Marriage Manifesto

Strength and Support for Australian Marriages

NATIONAL Marriage COALITION
"Strengthening and Supporting Australian Marriages"

A MARRIAGE MANIFESTO

PREFACE

In 2004 the Commonwealth Marriage Amendment Act defined marriage as:

> *"the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life".*

As such, marriage has traditionally been highly valued in all societies. However in recent years there has been a dramatic devaluation of marriage in Western society. Despite the growing attacks and the questioning of the value of marriage, most Australians still have a desire to be married and to form a family unit, and have every intention of making their marriage work.

However, in the past thirty years there have been dramatic changes in the legal status of marriage, social attitudes and outcomes. Divorce, although never desired, impacts every Australian either directly or indirectly.

After three decades of social experimentation, we believe it is time to rethink our foundations and re-establish marriage as the "bedrock" institution of society. There is still much to be done.

We present this document as a plan to encourage healthy marriages and stable families for the benefit of all members of our Australian society.

WHAT HAS BROUGHT US TO THIS POINT?

We believe that marriage needs to be reaffirmed because:

- **The divorce and co-habitation revolutions have failed.** Contrary to the expectations of so many in the 1970s, high divorce rates have increased, rather than decreased family dysfunction.
- **Divorce has not delivered greater personal happiness**; research clearly shows that remarriages are generally less successful and less happy than first marriages.
- **Co-habitation has been conclusively shown to be a less stable alternative to marriage.** Not only are defacto relationships less stable, co-habitation before marriage reduces the likelihood of later marital success.
- **Unwed-childbearing is failing women.** Rising birth rates to unmarried women has not led to greater freedom, equality, and justice for women, but to the feminisation of both parenting and poverty.
- **We value freedom and cherish social equity.** Marriage is a public good. The decline of marriage weakens civil society and spreads social inequality.
- **There is a widespread longing for marriage.** The overwhelming majority of Australians of all social classes and ethnic groups value marriage; the vast majority of young people aspire to live their adult life in a successful marriage.

It is time to face the hard truths discovered over the past thirty years. Marriage remains the best-practice model for men and women desiring to enter into a permanent committed relationship, and for raising and nurturing children. Furthermore, when marriages fail, children suffer. For many, the suffering continues for years. For some, it never ends.

By most accepted criteria, children are disadvantaged when marriage between parents does not take place, when parents divorce, and when spouses fail to create a strong sense of family connection. Every child deserves to be raised in the most conducive environment available to enable their full flourishing as a person.

Yet, as society retreats from supporting marriage publicly, it increasingly becomes devalued and is often the target of derision.

The decline of marriage is a national problem, touching in one way or another every community. If marriage does not receive due public recognition and support, there will be an increasing trend for marriage to become the private property of the privileged. Marriage is a rich generator of social and human capital and must not become the private hoard of a select few, creating a new 'marital divide' between the haves and have-nots.

Whether an individual ever marries or not, a healthy marriage culture benefits every person in our nation: rich or poor, religious or not, educated or otherwise, parent or childless, from any ethnic heritage. Marriage is not a conservative or liberal idea, not a plaything of passing political ideologies. Marriage is a universal human institution, the way in which every advanced society conspires to obtain for each child the love, attention, and resources of a mother and a father.

New research from pioneering marriage educators and therapists are laying out exciting new paths to marital success. Innovative leaders are beginning to focus on the vital new question: What can we do to strengthen marriage?

Support for marriage, we emphasise, does not require turning back the clock on desirable social change, promoting male oppression, or tolerating domestic violence. Supporting marriage should never bring condemnation or shame to the already distressed, but rather hope and support to the nine out of ten Australians who at some point in their lives have chosen marriage as the vessel for their dreams of a lasting, loving family bond.

For these reasons we come together as a coalition of individuals and organisations to:

- **Help men and women achieve a caring, collaborative, and committed bond, with a strong foundation of mutual respect between spouses**
- **Help reduce divorce and unmarried childbearing, so that each year more children will grow up in the security of a stable and functional two parent home.**

CHANGE IS POSSIBLE

Three misconceptions stand in the way of a renewed public commitment to marriage:

The Argument from Despair

Current high rates of divorce and unwed childbearing, some prominent voices tell us, are irreversible trends.

We respectfully, but firmly, disagree. The history of progress in the Western world is the history of confronting entrenched social problems once considered intractable, such as slavery, racism, poverty, drunk driving, domestic violence, sexism, tobacco use, and now climate change. In each case, the correct response is not fatalistic acceptance, but action. Few social problems are ever perfectly resolved. Certainly we recognise that there will always be some children born without sufficiently committed fathers and there will always be issues in marriages that provide great challenges for resolution.

However, the decline of marriage as a social institution is not inevitable. Recovery is possible. Our goal is not perfection, but progress. It would be unrealistic to expect to eliminate divorce or unwed childbearing, but it is distinctly possible to reduce the level of both. It may not be possible to make every marriage last, but to help more marriages succeed is achievable.

The Fear of Hurting Single Parents

There is an understandable fear that a great public effort to strengthen marriage may denigrate single parents and their children. We believe that this is a misplaced concern and underestimates the courage and caring of single parents in the face of difficult circumstances and social prejudice.

There exists a false stereotype that single parents don't care about marriage. No one entering marriage aspires to end up living apart or raising children on their own. No parents, single or married, dream of the day their daughters will become single mothers, or their sons absent fathers.

A culture that values and is supportive of marriage will do more than just reduce the numbers of people trapped in such situations. Such a culture will be sensitive to the difficulties faced by parents in failing marriages, enabling their children to better understand their parent's challenges, and in turn helping them prepare for their own marriages when they reach adult life.

