children of those surveyed are in secure families - 83% had a mother and father figure, 72% of them were with both their natural parents. The importance of the extended family network was affirmed as 78% of children said that their grandparents were important to them. Children also wanted their parents to set them secure boundaries (NSPCC).
4.1 The Family

The Church of England Report, *Something to Celebrate* defines the main purpose of families as:

- Providing for the reproduction and upbringing of children
- Being places of intimacy, commitment and love
- Enabling the creation of a sense of identity
- Preserving memory, history and a sense of tradition
- Giving stability in a context of change
- Being places where people learn moral values and skills for living (STC p5).

Family life is a God-given context for nurturing human beings to full personal maturity. At its best it provides protection and sustenance, a sense of belonging, the safety of intimacy, examples to imitate, training in virtue and the skills of life, friendships to enjoy, rituals to help with times of change, and an openness to the divine (STC p5).

A family is defined as a married or cohabiting couple, with or without their never married children who have no children of their own, or a lone parent with such children. People living alone are not considered to form a family (ST28 p44).

Professor Halsey in his preface to *Youth Crime in the 90s* says that ‘the highly complex problem of the family deserves to be at the top of the social science and political agenda cannot be doubted’ (YC90).

A recent MORI poll found that 69% believe being married with children is the most desirable lifestyle. 53% believe that the increase in babies born out of wedlock has a negative effect on family life (NFM p2). 72% of adults want an increase in the traditional family structure, 75% want a decrease in single parent households. 80% do not feel it is better to stay in an unhappy family. The debate about working women is evenly split – a positive effect 32%, but 35% a negative effect.

75% strongly support legally enforceable evening curfews on teenagers, 63% young people support them. The young people surveyed feel that the family is best defined as those they live with. 94% feel that they have a close family, 93% enjoy the time that they spend with their family. 73% claim to hold some religious affiliation, of those only 22% regularly worship. Religion provides a moral framework for the family – 48% agree (66% over 65) – of those married 55% agree, (cf living as married 22%).

In the Demos booklet ‘The Family in Question’, Professor Stein Ringen of Green College, Oxford says public policy should defend marriage against cohabitation if the decline of the traditional family is to be arrested. He calls for generous child allowances to mitigate the cost of bringing up a family, this should be 20% of average disposable income for the child’s first five years. ‘I wish to shake my fellow liberals out of their libertarian complacency about the decline of the family. Formal marriage should be encouraged and informal cohabitation discouraged’. He even suggests children should have the right to veto their parents divorce, if it is not in their best interests. He supports the committee set up by the Home Secretary to seek ways of underpinning and strengthening family life. ‘Not long ago families were off limits for government intervention’. This government shows signs of taking the issue of the family seriously (DEMOS).

The traditional family has been under pressure – The ways in which men and women form relationships, reproduce and bring up children are fundamental to the definition of any culture. (NFS)

The traditional family was seriously undermined when the Family Law Reform Act 1987 abolished the legal distinction between legitimate and illegitimate offspring, according to ‘The Necessary Family’.

‘Since the 1960s the family has been challenged by apparently, equally valid other ways of living in relationships with children, and that public policy should not support one way rather than another. We should be clear that there is no known precedent for such a view. There is a growing concern about the effects on society of abandoning the family as an ideal to aspire to.’ (NFS)

Marriage is declining and women are choosing not to have children or have them later. The Total Period Fertility Rate has dropped to 1.8, according to John Haskey, from the Office of Population Censuses.

For the anthropologist, widespread failure to marry is a sign of impending cultural collapse. Marriage is no longer affirmed by our culture, particularly the media. So, many question the point of getting married.
4.2 Childcare

In the *Hidden Costs of Childcare*, Patricia Morgan quotes from Marian Blum, 'Day care is a fact of modern life, no longer a debatable issue...Whether for it or against it, whether one thinks it is healthy or not, it is inevitable. Day care is like a roller coaster – it cannot be stopped'. (HCC p5) The National Childcare Campaign wants the provision of a statutory service for children aged 0-5 and holiday care for those up to 12. The TUC wants the same for under fives. Workplace nurseries and creches are being pressured on employers to develop family friendly policies. Business and media women have mounted a high profile campaign to offset their nanny costs against income. The Midland Bank is concerned that 'pregnancy costs firms dear' as mothers leave to have children and they are seeking ways to encourage staff with babies to return. The Equal Opportunities Commission says that the six million mothers represent a 'huge untapped resource' for employment prospects.

This raises the fundamental question – which priority – the family’s overall economic security and status or the mother’s independent income? A child costs seven or eight years of paid work. Bamardos estimates the cost of motherhood committed to the child full-time as 45% lower lifetime earnings than a woman with no children – (calculated as 8 years full-time motherhood and 12 years part time work) (Tf 6)

Do working mothers or full-time mothers make better parents? An objective analysis is not easy because childcare has become a business opportunity. Their supporters say the service has positive effects on children’s cognitive and socio-emotional development (HCC p 10). In contrast, Patricia Morgan argues that ‘where a child spends 11 hours of his waking day in the care of indifferent custodians, no parent and no educator can say that the child’s development is being promoted or enhanced. Common sense says that children are harmed by indifference’ (HCC p14) As early as 1978 day care children were found to be more aggressive with other children and more defiant with adults.

Ten separate studies showed a constellation of negative and aggressive behaviour and decreased co-operation. These children in their first 2 or 3 years at school were more likely to hit, kick and push; threaten, swear and argue and be rated by teachers as having aggressiveness as a serious deficit of social behaviour (HCC p15)

A study in the USA (NICHD, *Early Child Care Research Network* 1996) identifies some factors in nonmaternal care which are associated with insecure attachment of infants to their mothers. It shows that boys are more at risk, and how nonmaternal day care of more than 10 hours a week can further disadvantage those 25% or more of infants who are already most vulnerable and disadvantaged (ECC 20).

In a meta analysis of 22,072 children in 1994 by Violato and Russell from 88 studies published between 1957 and 1993, no support was found that even high quality daycare is an acceptable substitute for parental care. The results showed significant and robust evidence of negative outcomes associated with non-maternal care in socio-economic outcomes, behavioural outcomes, and in attachment to the mother.

Governments and opinion makers could encourage community attitudes of respect and appreciation towards full-time parenting, especially where children under three are involved. Children in their first 3 years and their mothers form a discrete and vulnerable group with special and important needs during a limited period. The next move in women’s rights could be “affirmative action” in favour of mothers to give them freedom of choice to stay at home with their small children. Sweden financially supports personal parenting by either parent for the first 12 months of a child’s life. (ECC 167)

4.3 Lone Parents

The Relate Report *The Cost of Communication Breakdown* (RCCB) confirms that 83% of children live with two parents (not necessarily biological). Lone parent families have been an increasing factor in modern society. Between 1961 and 1992 there was a fourfold increase in the proportion of children in lone parent families. They doubled from 1971 to 1.3m in 1991. 90% of these are headed by women (Haskey 1993). 20% of lone parent families have 2.2 dependent children.

A Survey by Gallup called *Youth Crime in the 90s* warns that ‘the regime of a single parent family is more permissive with respect to the acceptability of, for example, mugging, shop-lifting and
carrying weapons for defence. Children of lone parent families do in fact more often get into trouble with the police. All the suggestions for improving the quality of family life ought to be followed with vigour. (YC90 p14). The greatest sanction against crime for young people is parental reaction, often a lone mother cannot cope with the extra burden.

Families without Fatherhood also points out another pressure on single mothers with sick children - 'Lone mothers are forced into all sorts of difficulties - she is short of money, needs to work, unable to pay for substitute child care, could lose her job looking after an ill child - which can lead to an ever descending spiral of financial and emotional distress (FWF p15).

Between November 1996 and 1997 the number of lone parents on Family Credit rose by more than 11% to 367,000. (Daily Telegraph 10/4/98). This indicates the increasing national cost of family breakdown.

A definition of lone parents is - those previously married - then divorced or separated; widow; single parents by choice or failure to marry and those formerly cohabiting.

Working together to Safeguard Children is the new Department of Health inter-agency consultation paper published in February 1998. It prefaces the document - 'ensuring that all children within our community are safeguarded and protected from abuse is an objective to which the Government is firmly committed. We believe that the community as a whole has a responsibility for promoting the welfare of children and for the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Families provide the prime building block for safe and sustainable communities and all agencies and professionals need to support parents in discharging their parental rights and responsibilities to enhance the welfare and safety of children (WTSC piii). The key message that the Government wishes to promote is a new emphasis on looking more widely at the needs of the most vulnerable children and families in our communities.

With all the pressures on lone parents, the emphasis is to promote community responsibility for the welfare of children.

4.4 Divorce

The impact of divorce on children has been addressed in the Exeter Family Study - Family Breakdown & its Impact on Children. Some of the outcomes include the assertion that over the past twenty years research has amassed abundant evidence that children fare badly in a dysfunctional family (EXPC p226). Emery has shown that, when exposed to parental conflict, boys are more likely to exhibit aggressive and disruptive behaviour (externalised), whereas girls are more likely to become withdrawn and depressed (internalised) (EXPC p226).

The maxim 'better a good divorce than a bad marriage' is accepted by many parents and family lawyers, though it has no established basis in practice (EXPC p227). Parents' energies are deflected away from their children when in the midst of conflict over divorce. The numbers are substantial - 160,000 couples divorce each year - affecting 176,000 dependent children (EXPC p228). The effect on the children is the loss of the extended family support, especially from grandparents. Family breakdown and especially single parenthood influences the involvement of young people in serious crime and results in an increased rate of suicide in young men (EXPC p228).

Predictive factors of divorce have been identified by the Policy Studies Institute in The Growth of Lone Parenthood (GLP p100). The factors which increase the likelihood of divorce are - early marriage; premarital cohabitation; premartial birth; children early in a marriage; childlessness; low educational achievement; different social classes of partners; breakdown among close family; married before; lived apart; access to alternative partners; alternative home.

