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CANADA



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# The Family in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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## ***So what is the family in the 21st century?***

- The union of a man and a woman in a committed monogamous relationship;
  - The most basic social bond;
  - The most basic social unit within society.
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## ***What does the family do?***

- It is home to human relationships;
- It shapes human identity and character;
- It is for bearing and raising children;
- It is our first school, our first hospital, it is the first society we encounter;
- It connects the generations and sustains social order.

## Deleire and Kalil (2002) Twelve Family Forms:

- Never married single mothers;
- Never married single mothers in multi-generational households;
- Single mothers with cohabiting males;
- Divorced single mothers;
- Divorced single mothers in multi-generational households;
- Single father families (in the same variations as single mothers);
- Grandparent households with no parent present;
- Two cohabiting couples with one non-biological parent;
- Two biological cohabiting parents;
- Blended or step-families;
- Blended or step-family married couples;
- The two-biological-parent married couple.

# Outcomes for children in relation to family form

## Children living with two-biological-married parents

- do better in educational attainment and school engagement  
(Hao and Xie 2002; Deleire and Kalil 2002; Lamb and Manning 2003; Brown 2004);
- are less likely to be engaged in early sexual activity and fall to teenage pregnancy  
(McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Woodward, Fergusson and Horwood 2001; Deleire and Kalil 2002; Hao and Xie 2001).

This has wide implications for employment, the generation of wealth, future family wellbeing and costs for society.

# Outcomes for children in relation to family form

Children from family forms other than the two-biologically-married parent couple more likely to:

- behave anti-socially;
- withdraw from society or be insecure;
- be angry and inconsistent in relationships.

(Lamb and Manning 2003; Acs and Nelson 2002; Hao and Xie 2001)

# Outcomes for children in relation to family form

## Children from cohabiting families

- one in five cohabiting families falling into the “poor” category;
- two in five children from cohabiting families experiencing food insecurity.

(McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Acs and Nelson 2002)

# The disadvantages they experience seem to be mediated through the following dynamics:

- **income disadvantage**  
(McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Acs and Nelson, 2002);
- **increased chances of parental depression/distress**  
(Brown, 2003; 2004; Dunn, 2002);
- **lower levels of social capital**  
(McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994);
- **lower levels of parental commitment towards non-biological children outside of marriage**  
(Lamb and Manning, 2003; Thomson, Hanson and McLanahan, 1994);
- **apparent relationship between family change and increased levels of teenage sexual activity**  
(Woodward, Fergusson and Horwood, 2001; Cherlin et al 1995).



# Single Parent Families

- Children more likely to engage in early sexual activity and become teenage parents

(Thomson, Hanson and McLanahan 1994; Woodward, Fergusson and Horwood, 2001; Deleire and Kalil 2002; Hao and Xie 2001);

- There is substantial difference in income levels between married parent families and single parent families;
- There are lower levels of parent-child quality contact time, general commitment, support and social capital.

# Children from single parent homes are at greater risk of:

- lower educational achievement;
- early sexual activity;
- early family formation; and
- late labour force participation.

(McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Thomson Hanson and McLanahan 1994).

# Cohabitation

- greater risk of being poor or being 'food insecure'  
(Acs and Nelson, 2002);
- highest levels of misbehaviour  
(Hao and Xie, 2001; Brown 2004);
- a stable family environment does not seem to reduce children's misbehaviour in cohabiting unions (Hao and Xie, 2001);
- no observable benefit with the presence of a non-biological partner in a household (Lamb and Manning, 2003);
- some researchers suggest that the most dangerous place for a child to be is with a non-biologically related male.

# Step-families

- greater risk of early sexual activity and pregnancy in teenage girls (Pong and Dronkers et al 2003);
- adversely affect school achievement (Maley, 2001; Carlson, 2006);
- family change in general seems to be associated with early sexual activity and youth offending (Fergusson, 1999);
- lower school achievement than those from married parent families (Brown, 2004);
- lower than average levels of emotional well-being for children (Thomson Hanson and McLanahan, 1994).

# Married parent families

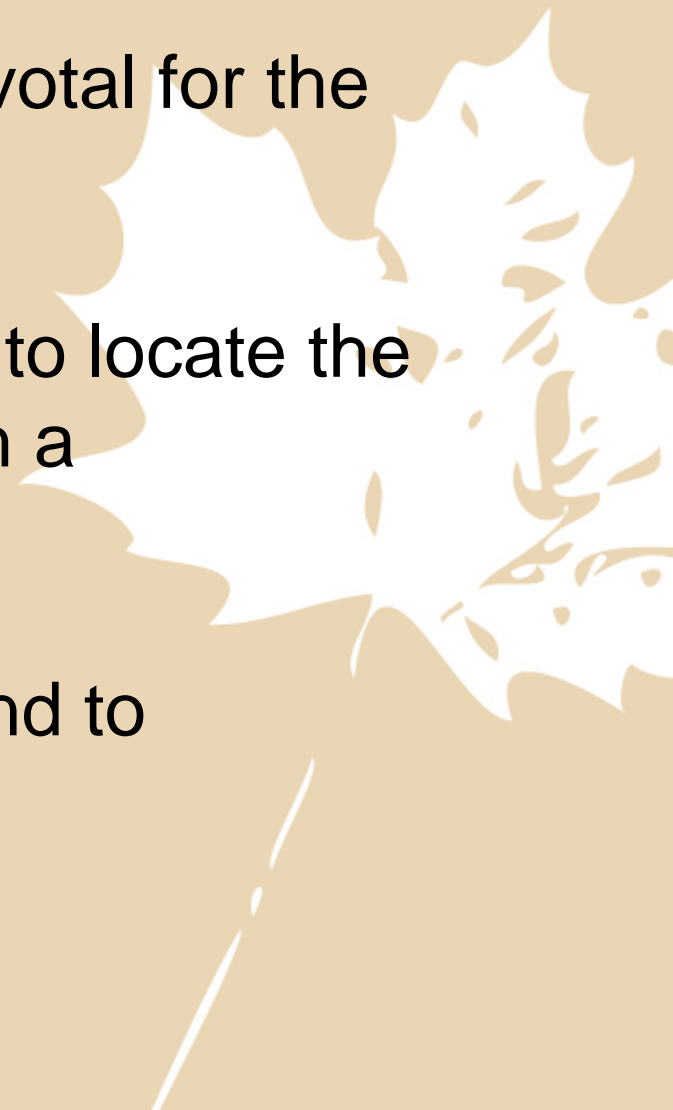
- more likely to graduate from high school;
- attain the highest levels of educational achievement;
- less likely to engage in early sexual activity;
- less likely fall into alcohol and drug abuse;
- less likely to exhibit behavioural problems

(Hao and Xie, 2001; Thomson Hanson and McLanahan, 1994; Lamb and Manning, 2003).

# Recommendations

1. Transform contemporary culture;
2. Effect change through policy and law in the field of family;
3. Revisit welfare;
4. Re-examining the provisions made for charitable giving;
5. Re-examine compulsory schooling sector's influence on our attitudes.

# Closing Summary

- If the raising of children is pivotal for the common good,
  - then it is reasonable to want to locate the optimal environment for such a responsibility,
  - and then seek to preserve and to strengthen it.
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The optimal environment for raising children is the traditional, or classic family form, as it is described in common law—that is the two-biological-parent married couple.

Therefore...



Efforts in culture need to be made that show marriage for what it really is.

Policy-makers and legislators need to:

- consider a “Marriage Act”,
- revisit welfare,
- revisit tax arrangements,
- and encourage educators to work with the various institutions of civil society, to strengthen marriage in schooling and in our communities.

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