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Epidemic of Illegitimacy Highlights Need for Return to Traditional Values

With the devaluation of traditional marriage over the past couple of decades has come an alarming increase in the number of children growing up in homes without fathers, and an increasingly casual attitude about childrearing. A recent study from Child Trends, a non-profit research group that identifies emerging trends in child development, found that as of 2010, 41 percent of all births in America occur outside of marriage. That compares to about 11 percent in 1970 and around 30 percent in 1990.



One of the findings of the study that has received the most media attention is the statistic showing that the majority of births to women under 30 years of age occur outside of marriage. While African-American and Hispanic women still lead the way in the percentage of non-marital births (73 percent and 53 percent, respectively), the problem is one that transcends race and ethnicity, with the percentage of illegitimate births among white women growing from 17 percent in 1990 to nearly 30 percent today.

Reported the [New York Times](#) of the study: “Once largely limited to poor women and minorities, motherhood without marriage has settled deeply into middle America. The fastest growth in the last two decades has occurred among white women in their 20s who have some college education but no four-year degree....”

The *Times* noted that among “mothers of all ages, a majority — 59 percent in 2009 — are married when they have children. But the surge of births outside marriage among younger women ... is both a symbol of the transforming family and a hint of coming generational change.”

The study did find one group of women who wait for marriage before having children: college graduates. The *Times* used that statistic as a signpost for class warfare, insisting that the trend is evidence of a “new class divide, with the economic and social rewards of marriage increasingly reserved for people with the most education.”

It is simplistic to distill the problem down to one defined by economics and education. While it is true that illegitimacy is now most rampant among demographics with the lowest education and the highest unemployment, that trend hasn't occurred in a cultural vacuum. Witness that during past eras in which many Americans had little education and were often tentatively employed, illegitimacy was almost unheard of. Couples got married, typically stayed married for better or worse, raised families, and were far less absorbed with self. They were also more inclined to look to God and family — rather than government — for what they needed, and made do or did without, to use a cliché from one of those eras.

The increase in non-marital births seems to have coincided most closely with the deterioration of sexual morals, beginning in the 1960s, the discounting of religious faith, and the introduction of LBJ's “Great



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Society” scheme, which spawned an era of government welfare and entitlement that has prompted generations of Americans since then to look increasingly to government for provision and solutions to their problems.

The Child Trends study noted that the majority of non-marital births have come among couples who are living together, with most of such relationships failing — leaving women to raise children by themselves. Such a trend has led to an attitude among an increasing number of women that marriage is either beyond their reach or not worth their bother. For many women marriage “has become a luxury good,” Frank Furstenberg, a sociologist at the University of Pennsylvania, told the *Times*.

That outlook was confirmed by one woman interviewed by the *Times*, whose casual relationships resulted in two children by two separate men—but no prospects for matrimony. “I’d like to do it,” the Ohio woman said of marriage, “but I just don’t see it happening right now. Most of my friends say it’s just a piece of paper, and it doesn’t work out anyway.”

The authors of the study wrote that there are several reasons to be concerned about such a mindset — and the pandemic of illegitimate births that have resulted result from it. “Couples who have children outside of marriage are younger, less healthy, and less educated than are married couples who have children,” they noted. “Children born outside of marriage tend to grow up with limited financial resources; to have less stability in their lives because their parents are more likely to split up and form new unions; and to have cognitive and behavioral problems, such as aggression and depression.”

Reporting on the study, Rachel Sheffield of the [Heritage Foundation](#) noted that compared to children from intact, married-parent families, children from such single-parent homes “are less likely to graduate, have [lower rates of academic achievement](#), have a greater likelihood of experiencing [emotional problems](#), engage in [delinquent behaviors](#) at greater rates, and are more likely to become [single-parents themselves](#).”

Sheffield also pointed out that even while “about half of the children born to single women are born to those in cohabiting relationships, these relationships frequently [do not lead to marriage](#), and children from cohabiting families do not reap the same benefits as their peers from married-parent homes.”

A 2010 study published by the federal Centers for Disease Control, entitled [Family Structure and Children’s Health in the United States](#) confirmed the bulk of these findings.

The remedy for runaway illegitimacy in America, of course, is the promotion of traditional marriage and family structures. A [2002 report from Child Trends](#) concluded: “Research clearly demonstrates that family structure matters for children, and the family structure that helps the most is a family headed by two biological parents in a low-conflict marriage.”

Amazingly, even with such an enormous weight of evidence in favor of traditional families and values, the federal government, led by an irresponsible Obama Administration, appears to be doing everything in its power to push an opposite agenda. Only the actions of an informed and prayerful American electorate will bring a turn back to cultural sanity.



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