An important study on The Legacy of Parental Divorce traces the effects of divorce into adulthood. This study by Kathleen Kiernan is an LSE/CASE document. It uses the National Child Development Study - 17,414 babies born during the first week of March 1958. It asks -

1 To what extent does divorce during childhood have long-term consequences for the educational attainment, economic situation, partnership formation and dissolution, and parenthood behaviour in adulthood?

In most cases it is shown that children who
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experience parental divorce in childhood have more negative experiences than children raised by both their parents.

2 Do the child and family characteristics preceding divorce weaken the relationship between the divorce itself and adult outcomes? Financial hardship is a strong influence. Children who grow up with both biological parents may end up better off educationally and economically largely because they were advantaged to begin with, not necessarily because their parents stayed together.

3 If parents remain together until their children are grown up before separating does this lessen the legacy of divorce on their adult children’s lives?

The answer is in the affirmative for most of the adult outcomes, but the instability of partnerships and marriages was as high amongst those whose parents separated after they had grown up as those who experienced parental divorce during childhood (LPD Abstract).

A most valuable report has just been published in June 1998 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation called Divorce and Separation – the outcomes for children (DSOC). The report says that divorce rates in the United Kingdom have given rise to concern over the well-being of children affected by parental separation. The report seeks to identify the main areas in which children from separated families are disadvantaged, both in the short and long term, and to evaluate possible explanations. In the short term, children are likely to experience unhappiness, low self-esteem, problems with behaviour and friendships and loss of contact with a significant part of their extended family. It states that as a rule of thumb many adverse outcomes are roughly twice as prevalent among children of divorced families compared with children of intact families (DSOC p5)

- they tend to have lower incomes, poorer housing and experience greater levels of financial hardship than intact families.
- they tend to achieve less in socio-economic terms when they grow into adults
- there is an increased risk of behavioural problems – withdrawn behaviour, aggression, delinquency and other anti-social behaviour
- they perform less well at school and gain fewer educational qualifications
- they are more likely to be admitted to hospital after accidents and have more health problems
- they are more likely to leave home earlier,

...become sexually active, cohabit and give birth outside marriage at an early age
- more depressive symptoms are reported and higher levels of smoking, drinking and drug use during adolescence and adulthood

The report refers to the complexities of factors that impinge on families before, during and after separation and these indicate a process, rather than a single event.

Research findings for children from stepfamilies suggest a number of ways in which they do not fare as well as those from intact families – in some instances not as well as those from lone parent families, particularly when the children are older when they move into the stepfamily. Continuing contact with the non-resident parent is very important and this can benefit the child’s adjustment following separation – the quality of contact is as important as the frequency of contact.

One of the most important conclusions is that everything should be done to minimise family conflict during and after the divorce. Parents should be encouraged to minimise the involvement of children in their disputes. Benefits come from maintaining contact with both parents, particularly the non-custodial parent. Some children and parents need professional support at the time of separation, adequate resources invested in this will have positive paybacks in the future (DSOC p7). This report provides a valuable and thorough contribution to this important area of research.

4.5 Marriage

‘What Europe Thinks’ is an attitude survey and confirms that marriage still popular among divorcees, even after the failure of a previous marriage. The durability of the family is impressive – 90% say the family is very important. Support for marriage in the UK, 1981 83% and 1990 81%. In reply to the statement – a child needs two parents to grow up happily 1981 80% agree and 1990 87%. (WET p48). There is disapproval of lone parenthood by choice – do you approve of a woman choosing to have a child without a stable relationship with a man? 1981 33% 1990 37%. Responsible parenthood is strongly asserted – a parents duty is to do the best for their child even at the expense of their own well-being 1981 66% agree and 1990 69%. 

Family Matters
Priority is given to family life - there should be more emphasis on family life - 1981 83% and 1990 87%.
The survey summarises, 'Family life has lost none of its importance, and marriage none of its popularity, but the nature of both marriage and family life are beginning to show signs of change'. (WET p67)

4.6 Stepfamilies

Calculations by the National Stepfamily Association predicts there will be up to 3 million stepchildren and young adults by the year 2000. Consequently millions will be in life situations which are surprisingly little understood, either at the level of common wisdom, or through research (GUS preface). An important new report from Oxford University Growing up in Stepfamilies examines the long-term impact of stepfamily life in Britain. Some of the key outcomes to help overcome the challenges in a stepfamily include:

* the quality of the parental marriage, the absence of acrimony, violence or quarrelling
* the quality of the relationship with the caretaking parent
* support from grandparents and the extended family
* continuity and security in housing, school and local friendships
* in adulthood finding fulfilling work and strong emotional relationships (GUS p286)

4.7 Male Role

The changing role of men in families has been highlighted by the book Families without Fathers, which questions the growth of single parent families and the largely negative role of men in parenting in some modern family units. It argues that 'the traditional family is the tested arrangement for safeguarding the welfare of children'. It challenges the attitudes of many modern men - the adult ego is self-sufficient. Children become commodities; Marriage becomes a mere contract; Parents cannot escape responsibility for the quality of their children as citizens.

'An overlooked consequence of family breakdown is the emergence of a new type of young male, namely one who is both weakly socialised and weakly socially controlled so far as the responsibilities of spousalhood and fatherhood are concerned.

He does not feel the pressure of previous generations of males to be a responsible adult in a functioning community. We are faced with many irresponsible fathers - this is a fundamental challenge to social policy' (FWF).

These alternative family types are yet to be tested, particularly the effectiveness on child rearing of fatherless families (FWF p27).

The National Child Development Study of 33 year olds in 1991 reported that 70% said it was 'alright for people to have children without being married', (NCD). 11% of the divorced women had lived with three or more partners by the age of 33 (cf 2% rest). Divorcees had lower educational attainments - degree or higher 7% (12% married). Married couples were far more likely to own their own home. Cohabitees were shown to be the least content.

'If the experience of children is considered - every empirical study that has ever been published shows the benefits for children of families with fathers as compared with those households without them' (FWF p29). Also Crellin's study had shown that 'on average the life-long socially certified monogamous family on the pre-1960's pattern was better for children' (FWF p34).

The Scottish Home & Health Department demonstrated a striking downward social mobility among the mothers of children of uncommitted fathers. Higher perinatal mortality rates occur among the children of uncommitted fathers 52 (cf 36 per 1000).

Absent fathers resulted in 61% of mothers working in pre-school years (24% married); these families were more mobile - changing friends, schools and other familiar things. 20% had moved house four times (7% married). The most mobile household (38%) was in a cohabiting home. Households lacking basic amenities ranged from 33% illegitimate, 17% legitimate, 5% adopted.

By the age of seven - 90% of children with committed fathers were in the household into which they were born, only 27% of children of uncommitted fathers were with their natural parents. Also 11% of children of uncommitted fathers had been taken into care for at least a short period, mainly due to the illness of the mother, who had no other support at home (FWF p40).
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Family types were surveyed - children of UF (uncommitted fathers), CF (committed fathers) and AD (adopted fathers). Graded by general knowledge at seven, which should have been provided by the opportunities and stimulation provided for them by their family. Below average 65% UF, 28% CF, 16% AD. 8% UF rated largely ignorant of the world around them. Southgate reading test 'poor' 49% UF, 28% CF, 18% AD.

Having a committed father made the second biggest positive statistical difference after social class. Arithmetic UF five months behind. Interest in children's education 'little or no interest' 21% UF, 4% CF, 1% AD.

Stott's Bristol Social Adjustment Guide to behaviour - maladjusted 25% Uncommitted Fathers, 16% rest. (FWF p42)

Adoptive parents are especially shown to be good parents and prove that the two adult family unit is successful even if they are not the natural parents. 'Existing data does not suggest that uncommitted fathers and single motherhood are institutions of equal worth to the average child on any of the criteria that are usually adduced in connection with the assessment of their best interests'.

'The longer the same father has been part of the child's life, and the more effectively the father has taken part in the life of the family, the better the results for the child'.

'The presence of the natural father was one of the four most powerful protectors against delinquency among girls'. (FWF)

4.8 Parenting

The 1991 Census showed that there were 6.5 million children under 8 years of age in the UK. The responsibility and cost of parenthood is substantial. By 17 a child will have cost around £50,000 for regular items of spending, with 90% of this cost incurred by the parents. (TT p5)

Childline have produced an important survey for parents called, Listening to 10 year olds. They say 'Being a parent is perhaps the most difficult job any of us have to do in our lives; we are not trained to do it and it lasts for life. Young children can be very physically and emotionally demanding and require that we draw on all our resources and creativity. Children who call ChildLine want to talk to their parents, they want them to know how they are feeling' (CL10 p47). There is the vital issue of listening to children and giving them the appropriate time and space to be heard. Parents play such an important part in this.

Many problems arise from the lack of good parenting. In Youth Crime in the 90s, the key role of parents is stressed as well as how to control their children. 'Much analysis of rising crime focuses on the alleged decline in control over young people by their parents. Evidence points to marital breakdown through divorce and separation as well as to the rise of parenthood outside marriage. Some children admitted they would steal for the excitement it gave even if they had the necessary money in their pockets. The question was raised whether parents found it harder to discipline their children because of the fear of being accused of abuse - 66% agreed (YC90 p11). The survey shows that the solidarity between parents and police has declined. Many adults are confident that their juvenile deviants will grow up to be respectable law-abiding citizens.

Until the 1970s 80% of children grew up under the care of two married parents, the twenty-first century child will have even less chance of doing so. The negative significance of this development is underlined by the research which shows a greater vulnerability to crime and deviance among children who lack two committed parents. Parents' views in the survey data show that 80% of adults would welcome less focus on individuals and more on community while 82% want greater parental power to discipline children without fear of prosecution (YC90 p15). 'Less trendy theory, return to corporal punishment, return to disciplinary fatherhood are measures that would have popular adult support'.

