

Written evidence from Mr David Patrick [HAB0166]

The Women and Equalities Committee Evidence Re Cohabitation Rights Consultation

When couple enter a marriage contract they are making a public commitment through their wedding vows, which gives Society greater stability. If a couple choose not to be committed in this way, it is wholly wrong to offer equivalent rights to those enjoyed by married couples. We know from experience that cohabiting couples will probably pass through many such relationships. Any legislation that confers rights equivalent to those of married couples is going to be tangled up by these ongoing series of relationships. Hard cases make bad law.

If couples wish to live together & remain unmarried, it is quite feasible to make provision through a will to confirm their wishes for how assets should be distributed on death.

Statistics both in the UK and USA clearly show that children brought up by parents in a stable married relationship fair better in terms of education and not being caught up in the criminal system. Over half of children of parents in a casual, or uncommitted relationship, will experience their parents' separation before the age of five. Compare this to the data for the children of married couples, which is only 15%.

For example:

1. *"Children living with married parents are more often involved in community activities such as soccer or other sports, take part in academic pursuits in local schools and other academic institutions that can lead to college, and eventually, a career." USA **
2. *"This paper has set out why family structure remains an important determinant of children's and parents' outcomes. As has been shown, the differences between the two prevailing structures— marriage and co-habitation— are stark, even when controlling for income and education. Attributing any distinction entirely to the selection effect ignores the impact of intention that marriage, with its public commitment, entails. The recommendation of this paper is for Government to stop blurring the distinction between co-habiting and married couples: when they deliver dramatically different outcomes for children as well as parents. To pretend that these family structures are interchangeable is to cheat couples, and in particular the most disadvantaged, of the best basis for a stable relationship.*

*The differences between co-habitation and marriage are not negligible. The government should stop pretending they are." UK ***

It is unnecessary as well confusing to create another class of relationship – the decision whether to marry or cohabit is a choice that couples choose to make. If the committee recommends that the government change the law this can only weaken society, with disastrous outcomes for children. We should be encouraging commitment, and not fostering the idea that relationships can be casual and temporary.

* <https://gillespieshields.com/40-facts-two-parent-families/>

** Family Structure Still Matters by Sophia Worringer© The Centre for Social Justice, 2020

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