

# Fathers not included

May 2008

The logo for The Centre for Social Justice, featuring the text "THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE" in white, uppercase letters on a dark red background.

PRESS RELEASE FROM THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE  
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## **PUBLIC REJECTS BROWN'S BID TO SIDELINE FATHERS**

Gordon Brown's controversial plans to exclude all mention of fathers from the law covering test tube babies has been overwhelmingly rejected by the British public.

The vast majority of people believe that a child has a right to male and female parents and to know the identity of its biological parents.

But both these rights will be swept away if the Prime Minister wins a key Commons showdown on Tuesday when MPs vote on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill.

Mr Brown faces a Commons rebellion with 20 MPs, including 12 Labour MPs, signing an amendment to the Bill that would restore a child's right to a father and a mother. Many more Tory and Labour MPs are expected to support the rebels now that all MPs have a free vote on the issue.

The strength of public opposition to the Prime Minister's move is revealed in an independent YouGov opinion poll commissioned by the Centre for Social Justice, the think-tank chaired by former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith.

The survey found that eight out of 10 people believe a child has a right to two parents and that six out of 10 believe that a child should have male and female parents.

The present law states that fertility clinics must take account of a child's need for a father when assessing women for treatment.

This means that when a single woman or lesbian or gay couple apply for fertility treatment, the clinic cannot ignore the role fatherhood plays in a child's welfare.

Opponents of the Bill, who include Labour MP Geraldine Smith and Mr Duncan Smith, are warning that amid mounting evidence of the damage done by absentee fathers in terms of crime, anti-social behaviour and school failure, now is not the time to send an official message that fathers do not matter.

They also point out that existing sex discrimination laws mean that it is illegal to reject a lesbian couple applying for IVF treatment on the basis of their sexual orientation.

Mr Duncan Smith said: "This move by Gordon Brown has huge symbolic significance. It will not make any practical difference to lesbian and gay couples, but if passed it will send a dismissive message about the family and about the importance of fathers in the upbringing of children. We should be including fathers in; not including them out."

The report by the Family Law Review Group set up by Mr Duncan Smith's CSJ think-tank also condemns Government moves to remove from birth certificates all reference to the biological parentage of children.

Babies will be registered as having two mothers or two fathers and will not know who has brought them into the world.

The report says Ministers are bidding to change the law to appease the gay lobby. But it points out that fewer than 2 per cent of IVF treatments in 2006 were for single or lesbian women. In any case, lesbians and gays are protected by laws banning discrimination against couples on the grounds of their sexual orientation.

The report, 'Fathers Not Included', is to be sent to 600 MPs on Monday as they begin debating and voting on the HFE Bill, says the Government is flying in the face of a wealth of social research showing the importance of engaged fathers for families and communities.

"Fathers matter to children but fatherhood itself is essential for drawing men into dependable and responsible adulthood.," the report warns.

"It also disregards the fact that existing guidance provided by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority makes it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation.

"The combined effect of this guidance and the fact that this clause does not make the need for a father absolute, is to undermine the argument that this clause impacts unfairly on single or lesbian women.

"By ignoring the benefits fathers bring to children in order to accommodate childless adults, the Bill places the rights of adults at the centre, rather than the best interests of children.

"While we acknowledge the profound distress of involuntary childlessness, such a bias is wholly inconsistent with the welfare principle usually governing family law and a wide range of other policy areas."

The report recommends that the role of fathers and mothers should be formally recognised and protected by a new clause within the Bill and that

further research should be carried out looking at the outcomes for children born by donor conception and raised by same-sex couples.

The authors of the report also back calls for greater transparency in the birth registration system which would make it easier for donor-conceived children to find out about their biological parents.

The report's recommendations are backed up by the findings of an exclusive poll carried out by YouGov for the CSJ.

Key findings from the poll conducted earlier this month include:

\*61 per cent of people believed that it was very important or fairly important for children to know the identity of their biological parents. Only 10 per cent said it was not important at all.

\* 79 per cent said that there should NOT be an absolute right enshrined in law for everyone to have an IVF child if they wish.

\*80 per cent believed that a child had a right to two parents.

\* 60 per cent agreed that mothers and fathers both have their own unique contributions to bringing up a child and it is important children have both a male and female parent.

\*Only 24 per cent thought that the law should recognise the partner in a same-sex couple who has a child through assisted reproductive treatment in the same way as a biological parent.

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**Note to editors:**

Copies of Fathers Not Included; Assisted Reproduction, the Need for a Father and the Meaning of Parenthood are available from the Centre for Social Justice. Tel 0207 799 1477. [www.centreforsocialjustice.com](http://www.centreforsocialjustice.com)

**YouGov Polling May 2008** (Nationally representative YouGov poll of 1500 people carried out in May 2008)

For more information or to interview Iain Duncan Smith, please contact Nick Wood of Media Intelligence Partners on 07889 617003 or Alistair Thompson on 07970 162225 or 0203 008 8145 or visit [www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk](http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk)

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