Parental attitudes from the National Child Development Study showed 85% agreed that 'people can have a satisfying relationship without children' and even 66% agreed that 'having children seriously interferes with the freedom of their parents' (NSPVC p7).

In the NSPCC report Voices from Childhood a significant finding was the adverse experiences of those respondents who do not feel close to either parent. They were more likely to record having received less affection, praise and more criticism, strictness, frequent and unfair punishment at home (NSPVC
Children rearing remains predominantly a female role.

We must ensure that children and their parents are given all the support and encouragement they need to grow into the caring and responsible adults of the twenty-first century.

4.9 Listening to Children

NSPCC commissioned a survey *Talking about my Generation* - A survey of 8–15 year olds in 1996. Their aim was to obtain a contemporary picture of children’s experiences of, and attitudes towards, family and social life. 83% lived in two parent families, 73% of whom were their natural parents. Grandparents were seen as key figures in children’s lives - 78% said they were important to them. A quarter of the children who had one absent parent, a third of them had no contact with them and only half saw them at least once a month. Grandparents were often cited as more important than absent parents. Family based activities were usually carried out by the mother and a fifth said they had done nothing with their father in the last week.

Children commented on high levels of caring behaviour by their parents towards them. 90% quoted at least three ways their parents showed affection towards them. The most common way was physical affection as mentioned by younger children, 8–10’s, 82%. Praise was the most noted for 12 – 15 years, 68%. Parental approval was highly regarded, 78%. Criticism was also reported, and those criticised often, 26%, came from large or reconstituted families or from several classes D and E - suggesting that stress may be a contributory factor.

Surprisingly, the great majority of older children felt that issues such as smoking, drinking and what time they came home at night should not be left to their discretion. Most children had someone to talk to, but mothers were overwhelmingly the most popular confidantes. Another surprising answer was that 62% of the children felt it was not important for them to have the same things as their friends. In contrast, boys from social classes D and E were more likely to say it was important to them to have the same things.

Adults were challenged by children with the view that adults operated double standards, expecting children to behave well, whilst behaving badly themselves. Even two-thirds of younger children shared this view. Qualities required of good mothers and fathers were remarkably similar and suggest that children think in terms of good parents rather than differentiating on the basis of sex. Children who were often criticised were less likely to experience positive parenting in terms of demonstrations of affection and positive feedback. They described their parents as strict and experienced higher levels of physical and coercive punishment (NSPCC Summary).

In the Report of the National Commission of Enquiry into the Prevention of Child Abuse one thousand children were surveyed for their views:

- Overwhelmingly they asked for more and better communication with adults; more listening: greater understanding and support; more attention and more talking to children and far less physical punishment.
- Praise when children do well. 90% say this helps them to behave better.
- Most children feel that grown ups are unpredictable, and only 33% believe that punishment is mostly fair.
- 50% of children do not believe that adults generally listen to what they say.

As we went to press a new survey was published by GfK called ‘Hopes and Fears: Young European Opinion Formers’ 3000 European teenagers were interviewed. According to the Times report (24/6/98) they want to get married, have children and live happily - they want happy families. They realise that they have to put their children first, stay with their spouses and reject infidelity and the materialistic culture. They appear to be moving back to the family values their parents rejected. Even in the most liberal countries divorce was condemned, they demanded parents should keep their marriage vows and they admired stable couples. The youngsters from broken homes were the ones who vowed to put their families first. ‘The moral pendulum is swinging back towards the traditions their parents overturned’ says the survey.

Wayward teenagers in Nottingham are flourishing in a newly introduced mentor programme, according to the Times. (28/2/98). Jack Straw was reported speaking at a conference on ‘Motivating young people through social mentoring’. There are real benefits in giving young people adult mentors or personal advisors to help them find jobs,
develop their skills and generally encourage them. It is particularly helpful in attempting to discourage youth crime.

4.10 Grandparents

The very important role of grandparents has been highlighted in various pieces of research consulted (especially NSPCC and the Exeter Study). This appears to be a neglected area of study which could well be a helpful addition to the strengthening of family life. Children often say how important their grandparents, especially their grandmothers, are to them. They have time for them when their parents are working. Interestingly the statistics show many lone parents, but a substantial number may live at home with the child’s grandparents or have a supportive extended family. The positive input to the children by grandparents and the stability of many families is strengthened by their presence. When divorce becomes acrimonious and the children lose contact with their grandparents the children are likely to suffer from the absence of a most important secure and loving relationship.

The grandparents often help in childcare for working mothers, this provides very positive support. Such loving security is in contrast to even the best that a nursery can offer. Small children, as well as the grandparents, mutually benefit from such positive attachment.

Geoff Dench has studied the role of grandparents in extended families in London. (PM p1). Anecdotal evidence suggests a strong role for grandparents, especially in the African-Caribbean community. He found that this was not as strong as thought, but many British families rely on their grandparents both financially and as an extended family.

In another book *Rewriting the Sexual Contract* Dench points out the changes in attitude as women grow older. He says ‘my own research findings show that as they grow older and see the consequences of the sexual revolution from different perspectives, many women become seriously concerned about the future of families in Britain under current social policies. They worry about idle adult sons who seem to have no stake in society, about daughters who cannot find reliable and committed partners to help them bring up their children, and about grandchildren denied the security of a stable home life. Many blame ‘alternative’ family conventions for spawning all these problems’. The women who resisted parental pressures and threw off convention in the sixties have now become grandmothers and most now believe in long-term mutual commitment as the basis for the successful rearing of children (RSC p51).

4.11 Youth Crime

The breakdown of the family and particularly the phenomenon of absent fathers has had a strong influence on the rapid growth of youth crime. The growth in crime has been dismissed as the creation of ill-informed people in the throes of a moral panic. The withdrawal of men from parenthood within a family setting has even been celebrated by some as an improvement’ Dennis quoted by Professor Halsey (YC90 p3) ‘We must seriously appraise the quality of rearing citizens in the next generation and of ensuring civic safety in the immediate and more remote future’ Professor Halsey.

The Gallup survey *Youth Crime in the 90’s* documents that 80% of known offenders are male and half are under 21, of those 20% are under 17. Cautioning for males peaks between ages 15 and 18. One third of men had committed an offence by 35. From 1981 to 1991 there was a 25% drop in the total juvenile population. Crime statistics have been reduced by cautions and police practice. During the 1980s there was an estimated increase in crimes of 54%, though formally recorded at 13%.

The contribution of the family type is a predictor of the origins of crime – the *Family Policy Studies Report* concludes ‘it is already apparent that the tangled roots of delinquency lie, to a considerable extent inside the family’. (YC90 p6) The Newcastle study states that ‘social deprivation does not appear sufficient on its own for delinquency to develop’.

In the Cambridge study, the indicators are that most of the modest association between social class and delinquency is probably due to the parental and family problems sometimes associated with low social status, rather than low social status per se.

Innocence from criminal activity was correlated with church attendance. The matrix of correlation here which, while it does not in any way isolate the disrupted family, points to significant increase in
the probability of offending from non-traditional children' (YC90 p9).

An important recent report comes from the Association of Chief Police Officers. This points out that the early 90s have seen significant increases in the levels of recorded youth crime. The annual cost of youth crime is between £5-10 billion. There are 28m offences each year – 7 million by under 18s. 50% of all crime by under 21s. 'Young people are not so likely to grow out of crime as before'. (ACPO p14)

The research identifies key 'risk factors'. It is shown that the presence of the biological father was found to be significant in mitigating many of these adverse factors and generally had a protective effect. Women who marry as teenagers are twice as likely as others to have sons who become offenders by the age of 32 and half of them do in fact offend'.

Poor parental supervision clearly predicts the likelihood of juvenile and adult offending. Broken homes are more strongly related to delinquency when they are caused by divorce or separation rather than death. Low school attainment is an important predictor of offending. Young people who are truanting, or who are excluded from school, are more likely to offend than those who are not (ACPO p 24).

The ACPO recommends ways of reducing the risks of youth crime by – parenting skills training, supporting local communities and parental orders. Practical projects like the Milton Keynes Young Persons Befriender Scheme are praised.

A troubled home life is described as – Broken Family, Low Income, Poor Parenting, Child Abuse, Domestic Violence and a Criminal Family Member.

The book *The Necessary Family and How to Support it* refers to various American studies that show that the prevalence of broken families in a neighbourhood contributes to increase its crime rate. Curiously, another study says that a city's divorce rate is a better predictor of the robbery rate than statistics of arrests and sentencing (NFS p29).

### 4.12 Health

The marriage research organisation One Plus One in 1991 found that married people are much less likely to suffer from physical or mental illness than either single or divorced people. There is a correlation between marital status and ill health. Divorced people were ten times more likely to be admitted to psychiatric hospitals and four times more likely to commit suicide than married people. The *National Child Development Study*, the longitudinal study started in 1958, found that 52 per thousand of the children born out of wedlock were dead by the age of seven, compared with 36 in traditional families. A BMJ report in 1993 studying infant deaths showed that accidents and injuries accounted for nearly 60% of the deaths in lone parent households, double the rate in other households. They were also more likely to die in infancy or childhood. “Single parent babies are likelier to die young” – this was the *Daily Telegraph* headline (17/6/98). *Population Trends* (POP98), the quarterly analysis published by the Office for National Statistics, shows that babies born to single mothers are twice as likely to die in their first year as those born within marriage. Also mortality rates for babies born to teenage mothers are double those of women aged 25 - 34. These new statistics also confirm that suicide rates for young men are increasing, the only group showing an increase.

