

## **Why Marriage Matters: 26 Conclusions from the Social Sciences**

### **Family**

- Marriage increases the likelihood that fathers and mothers have good relationships with their children.
- Cohabitation is not the functional equivalent of marriage.
- Growing up outside an intact marriage increases the likelihood that children will themselves divorce or become unwed parents.
- Marriage is a virtually universal human institution.
- Marriage and a normative commitment to marriage, fosters high- quality relationships between adults, as well as between parents and children.
- Marriage has important biosocial consequences for adults and children.

### **Economics**

- Divorce and unmarried childbearing increase poverty for both children and mothers.
- Married couples seem to build more wealth on average than singles or cohabiting couples.
- Marriage reduces poverty and material hardship for disadvantaged women and their children.
- Minorities benefit economically from marriage.
- Married men earn more money than do single men with similar education and job histories.
- Parental divorce (or failure to marry) appears to increase children's risk of school failure.
- Parental divorce reduces the likelihood that children will graduate from college and achieve high status jobs.

### **Physical Healthy and Longevity**

- Children who live with their own two married parents enjoy better physical health, on average than do children in other family forms.
- Parental marriage is associated with a sharply lower risk of infant mortality.
- Marriage is associated with reduced rates of alcohol and substance abuse for both adults and teens.
- Married people, especially married men, have longer life expectancies than do otherwise similar singles.
- Marriage is associated with better health and lower rates of injury, illness, and better disability for both men and women.
- Marriage seems to be associated with better health among minorities and the poor.

### **Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being**

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

- Divorce appears to increase significantly the risk of suicide.
- Married mothers have lower rates of depression than do single or cohabiting mothers.
- Boys raised in single- parent families are more likely to engage in delinquent and criminal behavior.
- Marriage appears to reduce the risk that adults will be either be perpetrators or victims of crime.
- Married women appear to have a lower risk of experiencing domestic violence than do cohabiting or dating women.
- A child who is not living with his or her own two married parents is a greater risk for child abuse.<sup>i</sup>

### **High Divorce Rates**

In 1960, there were 2.2 divorces per 1,000 population; between 1979 and 1981 the divorce rate peaked at 5.3 per 1,000 population; in 2006 the divorce rate stood at 3.6.<sup>ii</sup>

### **Marriage: Still an American Ideal**

There are 2.2 million marriages per year, 6,000 per day.<sup>iii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> *The Twenty-Six Conclusions: A Snapshot. Why Marriage Matters: Twenty –Six Conclusions from the Social Sciences.* Institute for American Values, 2005. <http://center.americanvalues.org/?p=7>.

<sup>ii</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2003: Table 83, [www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/03statab/vistat.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/03statab/vistat.pdf) U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2004: Table 117, <http://www.census.gov/prod/2005pubs/06statab/vistat.pdf>; <http://www.divorcereform.org/rates.html>; [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvst/nvsr55/nvsr55\\_20.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvst/nvsr55/nvsr55_20.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> National Vital Statistics Report. The National Center for Health Statistics. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/pubd/nvsr/54/54-20.pdf>