The Privatisation of Marriage

Marriage is not just a private relationship. It is also a social institution. Many Australians see marriage as too personal to be a proper matter for public concern or intervention; even family members or children often not being seen as legitimate stakeholders in the success of a marriage. If marriage is just a word for two adults who have managed (or not managed) to create an emotionally satisfying personal relationship, how can any outsider legitimately question their later decision to divorce?

We do not accept the 'private model' of marriage. A good marriage is not just a good private relationship; a good marriage has a positive direct and indirect impact on others in the community. Though marriage is intimate and personal, marriage also has an inherently public aspect. By its very nature 'marriage' is what couples do when they want to bring their relationship out of the private realm of personal emotions and publicly commit the rest of their lives to each other, visible to and recognised not only by the couple, but also by friends, family, religious bodies, government, and the rest of society.

Good marriages are a product of the community; they don't occur by accident. They are most likely to be made in a society that understands and values marriage as a shared aspiration and key social institution, rather than one that sees it as just a 'private affair' of no relevance to overall community wellbeing.

In the past thirty years enormous advances in psychology, sociology, neurobiology, anthropology and theology has provided a vastly better understanding of what contributes to successful marriages. There no reason why, as a society we cannot systematically draw on this insight to create an environment that makes success in marriage a more likely outcome for the majority of people who desire this outcome.

SEVEN DIMENSIONS OF MARRIAGE

Marriage has at least seven important dimensions:

1. **Marriage is a legal contract.** Marriage creates formal and legal obligations and rights between spouses. Public recognition of, and protection for, this marriage contract, whether in tax or divorce law, helps married couples succeed in creating a permanent bond.

2. **Marriage is a financial partnership.** In marriage, "my money" typically becomes "our money," and this sharing of property creates its own kind of intimacy and mutuality that is difficult to achieve outside a legal marriage. Only couples who make this legal vow typically acquire the confidence that allows them to share their bank accounts as well as their bedroom.

3. **Marriage is a covenant or sacred promise.** Even people who are not part of any organised religion usually see marriage as a covenant or sacred union, entered into with vows and promises and often with profound spiritual implications. Religious faith assists in deepening our understanding of the meaning of marriage and provides a important fountainhead of inspiration and support when troubles arise.

4. **Marriage is an exclusive sexual union.** Marriage elevates sexual desire into a permanent sign of love, turning two lovers into "one flesh." Marriage indicates not only a private but a public understanding that two people have withdrawn themselves from the sexual marketplace. This public vow of fidelity also makes men and women more likely to be faithful.

5. **Marriage is a personal bond.** Marriage is the ultimate avowal of caring, committed, and collaborative love. Marriage incorporates our desire to know and be known by another human being; it represents our deepest hopes that love is not a temporary condition and that we are not condemned to drift in and out of shifting relationships forever.

6. **Marriage is a family-making bond.** Marriage takes two biological strangers and turns them into each other's next-of-kin. As a procreative bond, marriage also includes a commitment to care for any children of the married couple.

7. **Marriage fosters effective fathering.** The empirical evidence is quite clear: marriage is our best hope of fostering involved, effective, nurturing fathers. When fathers do not live with their children, research shows, the relationship between father and child typically dissipates.

In all these ways, marriage is a productive institution, not a consumer good. Marriage does not simply certify existing loving relationships, but rather transforms the ways in which couples act toward one another, toward their children, and toward the future.

Marriage also changes the way in which other individuals, groups, and institutions think about and act toward the couple. The public and legal significance of marriage increases couples' confidence that their partnerships will last. Conversely, the more marriage is redefined as simply a private relationship, the less effective marriage becomes in helping couples achieve their goal of a lasting bond.

MARRIAGE IS A PUBLIC GOOD

In 1998, the Australian Government's Inquiry into Aspects of Family Services resulted in the report *To Have and To Hold: Strategies to Strengthen Marriage and Relationships* [1]**.** It concluded that:

> *"…marriage and relationship breakdown costs the Australian nation at least $3 billion each year. When all the indirect costs are included, this figure possibly doubles. When all the personal and emotional trauma involved is added to these figures, the cost to the nation is enormous."*

Strengthening marriage is therefore a legitimate public goal for at least four reasons:

- Marriage protects the well-being of children;
- Divorce and unwed parenting generate large taxpayer costs;
- Marriage is a unique generator of social and human capital, as important as education in building the wealth of individuals and communities; and
- Marriage provides the structure most likely to achieve permanence in a relationship.

The publication *21 Reasons Why Marriage Matters* [2] (attached as Appendix One) provides a comprehensive analysis of the public good of marriage; citing 132 references from both Australian and international research.

Marriage is indeed a public good.

It has been clearly established that communities where stable marriages are common have better outcomes for children, women and men than do communities suffering from high rates of divorce, unmarried child-bearing and high conflict or violent marriages.

As policy makers concerned about social inequality and child well-being think about how to strengthen marriage, more funding is needed for research into both the cause of the marriage gap in child and social well-being, and ways to close that gap.

[1] To Have and To Hold: Strategies to Strengthen Marriage and Relationships. Commonwealth of Australia 1998. ISBN 0 644 52772 2.

[2] 21 Reasons Why Marriage Matters - Published by the National Marriage Coalition, 2004

STEPPING FORWARD TOGETHER — A CALL TO ACTION

We urge all governments and their agencies to take urgent steps to:

1. Make the promotion and support of marriage an explicit goal of government policy. This should be accompanied by:
   i. Performance measures, such as a reduction in the divorce rate and an increase in the proportion of children born inside of marriage, and
   ii. An obligatory requirement of a "Family Impact Statement" as an essential consideration for all new legislation and policy.

2. Increase funding for marriage research, including: basic research on the marital processes that impact mental health and the success of marriages; intervention research designed to investigate ways to improve marriages; and evaluation research.
   i. Support new research to investigate the economic costs shifted to business and taxpayers when marriages fail or fail to form.
   ii. Support the collection of data by public health departments that allow the correlation of marriage with mental and physical health.