In 1995, Rutter & Smith in a major survey of psychosocial disorders showed a significant recent increase ‘this happened in the golden era of low employment and rising living standards between 1950 and 1973. There is strong evidence that family conflict and bad parenting increase the risk that children will later develop disorders’ (NFS p25).

There has been a 50% increase in children under 10 with mental illness admitted to hospital in the last four years. There is also great concern over the increase in suicides, particularly young males. An important paper *Causes of Child Abuse and Neglect* from the *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, August 1992 looked at child neglect from the perspective of the child. Generally it states that the mistreatment of children was associated with “poor care” from parents, this mistreatment was significantly related to family break-up. When children were asked their worst experience in life the most common mentioned were family break-up and abuse. The paper also outlined the basic causes of child neglect as marital turmoil, lack of parenting skills, poor bonding, ignorance of the child’s needs.
and unrealistic expectations of the adults from the child. Parents with unrealistic expectations blame their children more frequently, and use more punishment and less explanation.

The effect of divorce on children is that they are more likely to be admitted to hospital following accidents, to have reported more health problems and to visit their family doctor more often (DS p5). Family conflict is stressful for children, they respond in various ways — including aggressiveness, anxiety and withdrawal. This is made worse when parental conflict is expressed violently or is poorly resolved, such that children feel caught in the middle. (DS p4) The multiple changes in family structure inflict ongoing stress on children both directly and through the accompanying distress of the adults in their lives.

The *Sunday Times* headline reflects ongoing stress on children. One in five girls tries suicide. (5/4/98). This statistic comes from the Samaritans as children respond to the challenge of modern life. In 1995 738 people between 15-24 committed suicide. Coroners are said to hide the true extent of suicide by recording open verdicts to spare the family feelings.

In February this year the Government published its Green Paper on public health *Our Healthier Nation*. It identifies three healthy settings - schools, workplaces and neighbourhoods. Sadly it missed the vital contribution of healthy families! The book, *The Divorced and who Divorces* by Kathleen Kiernan and Ganka Mueller, a CASE paper, May 1998 (DWD) says that research shows the major impact of family relationships on the health of both adults and children. There is a strong link between marital status and health. Married people have the highest rates of premature mortality and illness. For children, Harold stated ‘the family environment is the primary social platform from which an understanding of children’s social-emotional development can be derived’. (DWD summary)

The link between marital status and health is demonstrated —

1. **Protection/Support hypothesis** - marriage acts as a buffer against the effects of anxiety and stress
2. **Selection hypothesis** - emotionally and physically unhealthy people are less able to marry and if they do, less able to stay married
3. **Disillusion hypothesis** - the severing of the marital bond through divorce or widowhood is the source of great stress

Divorced or married men are 35% more likely to visit their GP than married men. Wives are more able to exert a positive influence on their husband’s smoking, drinking and eating habits. Men who experienced divorce or separation were nine times more likely to experience major depression. Marriage also reduces the risk of heart disease and strokes, thought to be related to reduced stress.

The suicide rates for men who were divorced, single and widowed aged 25-44 are three times higher than married men. Unmarried people take more risks with their health. The Health Education Authority has directed its latest safer sex campaign to recently divorced and separated people. (DWD). This report from CASE is a useful source showing the link between marital quality and both physical and emotional health.

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*Family Matters*

This is a framework and consultation document presented in May 1998 to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and the Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women.

Summary of the paper

Foreword by the Prime Minister
The Prime Minister says that the Government is pledged to support families and children, particularly as they struggle with choices between work and family responsibilities. He says he will implement the European Parental Leave Directive giving parents the right to three months unpaid leave after the birth or adoption of a child, as well as time off for urgent family reasons.

The main thrust of the document is to ensure that families have access to good quality childcare. Mothers are unable to take up job, education or training opportunities when suitable childcare is not available. This links with the Green Paper on Welfare Reform – New Ambitions for Our Country: A New Contract for Welfare.

The Government will immediately create more than 50,000 childcare places this year and make £300 million available in England – including £170 million from the Lottery to set up new out of school childcare places. From September 1998, every four year old will have the guarantee of a free education place. Eleven Early Excellence Centres are the first stage of a network across the UK to champion the highest standards. Child Benefit will be raised by £2.50, there will be a new childcare tax credit – part of the new Working Families Tax Credit. This childcare tax credit will pay up to £70 a week for one child and £105 for two children.

This is to be called the National Childcare Strategy working within a national framework, but will be run locally to ensure that local needs are met. This all requires a host of partners working together. The Prime Minister appeals to parents, childcare providers, carers and employers to help make it succeed.

National Childcare Strategy Document

Contents
The heart of this strategy is stated – ‘our economy will prosper if more skilled and capable people are able to take up job opportunities, because they have access to good quality, affordable and accessible childcare’. The aim of Government is to ensure good quality, affordable childcare for parents who wish to work outside the home, and support for parents, relatives and other informal carers who look after children. Employers are also encouraged to be aware of the business benefits of family friendly policies.

* The quality of childcare can be variable – there is no definition of standards applied across all childcare settings. 70% of childminders and 20% of pre-school workers have no formal qualifications.
* The cost of childcare is high – The Daycare Trust has estimated the weekly nursery cost for under fives as £50 – £120, and in a private day nursery £70 – £180. Thus for a family on average income, with two children, one third of their income is spent on childcare!
* In some areas there are not enough childcare places and access to them is limited by poor information. There are only 830,000 registered childcare places for the 5.1 million children under eight in England.
* £4 million extra will be spent on training childcare workers this year

Three Steps to a National Childcare Strategy
• Raising the quality of care
• Making childcare more affordable
• Making childcare more accessible by increasing places and improving information

The document says that the two tests of the success of our approach will be -

1. better outcomes for children, including readiness to learn by the time they reach school and enjoyable, developmental activities out of school hours
2. more parents will have the chance to take up work, education or training because they have access to diverse, good quality childcare

Summary of Contents
Changing patterns of work – the proportion of mothers in paid employment outside the home has
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grown from 52% to 62% in the past ten years, but especially for mothers with children under five – 32% to 51%. Women are expected to account for the 900,000 of the projected rise of 1.2 million in the labour force by 2006. In Italy, France and Sweden, 70% of lone mothers are in employment where more childcare is widely available, the UK figure is half this rate.

The assertion is made that 'there is clear evidence that good quality day care has long-term benefits for children's social and intellectual development.' No evidence is given apart from the suggestion that those in childcare are more confident. In our study we have found no such evidence of long-term benefits, rather that full-time childcare outside the home actually damages children.

Support for parents and informal carers will be given by introducing education for parenthood into the school curriculum. This is to be welcomed.

Increased funding will be provided for the existing Out of School Childcare Initiative (OSCI) to £22.1 million in 1998-99, five times the funding of last year. 40,000 extra childcare places will be created and more childcare workers trained.

Local childcare partnerships will be funded through the existing Early Years Development Partnerships by £12 million in 1998-99 to carry out local audits of supply and demand and to draw up local childcare plans.

The Department of Education and Employment will make at least £125 million available over the next few years to support this strategy. This includes among other things – training childcare workers, promoting family-friendly employment practices to employers, regulating and inspecting childcare.

The Government is committed to making paid employment more compatible with family life. 'Neither mothers nor fathers should have to sacrifice their parenting role for the sake of their employability'. The Midland Bank is promoted as a good example – in 1988 only 30% of women returned to the Bank following maternity leave, by 1997 it had risen to 80%!

Total expenditure by employers on childcare is £60 million, compared with £2.6 billion spent by parents – estimated by the Daycare Trust.
Conclusions and Projections

The Changing Structure of the Family

The past thirty years have seen revolutionary changes in the structure and function of the family in Britain which will probably go down in history as of at least equivalent importance to the Industrial Revolution for its potential to change the course of history. Social attitudes and behaviour have undergone radical changes which have created a complex pattern of different family structures. Social analysts now refer to first marriages, remarriages, cohabiting couples, lone mother families, lone father families, stepfamilies, multi-parent families where children sometimes live with one parent and sometimes with another, multi-sibling families where children from different unions live in a single household with a parent or step parent or other carer.

Despite the complexities of family life approximately half of all households consist of a married couple with or without children. This represents a decline from 70% at the beginning of the 1970s which is largely accounted for by an increase in cohabiting couples from 1% to 7%, in lone parents from 2% to 6% and in single parent households from 18% to 29%.

5.1 Attitudes to Marriage

It is projected that the percentage of married couple households will fall to about 40% by the year 2020. This projection is a statistical estimate based on current trends, but it is also reinforced by attitude surveys showing young peoples’ views on marriage. In the Nestlé Family Monitor (NFM) conducted by Mori only 13% of respondents in the 15-24 year age group agreed that it is better for parents to stay together even in an unhappy relationship whilst their children are growing up.

Nevertheless almost 70% of all age groups still regard traditional family life – married parents with children – as the desired norm. Although most respondents expect current trends to continue, the majority desire a reversal towards the reinforcing of traditional family life.

Young peoples’ attitudes were the subject of a Barnardo’s report Young People’s Social Attitudes (BSA) where teenage girls’ attitudes closely resembled those in the Mori Poll – 14% agreeing with the statement: ‘Where there are children in the family, parents should stay together even if they don’t get along.’ Boys’ attitudes on this question (22%) were more conservative. In fact, they were more conservative on all aspects of family life including cohabitation and child rearing.

This difference in gender attitudes to the family may reflect the higher level of self confidence among women throughout the western nations. The present generation of teenage girls are growing up in a social environment very different from that of their mothers and grandmothers. The world is open to them in terms of education, employment and careers. The high profile ‘girl power’ so successfully marketed by the Spice Girls finds an echo in numerous teenage girls’ magazines. But it is doubtful if the pop group could have attained such notoriety if they had not ridden on the crest of a social wave which had been gathering momentum since the 1960s with its student-led ‘Women’s Right to Choose’ slogan.
The more conservative attitudes among teenage boys may be a reflection of the high unemployment among young men especially in traditional manual work communities, and the consequent loss of social role from which many are suffering. We will need to return to this subject.

