

## NATIONAL POST

### **Marriage benefits us all**

Andrea Mrozek and Rebecca Walberg, Published: Wednesday, March 25, 2009

Too many Canadians know firsthand the emotional toll of family breakdown. And few would dispute there's a financial cost, too; a split household means paying rent twice, for example. There's also a public toll as a consequence of family breakdown, since the state often pays out benefits to help support broken families. It's this national financial burden that we aim to measure in the Cost of Family Breakdown in Canada, a report to be released in May, 2009.

Families headed by single mothers are at least four times more likely to be poor than those made up of a married couple and their children. When children are raised by single parents, they are more likely to be poor, and their families are more likely to rely upon public assistance programs for housing, child care and money for food, clothes and medication.

In 1960, fewer than one in 10 households were made up of single parents or common-law couples; today, that number is one in three. Yet instead of bemoaning this breakdown of marriage, our society tends to applaud it, saying "live and let live." The irony is that raising kids outside marriage actually makes a laissez-faire live and let live lifestyle less achievable -- because it increases the need for costly social programs, all of which amount to interventions in private family life.

A U. S. study last year determined that \$140-billion in public spending could be saved if all children lived with their own married parents. In the U. K., the extra costs to the taxpayer of poverty in single-parent households were measured at \$66-billion, equal to more than 6% of total government spending. (These numbers are conservative estimates because they look only at the direct costs of poverty-relief and social programs, and don't take into consideration the better health and educational outcomes linked with intact families.) Although no similar study has been done in Canada, we can expect that the results here would be similar.

A marriage is a private relationship, but it is also a public institution. Strong marriages are public goods because they generate social capital from which we all benefit.

Marriage makes families less likely to turn to the government for financial assistance, either directly through welfare, or, less directly, in the form of housing and day care subsidies.

All children deserve to grow up in a household with their own married parents. Supporting strong families is the right thing to do; it's also the financially responsible choice, for individual families and for Canada as a whole. - Rebecca Walberg is a Winnipeg-based policy analyst and writer. Andrea Mrozek is manager of research at the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada. They are the authors of the Cost of Family Breakdown in Canada, to be published in May.