3. Resist the conferring of the social benefits of marriage on other relationships that fail to deliver the same public good outcomes, particularly in the area of child raising. This could be partly addressed through the welfare and tax systems to eliminate or reduce disincentives for being married and to encourage couples to make the commitment to marriage.

4. Fund (either through redirecting existing or new funds) marriage-supportive activities; for example, sponsoring marriage mentoring and education campaigns for low-income communities, or public education campaigns focused on the health and other benefits of marriage, especially for children. Earmark funds for evaluation research, so that effective program components may be identified and replicated.

5. Promote the need for 'sexual integrity' in all relationships, and respectful attitudes to men, women and children.

6. Incorporate a marriage dimension in all existing teen pregnancy, fatherhood, and sex education programs. Make persuading teens to wait to have children until they are mature enough to make a good marriage an explicit goal of all government-funded education programs.

7. Reduce the negative impact of pornography[1] on attitudes towards women and on the health of marriages by:
    i. Introducing mandatory health warnings on sexually explicit pornographic material being sold or broadcast;
    ii. Prohibiting the advertising of all sexually explicit pornographic material
    iii. Restricting the availability of pornography by making internet filtering mandatory by all Internet Service Providers,

8. Support marriage and parenting education programs for couples considering marriage or seeking to improve their marriage and family relationships by:
    i. Introducing a $200 voucher system for marriage preparation courses available to all couples planning to marry.
    ii. Allowing the cost of attendance at marriage and parenting education programs to be tax deductible, similar to other vocational training expenses
    iii. Providing an easier path to tax deductible gift recipient (DGR) status for community-based organisations providing educational and support services in the areas of marriage and parenting.

9. Hold regular marriage summits to draw together stakeholders in marriage from community, business, counselling and therapy, religious, child welfare, and family organizations, as well as from federal, state, and local governments, to identify mechanisms to reduce the incidence of divorce and single parenting.

10. Further promote and amend mediation programs provided by Family Relationship Centres so that they seek to facilitate reconciliations, rather than merely expedite the divorce process. Fund evaluation research to see which divorce education programs meet the goal of both reducing divorce acrimony and preventing unnecessary divorce.

11. Implement a fundamental reform process of the Family Law Act 1975 with a view to making divorce laws more equitable for all concerned; specifically:
    i. Examining the current grounds for divorce, namely the irretrievable breakdown of the marriage, as evidenced by 12 months separation of the parties.
    ii. Examining whether the best interests of children would be enhanced by longer separation periods where there are children of the marriage and earlier reconciliation counseling (as opposed to conciliation counseling).
    iii. Including a presumption of shared parenting after divorce in the Family Law Act. Children will then be guaranteed equal access to both parents after divorce. This is their right.

[1] As definitively established by Oddone-Paolucci et al in an authoritative review summarising the findings of 46 empirical investigations; Oddone-Paolucci, E., Genius, M., & Violato, C. (2000). *A meta-analysis of the published research on the effects of pornography*. Medicine, Mind and Adolescence, Vol X11, no 1-2, pp101-112.

CONCLUSION

Marriage is a social good. It is much more than a private preference. It will flourish most effectively when supported by a culture that recognises its value for the benefit of all society and for future generations. Specific steps to encourage such a 'culture of marriage' should be part of all government planning. We pledge ourselves to help develop such a culture.

18 September 2007

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

© 2007. Published by the National Marriage Coalition in association with other groups from within the Australian Marriage Movement, many of whom are listed as signatories to this document. The initial draft of the Marriage Manifesto was presented to the National Strategic Mini Summit on Marriage, Family & Fatherhood held at Parliament House, Canberra on Friday 10th August 2007. After much consultation with many contributors it was officially released to the general public on 18th September 2007 at Parliament House, Canberra at the National Strategic Summit on Marriage, Family & Fatherhood.

We acknowledge the work of *The Marriage Movement: A Statement of Principles*, USA, June 2000 as part of the inspiration for this document. The Marriage Manifesto has been made possible through the generous commitment of the many supporters who have made valuable contributions; including Neil and Jane Rookes (National Marriage Coalition), Warwick & Alison Marsh (Fatherhood Foundation), and Byron & Francine Pirola (PMRC Australia).

ABOUT THE NATIONAL MARRIAGE COALITION

The National Marriage Coalition was formed in July 2004 and organised the National Marriage Forum, in the Great Hall of Parliament House in Canberra, which was instrumental in supporting the introduction of a definition of marriage under the Marriage Amendment Act. The National Marriage Coalition is now the peak body representing a wide variety of community-based organisations who deliver practical services in the area of strongly promoting successful marriages and healthy families.

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APPENDIX

Twenty-One Reasons
WHY MARRIAGE MATTERS

INTRODUCTION

What do we know about the importance of marriage for children, for adults and for society? There has been a sharp in-crease over the last two generations in the proportion of children who do not live with their own two married parents, spurred first largely by increases in divorce, and more recently by large jumps in unmarried or cohabiting childbearing. A vigorous public de-bate sparked by these changes in family structure has generated a growing body of social science literature on the consequences of family fragmentation.

This report is an attempt to summarize this large body of scientific research into a succinct form useful to Australians, Americans and others on all sides of ongoing family debates — to report what we know about the importance of marriage in our family and social system.

Marriage has changed a great deal over the past two generations, including increased incidence and social acceptance of divorce, cohabitation, premarital sex, and unwed childbearing. Other important changes include dramatic increases in the proportion of working wives, reduced tolerance for domestic violence, and a change in gender roles. Over the past 40 years, both men and women have become increasingly likely to support greater participation by men in the household and women in the labor force, and less sharp differentiation between wo-men's and men's roles. Yet when it comes to the benefits of marriage, research shows more impressive evidence of continuity than change or decline.