5.3 Social Revolution

Any analysis of the changing structure of the family in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century has to deal with a highly complex interaction of social forces. There is no simple explanation of the social revolution that has taken place during the lifetime of most adults. Most divorcees giving reasons for the breakup of their marriages speak of personal factors such as alcohol, violence and extramarital affairs rather than general social trends. But since the beginnings of recorded history there have always been alcohol, violence and extramarital affairs. Women have traditionally put up with drunken, violent and promiscuous husbands. Today they are no longer prepared to do so.

5.4 Behavioural Changes

This gives rise to the view that changes in attitudes largely account for the structural changes in society. But unpacking the relationship between changes in attitude and behavioural changes is notoriously difficult. It is often a chicken and egg situation. American Research, for example, indicates that attitudes towards divorce only softened after the incidence of divorce had become widespread.

It is equally contentious to attribute attitudinal and behavioural changes to changes in law. Although the 1971 British Divorce Law resulted in a huge increase in divorces (as recently happened in Belgium) there is plenty of evidence that the law simply legalised the large number of separations which had already occurred. Thus it may be argued that legislation often follows rather than leads changes in attitudes and behaviour.

5.5 Genesis of Social Change

Some sociologists still see the economy as the major engine generating forces of social change. Powerful arguments can be advanced in favour of such hypotheses. The early post World War Two period of rebuilding shattered cities produced a boom in the construction industry which stimulated the consumer industry and boosted the whole economy creating a demand for labour and sending wages soaring.

School leavers went straight into industry earning high wages and were rapidly recognised as a new consumer group with high spending power and low social responsibilities. This generated a major sociological change in emphasis from age to youth and was largely responsible for generating the pop culture which dominated the 1960s. The same economic conditions gave great power to workers and Trade Unions which was not curbed until the economic recessions of the 1970s and 1980s.

5.6 Influence of Affluence

Family life was inevitably affected by increased affluence and full employment. Young people began exercising a measure of independence within the family which led to tensions, conflict, early marriage and strains within the nuclear family which had become the backbone of the nation in the middle of the century. Rising affluence also contributed to both the social and geographical mobility of the family, and to a boom in the housing market. This in turn injected strongly materialistic elements into the social values of the nation.

Full employment in the economy and increased affluence across all social classes generated social change of immense significance, namely the individualisation of wages. In the inter-war years the breadwinner’s pay packet was seen as family income and when the children were old enough to earn, their income added to the family purse.

From the 1950s family income was no longer needed for survival. Young people were able to keep their own wages and working housewives regarded their income as ‘pin money’ – their personal property. Thus the process of the individualisation of society which had been steadily gathering momentum across the Western nations throughout the twentieth century was boosted by economic circumstance.
5.7 Extended Family to Nuclear Family

The traditional extended family which was strong at the beginning of the twentieth century and which gave identity and support to every individual radically changed by the middle of the century to the nuclear family pattern. That same process of individualisation continued into the second half of the century so that by the end of the century, the nuclear family itself is fragmenting. The phenomenon of the lone parent is acceptable and, if present trends continue, could even become a normative type.

5.8 Economic Theory

An economic theory of social change has been applied to the family through the work of Gary Becker who hypothesised that people are rational, informed individuals who take steps to maximise their level of satisfaction. Marriage is seen in terms of the gains or losses for the individual. Men have a comparative advantage in production outside the home and women for production inside the home. The attractiveness of marriage or cohabitation is then linked to economic factors whereby the gains are reduced to the extent that men are unable to fulfil their role and women can be as well off in individual households or in lone mother families.

There is plenty of research to support the view that unemployed young men do not make attractive life partners for young women who are contemplating marriage or cohabitation and who wish to raise a family. Many girls see the ideal arrangement as single motherhood with a non-domiciliary boyfriend. In this way, they and their children are protected from domestic violence, enjoy their personal freedom and yet have the advantage of male company when they want it.

Girls who have had a bad experience of family life in a stepfamily or through being placed in care often see motherhood as a means of establishing their independence and of obtaining the love and emotional satisfaction they have lacked in human relationships. Their baby specifically belongs to them and is expected to provide a personal relationship that has been lacking. But many teenage mothers find, to their distress, that the child is unable to provide them with the love and support they desire. Without the support of others in an extended family the young single mother can be desperately lonely.

In order to increase the attractiveness of young men as life partners, urgent attention needs to be given to providing suitable employment. Unemployment among young men is probably the single greatest threat to the future of the family in urban industrial communities. The traditional male role as provider and protector has been eroded by the forces of economic change. This is particularly seen in the rundown of heavy industry and the changes in manufacturing processes through the rapid computerisation of industry and commerce. This has led to a huge reduction in men's jobs and a rapid escalation of jobs available to women.

5.9 Political Influences

In addition to the forces of change in the economy, other social institutions are experiencing and generating change. Any analysis of social change factors which have influenced the social revolution that has engulfed the family in the last three or four decades would not be complete without a mention of political factors particularly the role of lobbies. Some of these political lobbies have focused upon the family, as the object of social change.

The traditional family has been seen by some as a major obstacle to the achievement of their objectives. It is possible for political groups with an agenda of social change to achieve influence far in excess of their numbers.

In a Government committed to equality of opportunity there is a danger of legislation further undermining, rather than strengthening, family life and thereby going against the wishes of the majority in the nation. The recent Mori Poll on family attitudes showed that most people regret the weakness of the nuclear family and the rising number of single households and single parent households. The report stated ‘there is only minority support for such shifts, with the majority desiring a reversal of the current social trends – 72% want an increase in the number of nuclear family households and a decrease in single person and single parent households’ (NFM p5).

British attitudes to the family are, in fact, far more conservative than many political commentators
realise. This reflects the deep longing most people have for security, personal fulfilment and happiness. Even young people who want excitement and freedom, also want security. Most of them are well aware that a personal relationship with one person of the opposite gender in a loving, trusting and faithful relationship at some time in their life would provide them with the ideal that they seek.

It is, therefore, essential that Government policy, in seeking to respond to the needs for reform and equality to meet minority demands, should not be pressured into ignoring the wishes and best interests of the majority.
6: Outcomes of Changes in the Family

6.1 Outcomes for Parents

6.1.1 Stress
The pain and suffering involved in the breakup of marriage and cohabitation relationships is incalculable. Separation and divorce are recognised as among the most stressful events in life. Yet they often come as a relief following a pre-separation period of intense friction and conflict. It is often this pre-separation period that is the most damaging not only to the couple but to their children.

Women are two-and-a-half times more likely than men to petition for divorce. Prior to 1996, more than half of divorces granted to women were for ‘unreasonable behaviour’ which in many cases includes domestic violence. The most common ground for divorce to be granted to a man was that of adultery.

6.1.2 Divorce
Rowlingson and McKay have identified the following factors as increasing the likelihood of divorce (Policy Studies Institute 1998):

- Early marriage
- Pre-marital cohabitation
- Pre-marital birth
- Having children early in marriage
- Childlessness
- Couples from poor economic backgrounds
- Couples with low educational achievement
- Couples from different social classes
- Experience of marital breakdown among close family
- Having been previously married
- Experience of living apart

- Access to alternative partners
- Access to an alternative home eg parents

6.1.3 Financial Loss
Whatever the cause of divorce or the breakup of a cohabitation relationship the fact is that both partners are left economically poorer. The British Household Panel Survey (BHIPS) data analysed by Jarvis and Jenkins Marital Disillusion and Income Change: Evidence for Britain (in Private Lives and Public Responses) revealed that separation results in substantial declines in income on average for separating women and children and that the incomes of separating men fall, but the change is less than for women (PLPR p104f).

6.1.4 Mothers
Being a lone mother is associated with a high risk of having a low income; not working; receiving social assistance benefits; in fact, almost one third of separating mothers move onto benefit and many mothers who were formerly working leave work to care for their children. Lone mothers additionally often suffer from low self esteem and a sense of rejection as well as feeling guilty for having brought poverty upon their children.

6.1.5 Fathers
Lone fathers often feel a deep sense of injustice following separation because, when there are children involved in a separation or divorce, custody is invariably granted to the mother. In the Family Court, Probation Officer reports usually favour the mother. This in fact is recommended policy. In the National Association of Probation Officers Handbook the following is stated in the section headed ‘Policy Objectives and Targets for the Family Court System’ –
a) to develop and promote policies and strategies which strengthen and enhance the ability of women to make and carry out choices within separating families

b) to develop and implement policies and strategies which challenge the experience of oppression of women in separating families

c) to support the rights of lesbians as mothers and carers

d) to develop policies and strategies which challenge the discrimination against women in contested residence and contact decisions (NAPO p11).

The policy objectives make no mention of the needs of children or the rights of fathers. It is therefore not surprising that many fathers feel the whole system is unjust and is biased against men. Many fathers also feel frustrated with the limited access they are allowed to their children, and a further sense of injustice at the activities of the Child Support Agency in chasing them for maintenance payments when their ability to carry out their roles as fathers is severely limited.

6.2 Outcomes for Children

6.2.1 Stress

The research data shows that most children suffer stress and emotional disturbance through the breakup of their parents' relationship. This is intensified if removal from the family home is also involved. Children are confused and distressed when they are separated from one of their natural parents. This is increased when they are taken to live with another carer and find themselves sharing their parent and their home with another group of siblings. The confusion is compounded when each of their parents forms another relationship where there are also children involved and the child from the first relationship spends alternate weekends with each parent and their new partner with a new group of siblings.

