

MARRIAGE

America's Best Antidote to Child Poverty

Collapse of Marriage the Major Cause of Child Poverty

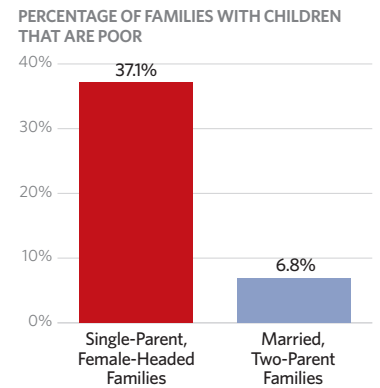
- **Single-Parent Households:** Single-parent families are nearly six times more likely to live in poverty than families headed by married parents. This is tragic, considering the dramatic growth in unwed births in the last five decades—from under 10% in 1960 to over 40% today.
- **Majority of Poor Families Not Married:** A staggering 71% of all poor families with children in the U.S. are unmarried. By contrast, married couples comprise only around 29% of poor families with children in the U.S.
- **Marriage Reduces Likelihood of Poverty for All Racial Groups:** Non-married Hispanic families are three times more likely to be poor than married Hispanic families. Non-married black families are five times more likely to be poor than married black families, while non-married white families are seven times more likely to be poor than married white families.

Marriage, Education, and Poverty

- **Two Strong Anti-Poverty Weapons:** The higher poverty rate among single-mother families is due to two factors: (1) lower income because of the absence of the father, and (2) the lower average education levels among single mothers. While policymakers recognize that education reduces poverty, most are unaware that marriage is an equally strong anti-poverty weapon. In the U.S., married couples with children are 76% less likely to be poor than non-married families with the same level of education. In fact, a married family headed by a high school dropout in the U.S. is actually less likely to be poor than a non-married family headed by an individual with a few years of college.
- **More Births Outside Marriage Are to Less-Educated Women:** Nationwide, roughly two-thirds of births among women who are high school dropouts are outside of marriage. In contrast, only 8.1% of births to college-educated women are to single women. Ironically, those women who will have the hardest time going it alone as a single parent are the most likely to have a child outside of marriage.
- **Two-Caste Society:** Because of these trends, the U.S. is splitting into a two-caste society. In the top half of the

In the United States, Marriage Drops the Probability of Child Poverty by 82 Percent

Source: Author's calculations based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2007–2009 data, http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_09_3YR_S1702&prodType=table (accessed August 6, 2012).



population, children are raised by married couples with a college education. In the bottom economic third of the population, children are raised by single mothers with a high school degree or less.

Anti-Poverty Policies Must Focus on Marriage

- **Not the Same as Teen Pregnancy:** While policymakers generally focus on teen pregnancy, in reality, only 7.7% births to single women in the U.S. occur to girls under age 18. Most non-marital births occur to young adult women in their early 20s. Lack of access to birth control is not a significant cause of non-marital births. Rather, the breakdown of marriage in low-income and working-class communities drives the vast majority of unwed childbearing in the U.S.
- **Ignoring the Positive Impact of Marriage on Children:** At present, the U.S. does little or nothing to discourage unwed births and nothing to encourage and strengthen healthy marriages. In fact, most welfare programs actively penalize low-income couples who do marry. Ironically, research shows that most unwed parents look favorably on the institution of marriage.
- **New Policies Should Build on These Attitudes:** Government should provide factual information to at-risk youth about the value of marriage. It should also connect low-income couples with community resources that will help them relearn the skills needed to develop and sustain healthy marriages before bringing children into the world. Finally, the state welfare system should be reformed to encourage rather than discourage marriage.