Social science is better equipped to document whether certain social facts *are* true than to say *why* they are true. We can assert more definitively that marriage is associated with powerful social goods than that marriage is the sole or main cause of these goods.

Good research seeks to tease out what scholars call "selection effects," or the pre-existing differences between individuals who decide to divorce, marry, or become unwed parents. Does divorce cause poverty, for example, or is it simply that poor people are more likely to divorce? Good social science attempts to distinguish between causal relationships and mere correlations in a variety of ways. The studies cited here are for the most part based on large, nationally representative samples that control for race, family background, and other confounding factors. In many, but not all cases, social scientists

have been able to use longitudinal data to track individuals as they marry, divorce or stay single, increasing our confidence that marriage itself matters. Where the evidence is, in our view, overwhelming that marriage *causes* increases in well-being, we say so. Where marriage probably does so but the causal pathways are not as well understood, we are more cautious.

We recognize that, absent random assignment to marriage, divorce or single parenting, social scientists must always acknowledge the possibility that other factors are influencing outcomes. (For example, relatively few family-structure studies attempt to assess the role of genetics.) Reasonable scholars may and do disagree on the existence and extent of such selection effects and the extent to which marriage is causally related to the better social outcomes reported here.

And of course individual circumstances vary.[1] While divorce is associated with serious increased psychological risks for children, for example, the majority of children of divorce are not mentally ill.[2] While marriage is a social good, not all marriages are equal. Research does not generally support the idea that remarriage is better for children than living with a single mother.[3] Marriages that are unhappy do not have the same benefits as the average marriage.[4] Divorce or separation provides an important escape hatch for children and adults in violent or high-conflict marriages. Families, communities, and policy makers interested in distributing the benefits of marriage more equally must do more than merely discourage legal divorce.

Social science is typically better equipped to answer general questions—(Are high rates of divorce and unwed childbearing likely to reduce overall child well-being?) than to answer questions facing individual parents (Will my particular children in my particular circumstances be harmed or helped by divorce?).

But we believe good social science, despite its inherent limitations, is a better guide to social policy than uninformed opinion or prejudice. The public and policy makers deserve to hear what research suggests about the consequences of marriage and its absence for children and adults. This report represents our best judgment of what the current social science evidence reveals about the importance of marriage in our social system.

Here is our fundamental conclusion: *Marriage is an important social good, associated with an impressively broad array of positive outcomes for children and adults alike.*

Family structure and processes are of course only one factor contributing to child and social well-being. Our discussion here is not meant to minimize the importance of other social and economic factors, such as poverty, child support, unemployment, neighborhood safety, or the quality of education for both parents and children.

But whether our society succeeds or fails in building a healthy marriage culture is clearly a matter of legitimate public concern.

FAMILY

1. Marriage increases the likelihood that fathers have good relationships with their children.

Mothers as well as fathers are affected by the absence of marriage. Single mothers on average report more conflict with and less monitoring of their children than do married mothers.[5] As adults, children from intact marriages report being closer to their mothers on average than do children of divorce.[6] In one nationally representative study, 30 percent of young adults whose parents divorced reported poor relationships with their mothers, compared to 16 percent of children whose parents stayed married.[7]

But children's relationships with their fathers are at even greater risk. Sixty-five percent of young adults whose parents divorced had poor relationships with their fathers (compared to 29 percent from nondivorced families).[8] On average, children whose parents divorce or never marry see their fathers less frequently[9] and have less affectionate relationships with their fathers[10] than do children whose parents got and stayed married. Divorce appears to have an even greater negative effect on relationships between fathers and their children than remaining in an unhappy marriage.[11]

2. Cohabitation is not the functional equivalent of marriage.

As a group, cohabitors in the United States and Australia more closely resemble singles than married people.[12] Children with cohabiting parents have outcomes more similar to the children living with single (or remarried) parents than children from intact marriages.[13] Adults who live together are more similar to singles than to married couples in terms of physical health[14] and emotional well-being and mental health[15], as well as in assets and earnings.[16]

Selection effects account for a large portion of the difference between married people and cohabitors. As a group, cohabitors (who are not engaged) have lower incomes and less education.[17] Couples who live together also, on average, report relationships of lower quality than do married couples — with cohabitors reporting more conflict, more violence, and lower levels of satisfaction and commitment.[18] Even biological parents who cohabit have poorer quality relationships and are more likely to part than parents who marry.[19] Cohabitation differs from marriage in part because couples who choose merely to live together are less committed to a lifelong relationship.[20]

3. Growing up outside an intact marriage increases the likelihood that children will themselves divorce or become un-wed parents.

Children whose parents divorce or fail to marry are more likely to be-come young unwed parents, to divorce themselves, and to have unhappy marriages and/or relationships.[21] Daughters raised outside of intact marriages are approximately three times more likely to end up young, unwed mothers than are children whose parents married and stayed married.[22] Parental divorce approximately doubles the odds that adult children will also

divorce. Divorce is apparently most likely to be transmitted across the generations when parents in relatively low-conflict marriages divorced.[23]

4. Marriage is a virtually universal human institution.

Marriage exists in virtually every known human society.[24] Exactly what family forms existed in prehistoric society is not known, and the shape of human marriage varies considerably in different cultural contexts. But at least since the beginning of recorded history, in all the flourishing varieties of human cultures documented by anthropologists, marriage has been a universal human institution. As a virtually universal human idea, marriage is about regulating the reproduction of children, families, and society. While marriage systems differ (and not every person or class within a society marries), marriage across societies is a publicly acknowledged and supported sexual union which creates kinship obligations and sharing of resources between men, women, and the children that their sexual union may produce.