The emotional upheaval is not just a passing phase, it leaves the child damaged for life. On average three thousand children in Britain every week experience the pain and trauma of their parents divorcing. Probably a similar number suffer from the breakup of their parents' cohabitation relationship. There is no research data available on cohabitation statistics since these are informal arrangements.

6.2.2 Long Term Effects

The long term effects of divorce upon children have been revealed through the National Child Development Survey The Legacy of Parental Divorce (LPD) which has followed the lives of children born in the first week of March 1958. They were interviewed at ages 7, 11, 16, 23 and 33. The survey shows that the children of divorced parents suffer multiple disadvantages. They are twice as likely to suffer a marriage breakdown when they become adults in comparison with those whose parents have not divorced. Those who do not marry, but who cohabit with a partner, are four to five times more likely to experience the breakdown of that partnership.

Thus the destabilising effects of divorce and parental breakup carry over and actually multiply from one generation to the next. Children of divorced parents suffer a wide range of social disadvantage. There are long term consequences for the educational attainment, economic situation, partnership formation and dissolution, and parental behaviour in adulthood. In all these areas children who have experienced parental divorce in childhood have more negative experiences than children reared by both parents.

6.2.3 Summary of Effects

In summary, children who have suffered a broken home are more likely to -
- become parents at an early age
- divorce if they marry
- suffer a breakup if they cohabit
- have children out of wedlock
- be involved in domestic violence
- have low levels of education
- have no qualifications
- have low status employment
- have low wages
- be unemployed
- be in social housing
- be homeless
- be involved in crime

6.2.4 Crime

A 1997 report by the Association of Chief Police Officers Reducing Anti Social and Criminal Behaviour Amongst Young People (ACPO) states 'the outcomes from various research projects and statistical analysis clearly show the enormity of youth crime.' The report estimates that 14 million offences are committed each year by young people aged under 21. In 1995, a total of 217,500 child and teenage offenders were found guilty of
Outcomes of Changes in the Family

criminal acts, 30,000 of whom were aged 10 to 13 years.
The ACPO report says that a relatively small number of children are responsible for a vast amount of crime. It states unequivocally that it is children from broken homes who are the most likely to be involved in crime. The report states that ‘divorce or separation in a boy’s first five years predicts later convictions up to age 32 ... delinquency is especially predicted when the breakup occurs up to age four’ (ACPO p15).

6.2.5 Health
The physical health as well as the emotional stability of children is affected by their childhood experience of family life. A research project reported in the BMJ (28 May 1998) found that a significantly higher proportion of children from one parent households consulted their GP for infections and accidents. There was also a larger incidence of home visits for such children.

6.2.6 Education
Educational performance is also adversely affected by divorce and separation. Children who are emotionally disturbed or anxious cannot concentrate upon their schoolwork. Children from divorced families significantly under-achieve in comparison with those from intact families. Such children are also more likely to be involved in behavioural problems at school, truanning, running away from home and homelessness. Thus their life chances are severely affected. They are more likely to be unemployed or in low paid, low status jobs. They are also more likely to be involved in drug and alcohol abuse, suicide and crime.

6.2.7 Child Abuse
Children from broken homes are also the most likely to be the victims of child abuse. The risk is greatly increased where the mother marries again or lives in a cohabitation relationship. An extreme example was published by Dr Jack Oliver in a study of 147 families in North East Wiltshire who had experienced child neglect or abuse over two generations (BHBC p35). The 147 families in the study had produced 560 children of whom 513 had been abused, 41 of whom had died although only three of these deaths led to criminal convictions. The 147 mothers had had 352 different partners during the 21 years of the study. It is in these highly volatile family situations, where partners are changing rapidly that children are most at risk of physical battering or sexual abuse.

A survey based on data from the Family Court Reporter revealed the risk factors for children in different family types. The most significant was that children in a family unit with two natural parents cohabiting are twenty times more at risk of child abuse than a child in a family with two natural parents married. Most significant of all is that a child is thirty-three times more at risk of abuse where its natural mother lives with a cohabiting boyfriend (BHBC).

6.2.8 Traditional Family
Clearly, it is the breakdown of the traditional family of two married parents in a lifelong commitment that is responsible for an incalculable amount of childhood suffering and abuse. The dismantling of the social structure which has held the family together as the stabilising foundation of society for hundreds of years, has, in a single generation, been torn apart with disastrous social consequences.

In the face of such overwhelming evidence linking the breakdown of traditional family life to so many social ills it would be tempting to look for quick and easy solutions such as suggesting that all we have to do to solve the nation’s problems is to re-establish traditional family life. Such a simplistic solution is, of course, impossible and even if it were desirable would take several generations to accomplish. It is always much easier and quicker to destroy than to rebuild. Before offering any pointers to the way ahead, we need to ask some key questions such as the reason why we are seeing such widespread behavioural problems among children, especially children from broken homes.

6.2.9 Attachment Theory
A great deal has been written on the subject of ‘attachment theory' since Bowlby published his initial writings on ‘maternal deprivation' in 1944. Bowlby’s initial argument was that the formation of an ongoing relationship with the child was an important part of parenting and this was established very early in life. If this sensitive period was missed it led to insecure attachment which had long-lasting psychological effects. The theory has been considerably modified by later writers, although Professor Michael Rutter says that ‘the major tenets of attachment theory have been broadly confirmed' (Journal of Child Psychology volume 36 number 4 p551).
Rutter says that there is a ‘sensitive period’ during which it is highly desirable that selective attachments develop with a small number of adults who are closely involved in the child’s care. This is particularly desirable in the first year or two of the child’s life and the lack of secure attachment, particularly with the mother, or a very small number of adults, during this period will produce lasting damage in the child’s development.

6.2.10 Infant Security
Insecurity and a person’s attachment relationships with parents in early childhood influences their relationships in adult life (Main 1991). Longitudinal research indicates that the major variables are the age of entry into peer group experiences such as childcare or day nurseries and the length of time involved.

Where a child spends long hours in non-familial care during the first two years of life there is a high risk of insecure attachment which will result in various forms of anti-social behaviour such as aggressiveness, delinquency and other forms of social deviance. A major reason for this is that instead of learning their behavioural norms from adults, infants in day care mostly see other children and therefore learn their behaviour from them. Inevitably the most forceful infant becomes the role model.

Owen and Cox (1988) found twice as much disruptive behaviour in children who had been in childcare during the first year of life. Research studies show that pre-school education is of great benefit for 3 to 5 year olds, but there are considerable dangers of insecure attachment for infants placed in childcare from 0 to 3 years old. The risk is greatest where there are a number of carers and the infant is unable to form a secure attachment on a one-to-one basis with one or two adults. The time spent away from the mother is also of crucial importance. The shorter this is, the better – in the first few years.

6.2.11 Insecure Attachment
The research shows that boys suffer more than girls from insecure attachment in infancy, particularly those who lack the role model of a father to aid their personality and emotional development. In the current social climate, where aggression and violence are constantly used in the media for entertainment, boys soon adopt these values as a normal part of the culture. With strong peer group pressures, and lacking firm family guidelines to instil self control, boys can develop violent and anti-social behaviour. The likelihood of this happening is greatly increased by insecurity in infancy, which is commonly associated with being the child of parents who divorce or separate.

All the research points to the advantage for children of growing up in a family with stable married parents, and the multiple disadvantages suffered by children from broken homes. One of these disadvantages is poverty.

6.2.12 Government Policy
The subject of infant/maternal attachment has acquired political significance since the publication in May 1998 of the Government policy paper Meeting the Child Care Challenge. A central plank in Government policy is its ‘Welfare to Work’ programme which particularly encourages lone mothers to find employment and thus not to be dependent upon welfare provision (MCC).

In order to achieve this, the Government proposes to train 50,000 child carers to provide affordable child care. This achieves two political objectives by reducing the unemployment registers by 50,000 women and enabling many lone mothers to cease claiming welfare.

The Government has a strong economic interest in pursuing this policy since the annual cost to the public purse of supporting lone mothers is a crippling burden on the Treasury, and lone mothers are the fastest growing social group in the country. But if the consequence of the mothers of young babies working is insecure infant attachment, there will be a substantial social cost. If this results in psychological disturbance, aggressiveness and child delinquency, then the benefits to the exchequer in lower welfare provision for lone mothers will be more than off-set by the increased cost of juvenile crime. Short term financial gain would result in long term social problems.

6.2.13 Needs of Single Mothers
The Government has recognised the plight of many single mothers and is rightly attempting to improve their economic circumstances, although many will question the method of provision. The ‘Welfare to Work’ policy also recognises the social needs of single mothers due to loneliness in facing the difficulties of caring for children on
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their own. Employment provides them with a welcome change of environment and adult company. But it is possible that the disadvantages for the children may outweigh the advantages for the mother.

There are other ways of providing lone mothers with finance and with adult company. Indeed, it may be in the national interest to pay all mothers, lone and married, to care for their own children for at least the first six months in order to ensure that each child begins life with a secure maternal attachment.

6.2.14 Working Practices

For infants aged between 6 months and 3 years part-time employment and flexible working hours for mothers would ensure the child’s welfare as well as provide for the mother’s social and financial needs. But this requires a long term policy aimed at changing basic practices in industry to accommodate the needs of female workers. The whole of industry and commerce is still very largely a man’s world with working hours that suit men rather than the needs of women.

Both social and economic trends indicate that women will increasingly become active in the workplace. It is therefore essential that society should recognise the family responsibilities which women carry as well as the demands of work or professional careers. If a woman is inactive for too long following childbirth it will damage her career, but if she returns to work too quickly before her baby is securely attached it may damage her child.

