

Written evidence from Rev Mark Simpson [HAB0311]

As the minister of a church on a typical social housing estate, I see the painful results of social policy on a daily basis first hand. The British working classes (and underclass) have a tendency to take social policies quite literally, without restraint or caution, and family life has become such a mess that it is hard to see a possible way back to healthy functioning. Children growing up fatherless, or with a series of step fathers coming and going with whatever baggage they bring, tend to be undirectional, unmotivated, under-achieving and antisocial.

There is all the difference in the world between marriage and cohabitation. People typically say, 'It's just a piece of paper' - but that piece of paper means something: it is a record of promise and commitment. Cohabitation says, 'I am yours for now; but only until I go off you, or get bored of our relationship, or fancy going off with someone else instead'. That is utterly different to the public promise of, 'Till death us do part'.

Marriage provides a much higher level of security for children. With parents committed to each other, they know where they stand. When married parents separate or divorce, it is, of course, devastating for children. Cohabiting couples are far more likely to separate. I'm sure you have the statistics.

I am an ordinary, married, man of nearly 48 years old. Through youth groups on our estate, there are a whole troop of young lads, aged about 8 upwards, who relate to me as some sort of father-figure (even though they damage our property and are often obnoxious or abusive). It is heart breaking that they should view me in this way. I can't fulfil that role - I have my own family to care for; I see these lads once a week at best, and over the last year, hardly at all. Any government decision to promote cohabitation will create an ever increasing number of lost souls like these across our land.

One more comment about 'ever increasing numbers' - the nature of serial cohabitation means that, often, many more children are born - and to parents least equipped to care for them. Every new relationship must produce babies, to show it is worth as much as the last one. Many of the kids I speak to can't answer the question, 'How many brothers and sisters do you have?' There are so many combinations of step siblings, they can't work it out.

Please don't make this further move to belittle marriage. It matters to our society.

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