ECONOMICS

5. Divorce and unmarried childbearing increase poverty for both children and mothers.

Research has consistently shown that both divorce[25] and unmarried childbearing[26] increase the economic vulnerability of both children and mothers. The effects of family structure on poverty remain powerful, even after controlling for race and family background. Changes in family structure are an important cause of new entries into poverty (although a decline in the earnings of the household head is the single most important cause). Child poverty rates are very high primarily because of the growth of single-parent families.[27] When parents fail to marry and stay married, children are more likely to experience deep and persistent poverty, even after controlling for race and family background. The majority of children who grow up outside of intact married families experience at least one year of dire poverty (family incomes less than half the official poverty threshold).[28] Divorce as well as unmarried childbearing plays a role: Between one-fifth and one-third of divorcing women end up in poverty following the divorce.[29]

In Australia, a study of 500 divorcees with children five to eight years after the separation found that four in five divorced mothers were dependent on social security after their marriages dissolved. Also, mothers still suffer income losses of up to 26 per cent five to eight years after divorce.[30] Moreover, figures from Monash University's Centre for Population and Urban Research show that family break-up, rather than unemployment, is the main cause of the rise in poverty levels in Australia.[31]

Research from the Centre for Population and Urban Research at Monash University has further demonstrated this strong link between poverty and single-parent families. As of September 1996, 43.3 per cent of poor families were headed by lone parents.[32] Recent research by the Australian Bureau of Statistics has found that half of single parents are on welfare. The study showed that 52 per cent of one-parent families are living in a household where the parent is not working.[33]

6. Married couples seem to build more wealth on average than singles or cohabiting couples.

Marriage seems to be a wealth-creating institution. Married couples build more wealth on average than do otherwise similar singles or cohabiting couples, even after controlling for income.[34] The economic advantages of marriage stem from more than just access to two incomes. Marriage partners appear to build more wealth for some of the same reasons that partnerships in general are economically efficient, including economies of scale and specialization and exchange. Marital social norms that en-courage healthy, productive behavior and wealth accumulation (such as buying a home) also appear to play a role. Married parents also more often receive wealth transfers from both sets of grandparents than do cohabiting couples; single mothers almost never receive financial help from fathers' kin.[35]

A survey conducted by the Australian National University found that an unmarried person needs to earn $70,000 a year to be as happy as a married person on a family income of $20,000 a year. The survey also noted that money "is a less important ingredient of a satisfying life than marriage and churchgoing".[36]

7. Married men earn more money than do single men with similar education and job histories.

A large body of research, from a number of developed countries, finds that married men earn between 10 and 40 percent more than do single men with similar education and job histories.[37] While selection effects may account for part of the marriage premium,[38] the most sophisticated, recent research appears to confirm that marriage itself increases the earning power of men, on the order of 15 percent.[39]

Why do married men earn more? The causes are not entirely understood, but married men appear to have greater work commitment, lower quit rates, and healthier and more stable personal routines (including sleep, diet and alcohol consumption). Husbands also benefit from both the work effort and emotional support that they receive from wives.[40]

8. Parental divorce (or failure to marry) appears to increase children's risk of school failure.

Parental divorce or nonmarriage has a significant, long-term negative impact on children's educational attainment. Children of divorced or unwed parents have lower grades and other measures of academic achievement, are more likely to be held back, and are more likely to drop out of high school.[41] The effects of parental divorce or nonmarriage on children's educational attainment remain significant even after controlling for race and family background. Children whose parents divorce end up with significantly lower levels of education than do children in single-mother families created by the death of the father.[42] Children whose parents remarry do no better, on average, than do children who live with single mothers.[43]

An Australian survey of 512 children found that children of cohabiting couples were assessed by their teachers to be

performing at lower levels in language, mathematics, social studies and sport than children of wedded parents.[44]

The Western Australian Child Health Survey in 1997 found that 30 per cent of children from sole-parent families were low academic performers, compared with 17 per cent from couple families.[45] Australian research has also found that children from two-parent families have a better chance of getting a job than those from sole-parent families.[46]

A study of Australian primary school children from three family types (married heterosexual couples, cohabiting heterosexual couples and homosexual couples) found that in every area of educational endeavour (language; mathematics; social studies; sport; class work, sociability and popularity; and attitudes to learning), children from married heterosexual couples performed better than the other two groups. The study concludes with these words: "Married couples seem to offer the best environment for a child's social and educational development".[47]

A Melbourne University study of 212 children found that fathers, even more than mothers, had a major beneficial influence on children in their first year of school. The study found that kids with regular father involvement were more cooperative and self-reliant in school than kids who did not have father involvement. The more regular involvement the father has with the child, the study's author said, the better the child does in his or her first year of school.[48]

9. Parental divorce reduces the likelihood that children will graduate from college and achieve high-status jobs.

Parental divorce appears to have long-term consequences on children's socioeconomic attainment. While most children of divorce do not drop out of high school or become unemployed, as adults, children of divorced parents have lower occupational status and earnings and have increased rates of unemployment and economic hardship.[49] They are less likely to attend and graduate from college and also less likely to at-tend and graduate from four-year and highly selective colleges, even after controlling for family background and academic and extracurricular achievements.[50]

PHYSICAL HEALTH AND LONGEVITY

10. Children who live with their own two married parents enjoy better physical health, on average, than do children in other family forms.

Divorce and unmarried childbearing appear to have negative effects on children's physical health and life expectancy.[51] Longitudinal research suggests that parental divorce increases the incidence of health problems in children.[52]

The health advantages of married homes remain, even after taking socioeconomic status into account.