6.2.15 Welfare to Work

This is the dilemma the Government has to face in promoting its ‘Welfare to Work’ policy, and in training large numbers of carers to take care of the nation’s babies so that mothers can go to work. It may well be argued that it is better to pay the mothers to take care of their own babies rather than to pay someone else to look after them who has no lasting commitment to the child’s welfare. This same argument applies to both married and unmarried mothers.
7: Strengthening Family Life

All the research shows that marriage provides the healthiest and safest environment for child rearing. Despite the social revolution of the past thirty years marriage is still the ideal of the vast majority of the population. Yet marriage itself is undergoing revolutionary changes. Few women would want to go back to the Victorian type of traditional family with its patriarchal authority and strong male chauvinism. Contraception has given women control over their own bodies for the first time in history. Equality of opportunity in education and employment have opened up new social roles and lifestyles for women. But we are still in a transitional stage where the new patterns of marriage are emerging.

The great danger in any period of revolutionary social change is that the pendulum swings too far in the initial stage. It may be that this is what has happened in respect of the family. In recognising the rights of women we have overlooked the rights of others in the family and especially children - some would argue, both unborn and newly born.

7.1 Partnership Marriage

The increasing individualism of Western society throughout the twentieth century has emphasised the rights of the individual often without recognising obligations and has thus encouraged a self-centredness which often overlooks the needs of others. Clearly, long lasting stable marriage as the dominant family pattern is in the best interests of the nation and for the health and well being of its children. But this requires a new pattern of partnership marriage to emerge in which each one will seek and actively promote the happiness and well-being of their partner and their children as their foremost objective.

For such a partnership-marriage to become the norm, which attitude research shows to be the ideal of most people, it has to be based upon mutual respect, love, trust, faithfulness and commitment. These are the social values which need to be taught in schools and homes as part of family and marriage preparation and which also form the basis for successful parenting.

7.2 The Ideal

The great majority of people in Britain believe that the family headed by a married couple is the ideal environment for bringing up children. All the available research data confirms the truth of this belief. As far as the compilers of this report are aware not one single piece of research shows any evidence to the contrary. Yet there are strong political pressures not to distinguish between family types. No one family type is to be regarded as better than another. In a statement emphasising this, the Home Secretary was reported to say ‘the Government should not appear “judgmental” about relationships’ (Daily Mail 16 June 1998). Yet the whole business of Government is to make judgments. The role of Parliament is to examine the evidence and make judgments as to what is best for the nation.

It is the plea of this report that instead of following objectives for which there a lack of empirical support in the research studies, the Government should think carefully and act on the basis of overwhelming evidence to strengthen and support married couple family life. Certainly it has to be recognised that all marriages are not happy, but there is plenty of evidence to show why marriages go wrong and what can be done to help couples face the inevitable crises that occur in human relationships.
This was one of the purposes of the 1996 Family Law Act. Section 22 of the Act, which came into force in April 1997, empowered the Lord Chancellor to use funds for the provision of 'Marriage Support Services'. These are to provide marriage guidance and counselling to help couples to work through their difficulties, to encourage them to stay together, especially where there are children involved. This was part of 'Saving the Savable Marriage' (White Paper 1996). During the debate preceding the Act it was said that for every £3,000 spent on picking up the pieces of marriage breakdown, only £3 was spent on marriage support. A major intention of the Act was to redress this situation. During the first year of the act, under the previous Lord Chancellor, £4 million was made available, but subsequently, it does not appear that the Lord Chancellor’s department is providing funds for marriage support services.

7.3 Protecting Children
A major objective of the Family Law Act was to make divorce less acrimonious and thus lessen the traumatic effects upon the lives of children. Sensitive counselling, even if it does not save the marriage, can help to lessen the stress and take out the elements of conflict which are so distressing to children. When children are forced to witness conflict between their parents, and are involuntarily brought into the conflict, they often suffer severe trauma which leaves lifelong scars. The research shows that many children in such situations suffer psychological damage which severely affects their life chances in terms of education, employment and emotional stability. A recent publication by Childline Unhappy Families, Unhappy Children (UHUC) lists numerous conversations with children which reflect their suffering. The following are three typical examples:

'Mum and Dad told me three days ago that they were getting divorced... Dad’s been having an affair. Mum has, too. Her boyfriend practically lives here. He tries to be like a Dad... I don’t like him. They have told me I have to decide who I’m to live with... I just can’t decide.

'My parents split up two weeks ago... They’d been having physical fights... I had to phone the police one night... My Mum’s boyfriend has moved in... I’d like to live with my Dad but I don’t know where he is and my Mum thinks he might hit me like he hit her.

'Mum left two weeks ago... She loves another man. Me and my sister wanted to stay with my Dad... We didn’t want to live with Mum and someone who isn’t our Dad. But I’m worried I won’t see Mum every day. Dad said to ring you if we were worried,' (This was from an eight year old).

It is not possible to generalise upon the effects of divorce upon children. Children react to change in many different ways and some make the transition to a different type of family relatively easily. Katherine Kiernan has shown, however, that on average children from divorced families suffer multiple disadvantage in comparison with children from intact families (LPD). Nevertheless, it is also true that children in a conflict-free single parent household are generally more emotionally stable than children in a married couple family who are constantly exposed to conflict and verbal or physical abuse. It is the element of conflict which is so damaging to children.

7.4 Domestic Violence
Domestic violence is not a new social phenomenon but there has been a sharp increase in the number of incidents reported to the police in the past twenty years. Little is known about its causes as there has been no national study of domestic violence in the UK. There is an urgent need for such a study. A recent survey (Mooney 1993) suggests that three out of every ten women have been injured by their partners at some time during their relationship. Numerous studies refer to domestic violence as occurring in all social classes, indicating that it is both widespread and a serious problem in society which is growing rather than diminishing. Children living with domestic violence have been described as ‘the hidden victims’ and only recently is the extent of their suffering being recognised (NCHAC).

Relate reports that many married couples who experience marital problems are reluctant to use the counselling services available to them. Individuals or couples who do consult a counsellor usually don’t go until the extremities of desperation have been reached. Often the decision to divorce has already been taken by one of the partners and reconciliation is impossible. It is therefore important to pick up the early warning signs of stress in a marriage if effective help is to be given to the couple.

In order to facilitate such provision there needs to be cooperation between statutory and voluntary agencies. These groups could work together in a locally based family support group where Health Visitors, Teachers, GPs, Advice Centres and professionals together with Voluntary Agencies could provide a service to help people, in all types of families, work through their relationship problems.
The Future of the Family –

What will happen if there is no change of direction

Present trends based upon the changes which have taken place over the past thirty years indicate that Britain is heading for an unparalleled period of social disorientation. Some observers have argued that we are not witnessing the breakdown of the family but that we are simply seeing family life evolve into new patterns and therefore produce new family types. The research does not support this conclusion. All the studies we have examined point to the same outcome that the separation of parents, especially when accompanied by acrimony or conflict, has strongly dysfunctional effects upon children, plunging them into the confusing world of trying to find their identity with new carers, step parents and siblings.

Family life is undoubtedly breaking down at an alarming rate which will have dysfunctional effects upon the whole social structure in the future. Sociologists recognise the family as one of the major social institutions responsible for social stability. Major changes in the family affect all other social institutions causing changes within them and thus having an accumulative destabilising effect.

8.1 Consequences of Family Breakdown

Present trends indicate that during the next decade we will see the continuing breakdown of family life:

- The marriage rate will continue to decline.
- The divorce rate will remain high although it may decline slightly due to the lower number of marriages.
- Cohabitation will increasingly replace marriage, but the duration of these informal relationships is unlikely to lengthen.
- Family life is likely to become increasingly volatile with couples changing partners more frequently.
- There is likely to be an increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases.
- The number of lone parent families will continue to increase. The majority of these will be single mothers.
- The number of fatherless children will increase.
- The number of children who experience the divorce or separation of their parents will increase.
- The number of ‘insecurely attached’ and disturbed children will increase.
- There will be an escalation in the behavioural problems among school children.
- There will be increased stress among teachers and strains within the education service.
- Juvenile crime will increase.
- Crimes of violence and sex crimes will increase.
- Levels of social alienation and social disorder are set to increase.

The cumulative effect of all these social trends will increase the pressure on the Health and Welfare Services.
- The pressures will also increase on the Legal and Law Enforcement Agencies.
- These increased demands will put an additional strain upon the national economy.

There are sound sociological grounds to support the above scenario. Britain is at present enjoying a period of prosperity with falling unemployment and rising consumer demand. In times of affluence, when the gap between rich and poor grows wider, as it is today, the level of relative deprivation increases. Several factors make this a potentially dangerous trend. Three in particular
are the expanding drugs culture, the changes in technology and feminisation.

1. Drugs; despite the increased vigilance of police and customs authorities drugs continue to pour into Britain. Even if we were able to seal all ports and airports we are an island with hundreds of miles of unpatrolled beaches making it impossible to guard our shores against those who are determined to find entry. As demand increases so too will the supply. Drugs are the last resort of the socially alienated. As alienation increases the drugs culture will explode.

2. Technology; the social revolution of the past 30 years has been accompanied by a technological revolution which has changed the character of the labour market. Men in the blue collar industries have suffered most, particularly in areas dependent upon mining, steel, ship building, heavy industry and the docks. On the other hand many more jobs have been created which women are able to do. The resultant loss of role for large numbers of men, particularly young men in traditional industrial areas, is creating a dangerous underclass.

3. Feminisation: the feminisation of society over the past thirty years has accelerated under New Labour and is set to increase. In the Government paper Meeting the Childcare Challenge figures are given for the expansion of the labour force over the next eight years. Of the 1.2 million new jobs forecast, 900,000 are expected to be filled by women. Increasingly women are becoming the providers and protectors in the family – roles traditionally filled by men.

It is small wonder that young men are going through an identity crisis; unwanted in the workplace, unwanted in the family home, they rapidly become unwanted in society. It is boys from broken homes who are particularly vulnerable to such outcomes. Having had a disturbed childhood, particularly if they have had no father figure as a role model, they progress through behavioural problems at home, to truancy and delinquency at school, to juvenile crime and finally to a variety of deviant outcomes.

