

Written evidence from Mr Janet Healey (retired GP) [HAB0355]

The Women and Equalities Committee is proposing that cohabiting couples should be given parallel legal rights to married couples. I wish to respond to this.

When a couple get married, the wedding vows which they give provides families great stability. The Government should recognize this and be willing to promote it, rather than undermine marriage by offering equivalent rights to those who choose just to cohabit and not be committed to each other. It is known that co-habiting couples are far more likely to separate than couples who are married, 50% of the former, and only 15% of the latter.

Couples living together without being married is far more transitory and unstable, and must not be treated as equivalent to marriage. If cohabitees are given legal rights, cohabitation will be encouraged, with disastrous results.

When a family breaks down, it can have devastating effects on the children and is exceedingly expensive for society, costing the Government over £50bn each year. This will increase and worsen if the special legal status of marriage is not maintained and promoted.

Marriage has been shown to benefit both physical and mental health. Smoking and drug use is lower in married women than those who cohabit, and married men have been found to have fewer heart and cancer diseases.

Cohabiting couples can make their own legal arrangements if they wish, such as writing a will to deal with inheritance concerns, without changing the law for all cohabitees.

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