



HOW MARRIAGE BENEFITS CHILDREN



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CARE NET | 44180 RIVERSIDE PARKWAY, SUITE 200 | LANSLOWNE, VA 20176 | 703-554-8734 | CARE-NET.ORG

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We know from decades of research that the best predictor of virtually every measure of child well being is whether or not the child's mother and father are married to each other. Marriage is the "great equalizer." It allows children from various backgrounds, economic situations, neighborhoods, and circumstances to have the best opportunity to thrive. No government program or well-meaning non-profit organization can replace the stability and positive environment that a child gets from having two married parents.

Furthermore, marriage is an institution that was created and ordained by God for a variety of purposes, not least of which is to provide children with the care and support of both a mother and a father, united in love with each other, loving God, and loving their children. In the story of Christ's birth, God gives a perfect model to follow. He gave Jesus both a mother, Mary, and a father, Joseph to show us his design for life and abundant life.

However, our culture has spent decades devaluing the importance of marriage and father involvement, especially when it comes to their positive impact on children. Even among Christians, there can be, at best, a lukewarm attitude towards why marriage is such a critical building block in the lives of mothers and fathers, children, and the communities in which they live.

To provide just a glimpse at the social science research on family structure and child well-being, this ebook gives stats on 10 critical areas* where marriage has a positive impact on the well-being of children.

**All data (except the study on church attendance) is quoted from National Fatherhood Initiative's Father Facts publications, which can be accessed at www.fatherhood.org/fatherhood-data-statistics.*

Father Facts provides data from hundreds of studies to show the importance of marriage and father involvement to child well being.

Poverty

Children living in female-headed homes with no spouse present have a poverty rate of 47.6% - over four times the rate of children living in married couple families.¹

Teen Pregnancy

Researchers found that among a sample of 6,069 female participants from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, respondents were more likely to report teen pregnancy if they lived in a single mother household or other nontraditional family structure.²

Child Abuse and Neglect

A study using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study revealed that in many cases, the absence of a biological father contributes to increased risk of child maltreatment. The results suggest that Child Protective Services (CPS) agencies have some justification in viewing the presence of a social father as increasing children's risk of abuse and neglect. It is believed that in families with a non-biological (social) father figure, there is a higher risk of abuse and neglect to children, despite the social father living in the household or only dating the mother.³

Behavioral Problems

Data from three waves of the Fragile Families Study (N= 2,111) was used to examine the prevalence and effects of mothers' relationship changes between birth and age 3 on their children's well being. Children born to single mothers show higher levels of aggressive behavior than children born to married mothers. Living in a single-mother household is equivalent to experiencing 5.25 partnership transitions.⁴

Infant Mortality

Infant mortality rates are 1.8 times higher for infants of unmarried mothers than for married mothers.⁵

Drugs

Even after controlling for community context, there is significantly more drug use among children who do not live with their mother and father.⁶

Crime

Individuals from father absent homes are 279% more likely to carry guns and deal drugs than peers living with their fathers.⁷

Prison

Even after controlling for income, youths in father-absent households still had significantly higher odds of incarceration than those in mother-father families. Youths who never had a father in the household experienced the highest odds.⁸

Education

Students living in father-absent homes are twice as likely to repeat a grade in school.⁹

Church Attendance

A Swiss study of familial influence on church attendance showed that the biggest influence on a child's future church attendance — either regularly or irregularly — was the father's church attendance. When both dad and mom attended church on a regular basis, 33% of their children went on to attend regularly, 41% irregularly and 26% not at all. When dad was an irregular attendee and the mother regular, 3% of the children were regular church attendees, 59% irregular and 38% did not attend at all.

In homes where the father was a regular church attendee and the mother irregular, 38% of the children went on to regularly attend church, 44% attended irregularly and 18% did not attend at all. Even when the father attended church irregularly and the mother didn't at all, 25% of the children went on to attend church regularly, 23% irregularly and 52% not at all. This compared to families where mothers attended regularly and the father not at all where the numbers were 2%, 37% and 61% respectively.¹⁰

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