The cascade model of social deviance reproduced below is one that is generally recognised as representing the outcomes from antisocial attitudes generated in children who have not been successfully parented for one reason or another.

8.2 Beyond the Millennium

When relative deprivation reaches certain levels, as it did for example in the inner city riots of the early 1980s, social disorder is easily triggered. The stability of all our major social institutions is threatened if the present trends in the breakdown of the family continue. Criminologist Professor Richard Sparke of Keele University predicts the outcome of present trends. Referring to the year 2010, he says that crimes of violence, rape and sex crimes will be greatly increased. So too will the effects of alcohol and drugs. He says that men who feel alienated from society take their revenge upon women.

Professor Sparke expects policing to become more privatised through surveillance cameras, with police less in evidence. The number of prisons is set to increase with many more criminals being locked up for longer sentences in response to public demand. But prison experience will not be effective in crime prevention. He predicts great pressures upon politicians and police to enforce law and order. But he foresees the rich living in protected enclaves while the poor live in cities where young men are free to roam at will carrying out their acts of violence in 'no go' areas (BBC Radio 4, 2 Feb 1998).

Increasingly, as the family breaks down and children are brought up in an unstable environment of changing relationships, the scenario predicted by Professor Sparkes becomes more likely.

The one thing that can change the course of history is the stabilisation of family life in Britain. If lifelong marriage becomes the norm, with couples committed to maintaining their relationship, and putting the interests of their children above their own self interest, then the national social scenario will be transformed.
What can happen if there is a change of direction

There is already in existence a variety of services and support networks available for strengthening and supporting family life. A number of voluntary agencies have been founded specifically with these objectives. Homestart, Care for the Family, Relate, Childline, Childwatch are just a few of many. Most of these voluntary agencies run as charities relying on voluntary donations and a great deal of voluntary help. Many churches, synagogues, and other religious groups also have support services. Churches in particular, have become increasingly active in providing pre-marriage guidance, counselling services, parenting courses, activities for singles as well as support for the elderly and activities for young people.

There is a great fund of good will and integrity in harnessed to give support to family life. There is also a considerable amount of experience and skill among people who give their time on a voluntary basis which could be more widely used if there were a family support network in each locality. Counselling services and parenting courses, for example, could be made available to any families in the locality. Health Visitors, Teachers and GPs, who are often the first to see the early warning signs of stress within the family, could make use of these services if there were a referral system. Of course, there would have to be monitoring and safeguards, but the level of good will in the community should not be underestimated.

Despite the many excellent academic surveys and analyses of the family which have been carried out in Britain there is insufficient public awareness of the facts. There needs to be greater understanding of the stresses of modern life which cause relationship strains. There also needs to be greater public awareness of the consequences of family breakdown and the suffering engendered in the lives of adults as well as the damage to the lives of children.

If there were greater awareness of what is happening to children it is likely that there would be a positive response. There are, for example, many older people in every community who are living alone. Grandmothers often live in isolation from their own families, many of whom would willingly give time to support young mothers, help with baby-sitting and in many practical ways, if the network existed for putting people in touch with one another in the community.

These kinds of community initiatives would go a long way towards providing the kind of support traditionally given through the extended family which has so largely broken down due to the rapid social changes and mobility which has affected the family in the second half of this century. They could also help to solve the growing social problem of single person occupancy (currently 28% of all households) and loneliness.

There is an urgent need for social policies that are creative and community based, which link together professional and voluntary agencies and will make use of the enormous potential in each community where the fragmentation of the family and isolation keeps people apart.

The British people have always responded to challenge. In order to generate a great public response to the challenge facing us there needs to be public awareness of the social disaster that lies ahead if
family life continues to fragment at the present rate. The combined statistics and research data present an alarming picture of social disintegration and violence if present trends continue.

We need to present the truth in stark reality. But we also need to do so, not as a handwringing exercise of despair, but in the context of challenge to change the course of history. The British people need re-envisioning with positive programmes of social reform that will bring about a fresh embracing of healthy social values; such as commitment, unselfishness, caring for others, love and faithfulness.

The vast majority of people in Britain want to be part of a family and a community that is based upon such values. This is the 'ideal' they want to embrace and which attitude surveys show is the object of most peoples' aspirations. It is not an impossible dream if imaginative and creative social policies were put into action in the immediate future.

For the sake of our children. For the sake of our grandchildren. For the future of the nation - it can be done. It must be done. The alternative is unthinkable.
10: Recommendations from this Report

- The outstanding conclusion from the research we have studied shows that millions of children in Britain are suffering from the conflicts of their parents. As a nation we need to listen to their cries and give high priority to their needs.

- The research shows the lasting benefit to children of having their mother as a primary carer for the first six months of life and ideally until they are three years old. It also shows possible damage to children who are insecurely attached in infancy. Government policy should take note of these findings.

- It is recommended that the Government seeks to establish and implement a comprehensive policy involving both statutory and voluntary institutions to support and strengthen committed couple family life with marriage as the ideal.

- The Government’s fiscal and taxation policy should be revisited with support for married couples as a primary objective.

- Child allowances should be substantially raised for all dependent children. These should be taxable to ensure benefit goes to those most needing support.

- The work of the Child Support Agency should be carefully reviewed to take note of the many complaints of injustice and unfair practice.
• The loss of the extended family has seriously weakened support for both children and parents within family life; community schemes should be encouraged through which older people could fulfil 'granny' roles within the family.

• Men need to be encouraged to train as primary school teachers thus providing male role models for children in their early years.

• Britain is becoming a matriarchal society in which many men have lost their social role. Government needs to give urgent attention to tackling unemployment among young men to enable them to be role models for their children within the family.

• Family education courses should be taught in schools with marriage as the ideal.

• Pre-marriage preparation courses should be made available to all couples whether they are marrying in church or registry office.

• Those who are in a position to see the early warning signs of stress in the family, health visitors, teachers, doctors, community workers, should be able to call on the services of a local Family Support Group through a referral system.

• Parenting courses for parents of children of all ages should be widely available.

• The co-operation of the media should be sought to counter the negative family images often portrayed which contribute to social norms that undermine the stability of the family. Initiatives need to be taken to promote a more family friendly image in the media.
We received a number of recommendations of which the following is a summary. They do not necessarily represent the views of either the compilers of the report or those who commissioned it. All these recommendations have been included without identification, as some individuals did not want to be quoted formally on behalf of their organisation.

13.1 Contributor 1
Suggestions of how best to support a two parent family and single families.

1. Preparation for marriage – courses and support groups
2. Preparation for parenthood – new step in the marriage relationship
3. Appropriate employment practices for parents – especially part time work and flexible hours
4. Distinguish between the different kinds of single parents – requiring a variety of responses
5. Special resource centres for single parents
6. Special emphasis on education for young mothers who had missed out on continuing their education

13.2 Contributor 2
- Role of men changing, need to find new valued roles
- Too much time spent at work by men who have young families
- Need for positive role model for men in families
- Encourage men to show affection to their children
- Men are portrayed as a source of threat and danger
- Recruitment of male teachers into early years teaching
- Child Benefit to be substantially increased to provide economic 'glue' for the family
- Positive image of men is essential in the media
- Benefit of mentoring, older people supporting younger people
- 'Jobs for the boys' campaign to restore male involvement in providing financially for families
- Parenting education courses in schools and the community

13.3 Contributor 3
- Divorce prevention campaign
- Marriage education for schools
- Marriage enrichment programmes
- Relationship counselling not just for 'problem couples'
- Marriage promoted as a healthy way of living

13.4 Contributor 4
- Education in relationships is for all people, not just those with problems
- Marriage preparation classes for all who are preparing for marriage
- Parenting classes
- Support for those under pressure in relationships
- Careful counselling for couples separating and ensuring quality on-going contact with both parents
13.5 Contributor 5
- Pre-parenting and parenting awareness courses to be more widely available
- Effective anti-poverty measures for children and families
- Tax or benefits to enable parents to stay at home until the child is at school
- Maternity and paternity provisions to be extended
- Flexible working hours for parents

13.6 Contributor 6
- Reintroduce PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) into the National Curriculum particularly for relationship education
- The institution of marriage to be supported in fiscal policy
- Affirm good practice in marriage, rather than just remedying dysfunctional situations
- Ensure all Government policies reflect a ‘family friendly’ approach with equal opportunities for all

13.7 Contributor 7
- We are very concerned about the divisive and unhelpful experience of many children and parents following the implementation of the Child Support Act. We believe that a number of improvements should be initiated immediately with the long-term aim of establishing an approach to Child Support which is based on principles of shared parenting and mediation.
12: Organisations Contributing to Family Matters

Barnardos
Broken Rites – Divorced & Separated Wives
CARE for the Family
Cheltenham Group
Childline
Children’s Society
Childwatch
Christian Medical Fellowship
Church of England – Board for Social Responsibility
Evangelical Alliance
Family Education Trust
Family Life and Marriage Education
Home-Start
Institute of Economic Affairs, Health & Welfare Unit
Jewish Marriage Council
Maranatha Community
Marriage Care
Marriage Resource
Methodist Church – Children’s Section
Norwood Ravenswood – Jewish Children’s Agency
NCH Action for Children
NSPCC
National Council for One Parent Families
OFSTED
Order of Christian Unity
One Plus One – Marriage & Partnership Research Charity
Policy Studies Institute
Quaker Social Responsibility & Education
Relate
Salvation Army
Shaftesbury Society
Spurgeons Childcare
University of Exeter – Dept of Child Health, Postgraduate Medical School.
University of Leeds – Dept of Psychiatry & Behavioural Sciences
University of Newcastle upon Tyne
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