The health disadvantages associated with being raised outside of intact marriages persist long into adulthood. Even in Sweden, a country with extensive supports for single mothers and a nationalized health care system, adults raised in single-parent homes were more likely to report that their health was poor and/or to die (during the study period) than were those from intact homes; this finding remained after controlling for economic hardship.[53]

One study which followed a sample of academically gifted, middle-class children for 70 years found that parental divorce reduced a child's life expectancy by four years, even after controlling for childhood health status and family background, as well as personality characteristics such as impulsiveness and emotional instability.[54] Another analysis found that 40-year-old men whose parents had divorced were three times more likely to die than were 40-year-old men whose parents stayed married: "[I]t does appear," the researchers conclude, "that parental divorce sets off a negative chain of events, which contribute to a higher mortality risk among individuals from divorced homes. . .."[55]

11. Parental marriage is associated with a sharply lower risk of infant mortality.

Babies born to married parents have lower rates of infant mortality. On average, having an unmarried mother is associated with an approximately 50 percent increase in the risk of infant mortality.[56] While pa-rental marital status predicts infant mortality in both blacks and whites, the increased risk due to the mother's marital status is greatest among the most advantaged: white mothers over the age of 20.[57]

The cause of this relationship between marital status and infant mortality is not well known. There are many selection effects involved: Unmarried mothers are more likely to be young, black, less educated and poor than are married mothers. But even after controlling for age, race, and education, children born to unwed mothers generally have higher rates of infant mortality.[58] While unmarried mothers are also less likely to get early prenatal care, infant mortality rates in these instances are higher not only in the neonatal period, but through infancy[59] and even early childhood.[60] Children born to unmarried mothers have an in-creased incidence of both intentional and unintentional fatal injuries.[61] Marital status remains a powerful predictor of infant mortality, even in countries with nationalized health care systems and strong supports for single mothers.[62]

12. Marriage is associated with reduced rates of alcohol and substance abuse for both adults and teens.

Married men and women have lower rates of alcohol consumption and abuse than do singles. Longitudinal research confirms that young adults who marry tend to reduce their rates of alcohol consumption and illegal drug use.[63] Children whose parents marry and stay married also have lower rates of substance abuse, even after controlling for family background.[64] Twice as many young teens in single-mother families and stepfamilies have tried marijuana (and young teens living with single fathers were three times as likely). Young teens whose parents stay married are also the least likely to experiment with tobacco or alcohol.[65] Data from the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse show that, even after controlling for age, race, gender, and family income, teens living with both biological parents are significantly less likely to use illicit drugs, alcohol, and tobacco.[66]

How does family fragmentation relate to teen drug use? Many pathways are probably involved, including increased family stress, reduced paren-tal monitoring and weakened attachment to parents, especially fathers.[67]

John Embling, from the Melbourne-based Families in Distress Foundation, is well aware of the harmful effects on children of parental breakup. He has spent 30 years working with such children. Says Embling, "The children are in diabolical need. I could take you into these households and show you what it's like for kids to try to cope when mum is on drugs or drink, there's no bloke around worth a cracker and primary school kids have to get themselves up and off to school."[68]

13. Married people, especially married men, have longer life expectancies than do otherwise similar singles.

Married people live longer than do otherwise similar people who are single or divorced. Husbands as well as wives live longer on average, even after controlling for race, income and family background.[69] In most developed countries, middle-aged single, divorced, or widowed men are about twice as likely to die as married men, and nonmarried women face risks about one and a half times as great as those faced by married women.[70]

Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that the median age of death for non-married men in 1992 was 52.2 years, but the figure leaps to 72.5 years for married men. However, never-married Australian women live slightly longer than married women (74.2 years to 70.1 years).[71] Findings of the Australian National Health Strategy show that: "Both men and women who are married have much lower standardised death rates than those who are not. Compared with their married counterparts, never married men have a death rate which is 124% higher and divorced/widowed men have a death rate which is 102% higher; never-married women have a death rate which is 91% higher and divorced widowed women have a death rate which is 49% higher."[72]

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare study of 1994 found that never married and previously married people had mortality rates twice that of married people.[73] An Australian Bureau of Statistics study reported the following: "In 1996 married people overall experienced lower death rates than those who were divorced, widowed or never married. Males aged between 20 and 69 years who had never married experienced death rates two to four times higher than those who were married."[74]

14. Marriage is associated with better health and lower rates of injury, illness, and disability for both men and women.

Both married men and women enjoy better health on average than do single or divorced individuals.[75] Selection effects regarding divorce or remarriage may account for part of this differential, although research has found no consistent pattern of such selection.[76] Married people appear to manage illness better, monitor each other's health, have higher incomes and wealth, and adopt healthier lifestyles than do otherwise similar singles.[77]

A recent study of the health effects of marriage drawn from 9,333 respondents to the Health and Retirement Survey of Americans between the ages of 51 and 61 compared the incidence of major diseases, as well as functional disability, in married, cohabiting, divorced, widowed, and never-married individuals. "Without exception," the authors report, "married persons

have the lowest rates of morbidity for each of the diseases, impairments, functioning problems and disabilities." Marital status differences in disability remained "dramatic" even after controlling for age, sex, and race/ethnicity.[78]

A major study conducted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in 1994 found that married people have less insomnia and are less nervous than previously married or never married people. It also found that married people have less ulcers than the previously married, although about the same amount as the never married. Married people also smoked less and used less alcohol than never married or previously married people.[79]

A National Health Survey of 19,000 Australians released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in October 1997 found that separated, divorced and widowed people think they are in poorer health than their married and de facto contemporaries.[80]

Finally, an Australian study found that cancer, diabetes and heart disease are all about 40 per cent higher among previously married men and women.[81]

MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

15. Children whose parents divorce have higher rates of psychological distress and mental illness.

Divorce typically causes children considerable emotional distress and increases the risk of serious mental illness.[82] These mental health risks do not dissipate soon after the divorce. Instead, children of divorce remain at higher risk for depression and other mental illness, in part because of reduced education attainment, increased risk of divorce, marital problems, and economic hardship.[83] The psychological effects of divorce appear to differ, depending on the level of conflict between pa-rents. When marital conflict is high and sustained, children benefit psychologically from divorce. While more research is needed, the majority of divorces appear to be taking place among low-conflict spouses.[84]

