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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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Never in Britain's history has family breakdown hit such heights – new report

Britain's levels of births outside marriage are at the highest point for at least 200 years, according to a major new study of the history of the family from a leading think-tank. Cohabitation levels have also soared from under 5% pre-1945 to 90% today.

The inquiry finds that births outside marriage were at low levels throughout the 19th Century and stayed flat until the 1960s. But since then they have soared, from a long-standing baseline of 5 per cent to 45 per cent today.

Research shows that children brought up by lone parents on average do much less well than those brought up by two parents. For instance, they are 75 per cent more likely to fail at school and 50 per cent more likely to have alcohol problems. Separate studies have also shown that cohabiting couples with children are far less stable than married couples with children.

The latest report, published by the independent think-tank the Centre for Social Justice, refutes claims by some academics and campaigners that there is nothing new about contemporary levels of family breakdown.

They have insisted that the so-called permissive 1960s were not a break with long-established patterns of family life

But the detailed examination of the evidence stretching back to the 18th Century by Professor Rebecca Probert of Warwick University and Dr Samantha Callan, the CSJ's senior family researcher, confirms that the sexual revolution of the 1960s did indeed mark a decisive break with 200 years of conventional family structure.

Their report amounts to a comprehensive refutation of Professor Pat Thane's research published last year by the British Academy, *Happy Families? History and Family Policy*, which was widely reported in the media.

Their key findings culled from detailed historical documents are:

- The percentage of births outside marriage in the England and Wales hovered around 5 per cent (except during the two world wars) before rising in the 1960s onwards.
- By the late 1970s, this figure was above 10 per cent, by 1991 it was 30 per cent and today it is 45 per cent.
- Levels of births outside marriage were the same in the 1950s as the 1750s at around 5 per cent.
- Claims that cohabitation levels, as opposed to marriage, were “high” in the early part of the 20th Century are not borne out by the facts. The authors point to research suggesting that in the 1950s and 1960s, only 1-3 per cent of couples cohabited before marriage. Other research puts the pre-1945 level of cohabitation at 4 per cent. Today, nearly 90 per cent of couples live together before getting married.
- Records of unemployment claims from the 1920s point to minimal levels of cohabitation.

Gavin Poole, Executive Director of the CSJ, says:

“Current high levels of cohabitation are a key factor in the rise in family breakdown in our country and this paper shows that we have not been here before. The CSJ has consistently argued, from the evidence, that marriage and commitment tend to stabilise and strengthen families and cannot be ignored.”

Professor Probert and Dr Callan say in their report:

“It is not our intention to suggest that all marriages in the past were happy and long-lasting, nor that there were no examples of successful and stable cohabiting relationships.

“But the quality of family life should be distinguished from its form.

“The fact that a number of marriages were brutal and fleeting should not obscure the centrality of marriage to family life in previous decades.

“While many Victorian marriages were short-lived because of the untimely death of one of the spouses, this does not mean that the experiences of the survivors were in any way comparable to those undergoing a divorce today.

“Similarly, while one can of course find examples from all historical periods of couples who lived together outside marriage, it does not follow that cohabitation was remotely as common in the past as it is today.”

For media inquiries, please contact Nick Wood of Media Intelligence Partners Ltd on 07889 617003 or 0203 008 8146 or Alistair Thompson on 07970 162225 or 0203 008 8145.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

The Centre for Social Justice is an independent think tank established, by Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP in 2004, to seek effective solutions to the poverty that blights parts of Britain.

In July 2007 the group published *Breakthrough Britain. Ending the Costs of Social Breakdown*. The paper presented over 190 policy proposals aimed at ending the growing social divide in Britain.

Subsequent reports have put forward proposals for reform of the police, prisons, social housing, the asylum system and family law. Other reports have dealt with street gangs and early intervention to help families with young children.

The Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP stood down as Chairman of the Centre on his appointment as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in May 2010 and is now the Founder and Patron.