16. Divorce appears significantly to increase the risk of suicide.

High rates of family fragmentation are associated with an increased risk of suicide among both adults and adolescents.[85] Divorced men and women are more than twice as likely as their married counterparts to attempt suicide.[86] Although women have lower rates of suicide overall, married women were also substantially less likely to commit suicide than were divorced, widowed, or never-married women.[87] In the last half-century, suicide rates among teens and young adults have tripled. The single "most important explanatory variable," according to one new study, "is the increased share of youths living in homes with a divorced parent." The effect, note the researchers, "is large," explaining "as much as two-thirds of the increase in youth suicides" over time.[88]

In Australia, a recent study found that "never-married men had [suicide] mortality levels 89-90% higher than the standard rates and married men 43-25% below the standard rates, while divorced and widowed men also had elevated

[suicide] mortality levels." Similar trends were found among women as well.[89] Other research has found that suicide rates among men and women in Australia were three times higher than among married people.[90]

Figures from the ABS have shown that divorced males aged between 35 and 44 are the most likely to take their own life in Australia, while married people are the least likely to suicide.[91] And the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare study of 1994 found that never married and previously married people had three times the suicide rates of married people.[92]

More recent ABS figures point in the same direction. In the 1995-1997 period, married people (9 per 100,000 persons) were less likely to die from suicide than those who were never married (22), widowed (13) or divorced (26 per 100,000 persons).[93]

And a recent study recorded in the *Australian Medical Journal* by Dr Chris Cantor of Griffith University found that separated males are six times more likely to commit suicide than married men.[94] And a more recent study by the Institute of Health and Welfare found that divorced men are at least three times as likely to commit suicide as any other group.[95]

17. Married mothers have lower rates of depression than do single or cohabiting mothers.

The absence of marriage is a serious risk factor for maternal depression. Married mothers have lower rates of depression than do single or co-habiting mothers.[96] One study of 2,300 urban adults found that, among parents of preschoolers, the risk of depression was substantially greater for unmarried as compared to married mothers.[97] Marriage protects even older teen mothers from the risk of depression. In one nationally representative sample of 18- and 19-year-old mothers, 41 percent of single white mothers having their first child reported high levels of depressive symptoms, compared to 28 percent of married white teen mothers in this age group.[98]

Longitudinal studies following young adults as they marry, divorce, and remain single indicate that marriage boosts mental and emotional well-being for both men and women.[99] We focus on maternal depression because it is both a serious mental health problem for women and a serious risk factor for children.[100] Not only are single mothers more likely to be depressed, the consequences of maternal depression for child well-being are greater in single-parent families, probably because single parents have less support and because children in disrupted families have less access to their (nondepressed) other parent.[101]

Australian research shows that in terms of mental health, "never-married men suffer more from not being married than never-married women. But in all other categories women show a higher level of benefit from marriage than men. Separated, widowed, and divorced men were 55 percent above the male average in rates of mental illness while the separated/widowed and divorced category of women had rates 67 percent above the women's average."[102]

The 1994 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare study found that married people are three times happier than previously married people, and twice as happy as never married people.[103]

More recent Australian data reveal the same findings. An Australian Unity Wellbeing Index released in July 2002 found that married people were those with the most happiness and greatest sense of wellbeing. Married people scored 77.7 per cent on the personal wellbeing test compared to 65.1 per cent for those who were separated.[104]

CRIME AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

18. Boys raised in single-parent families are more likely to engage in delinquent and criminal behaviour.

Even after controlling for factors such as race, mother's education, neighborhood quality, and cognitive ability, boys raised in single-parent homes are about twice as likely (and boys raised in stepfamilies are three times as likely) to have committed a crime that leads to incarceration by the time they reach their early thirties.[105]

Teens in both one-parent and remarried homes display more deviant behavior and commit more delinquent acts than do teens whose parents stayed married.[106] Teens in one-parent families are on average less attached to their parent's opinions and more attached to their peer groups. Combined with lower levels of parental supervision, these attitudes appear to set the stage for delinquent behavior.[107] The effects of marital status on delinquency may be stronger for whites than for African-Americans.[108]

In Australia, a recent book by Alan Tapper highlights this connection between broken families and crime. In a study of rising crime rates in Western Australia, Tapper suggests that "family breakdown in the form of divorce and separation is the main cause of the crime wave".[109]

A longitudinal study of 512 Australian children found that there are more offenders coming from families of cohabiting than married couples, and there are proportionally more offenders who become recidivists coming from families of cohabiting than married couples. The study concludes, "The relationship between cohabitation and delinquency is beyond contention: children of cohabiting couples are more likely to be found among offenders than children of married couples".[110]

Those who work with juvenile offenders in Australia confirm these findings. John Smith of Care and Communication Concern in Melbourne has spent nearly two decades working with homeless youth and young offenders. He says that "almost 100 per cent" of these kids are from "single parent families or blended families".[111] And a recent New Zealand study found that 64.6 per cent of juvenile offenders had no birth father present.[112]

19. Marriage appears to reduce the risk that adults will be either perpetrators or victims of crime.

Overall, single and divorced women are four to five times more likely to be victims of violent crime in any given year than are married women.

Single and divorced women are almost ten times more likely than are wives to be raped, and about three times more likely to be the victims of aggravated assault. Similarly, compared to husbands, unmarried men are about four times as likely to become victims of violent crime.[113]

A study of 500 chronic juvenile offenders found that those who married and stayed married reduced their offense rate by two-thirds, compared to criminals who did not marry or who did not establish good marriages.[114] Married men spend more time with their wives, who discourage criminal behavior, and less time with peers, who often do not.

As one leading family expert has summarised the findings: "Australian studies with adequate samples have shown parental divorce to be a risk factor for a wide range of social and psychological problems in adolescence and adulthood, including poor academic achievement, low self-esteem, psychological distress, delinquency and recidivism, substance use and abuse, sexual precocity, adult criminal offending, depression, and suicidal behaviour."[115] He concludes: "There is no scientific justification for disregarding the public health significance of marital dissolution in Australia, especially with respect to mental heath."

20. Married women appear to have a lower risk of experiencing domestic violence than do cohabiting or dating women.

Domestic violence remains a serious problem both inside and outside of marriage.

While young women must recognize that marriage is not a good strategy for reforming violent men, a large body of research shows that be-ing unmarried, and especially living with a man outside of marriage, is associated with an increased risk of domestic abuse.[116] One analysis of the US National Survey of Families and Households found that cohabitors were over three times more likely than spouses to say that arguments became physical over the last year (13 percent of cohabitors versus 4 percent of spouses). Even after controlling for race, age, and education, people who live together are still more likely than married people to report violent arguments.[117] Overall, as one scholar sums up the relevant research, "Regardless of methodology, the studies yielded similar results: Cohabitors engage in more violence than do spouses."[118]

Selection effects play a powerful role. Women are less likely to marry, and more likely to divorce, violent men.[119] However, scholars suggest that the greater integration of married men into the community, and the greater investment of spouses in each other, also play a role.[120] Married men, for example, are more responsive to policies such as mandatory arrest policies, designed to signal strong disapproval of domestic violence.[121]

20. A child who is not living with his or her own two married parents is at greater risk of child abuse.

Children living with single mothers, stepfathers, or mother's boyfriends are more likely to become victims of child abuse. Children living in single-mother homes have increased rates of death from intentional injuries.[122] As Martin Daly and Margo Wilson report, "Living with a stepparent has turned out to be the most powerful predictor of severe child abuse yet."[123] One study found that a preschooler living with a stepfather was 40 times more likely to be sexually abused than one living with both of his or her biological parents.[124] Another study found that, although boyfriends contribute less than 2 percent of nonparental childcare, they commit half of all reported child abuse by nonparents. The researcher concludes that "a young child left alone with a mother's boy-friend experiences elevated risk of physical abuse."[125]

In Australia, former Human Rights Commissioner Brian Burdekin stated that there was an alarming 500 to 600 per cent increase in sexual abuse of girls in families where the adult male was not the natural father.[126]

A 1994-95 study by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that more cases of child abuse involved children from single parent families (39%) than families with two natural parents (30%) or other two-parent families (such as families with a step-parent) (21%). Of neglect cases, 47% involved children from female single parent families compared with 26% from families with two natural parents.[127] More recent Australian research has found that the typical child murderer is a young man in a de facto relationship with the victim's mother.[128]

A recent study of 1998-1999 Victorian child abuse victims found that 45 per cent lived with single parents. The report, by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, found that children who lived in natural two-parent families had a relatively low risk of abuse.[129] And a more recent report from the same Institute entitled *Child Protection Australia 1999-2000* reveals that children are most likely to be neglected or abused in single-parent families. It found that the ACT has the highest rate of maltreatment of children from female one-parent families (47 per cent), compared with 29 per cent in two-parent natural families and 18 per cent in step families or blended families.[130]

And a newer report from the same body found that "a relatively high proportion of substantiations [of child abuse] involved children living in female-headed one-parent families and in two-parent step or blended families."[131]

CONCLUSION

MARRIAGE IS more than a private emotional relationship. It is also a social good. Not every person can or should marry. And not every child raised outside of marriage is damaged as a result. But communities where good-enough marriages are common have better outcomes for children, women, and men than do communities suffering from high rates of divorce, unmarried childbearing, and high-conflict or violent marriages. As policy makers concerned about social inequality and child well-being think about how to strengthen marriage, more funding is needed for research into both the causes of the marriage gap in child and social well-being and ways to close that gap. Solid research is pointing the way toward new family and community interventions to help strengthen marriage. Ongoing, basic scientific re-search on marriage and marital dynamics contributes to the development of strategies and programs for helping to strengthen marriages and reduce unnecessary divorce.[132]

Who benefits from marriage and why? How can we prevent both di-vorce and the damage from divorce? How can families, counselors, communities, and public policy help at-risk and disadvantaged parents build healthy marriages?

If marriage is not merely a private preference, but also a social good, concerned members of our society, as well as academics, need and deserve answers to questions like these.

ENDNOTES

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21 REASONS WHY MARRIAGE MATTERS — ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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NATIONAL Marriage COALITION
"Strengthening and Supporting Australian Marriages"

The National Marriage Coalition is a collection of like-minded organisations who believe that marriage is, 'the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life'.

The National Marriage Coalition was formed in July 2004 and organised the National Marriage Forum, in the Great Hall of Parliament House in Canberra, which was instrumental in supporting the introduction of a definition of marriage under the Marriage Amendment Act. The National Marriage Coalition is now the peak body representing a wide variety of community-based organisations who deliver practical services in the area of strongly promoting successful marriages and healthy families.

We believe that every child has a fundamental right to both a mother and a father. The best way to secure this right is to establish a loving and stable marriage between a man and woman for life. Therefore marriage should be encouraged, strengthened and supported by government, society and individuals in every possible way.

The greatest resource Australia possesses lies in the families of our nation. The families of Australia need the full economic and legal protection of the Australian government. The strength of Australian families depends on the qualities of the relationships between our nation's mothers and fathers. Therefore the quality of our nation's marital relationships will determine the destiny of Australia.

Marriage needs the full support of government at every stage and every level including premarital counselling, marriage education, marriage enrichment and pre-divorce counselling. The National Marriage Coalition believes that there needs to be a massive increase in investment of government funding to support and strengthen Australian marriages.

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