

The forgotten role of families: why it's time to find our voice on strengthening families



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The CSJ Family Policy Unit:

The Centre for Social Justice was one of the first think tanks to set out the extent of family breakdown in our poorest communities. When we first published Breakdown Britain in 2006 we discovered a country where family breakdown was widespread in our poorest areas. Over 11 years we have continued to look carefully at how family breakdown entrenches poverty and limits the life chances of children growing up in poverty.

The Family Policy Unit has been established within the Centre for Social Justice to make the case for a more ambitious approach to strengthening families as part of a wider government poverty strategy.

Frank Young

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Executive Summary

This paper sets why a Government committed to ‘social reform’ should take family seriously and publishes new opinion polling which shows the public would strongly welcome this approach.

Britain is a country where family breakdown falls disproportionately on poorer children. The experience and consequences of family breakdown do not fall evenly and this inequality should be considered as serious as any other ‘injustice’ we address in the policy process. Almost half of all children are no longer living with both their parents by the time they sit their GCSEs. However for children in our poorest communities, the same proportion have already seen their parents split up by the time they start primary school ¹.

This is far from an ideological battle. There is now an established evidence base for the widespread impact of family breakdown on both levels poverty and the life chances of children growing up in poverty. Poverty levels for children growing up in lone parent families have almost double the ‘poverty risk’ than children living in couple families, with 47 per cent of children in lone parent families living below the official ‘poverty line’ compared to 24 per cent of children in couple families ².

When we talk about family breakdown we don’t simply mean separation or divorce, both family structure and relationship quality are increasingly understood to have an important impact on outcomes for children. We shouldn’t ignore either.

Not only does the evidence support government’s making family an important part of a poverty fighting strategy but voters have told the CSJ that they would welcome such a move:

- **Approaching three in four (72 per cent)³** adults in Britain think that family breakdown ‘is a serious problem and that more should be done to prevent families from breaking up’.
- **More than eight out of ten adults (81 per cent)⁴** think that ‘stronger families and improved parenting are important in addressing Britain’s social problems’.
- Almost the same proportion (**89 per cent⁵**) of adults say they support public money being spent on strengthening families and improving parenting specifically for children growing up in poverty.

This issue isn’t simply about poverty in financial terms. Family breakdown touches on almost every area of government policy and requires a government wide response. Reforming the structures of government to ensure every department recognises the role of families is not a structural argument, it is the starting point for recognising the role families play in every area to support the government’s wider policy objectives.

¹ CSJ, Fully Committed? How a Government could reverse family breakdown, 2014 p.15

² DWP, Households Below Average Income, An analysis of the income distribution 1994/95–2015/16, Table 4.14ts, London: Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 2017

³ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/ComRes polling of 2,026 adults between 2 August – 3 August 2017, To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Family breakdown is a serious problem in Britain today and more should be done to prevent families from breaking up.

⁴ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/YouGov polling of 1,665 adults between 31 July - 1 August 2017, How important, if at all, do you think stronger families and improved parenting are to addressing Britain’s social problems?

⁵ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/Bounty.com polling of 1,658 pre-natal and post-natal members via their online newsletter between 14th-25th August 2017, Do you support public money being spent on strengthening families and improving parenting with children in poverty?

This report makes a series of policy recommendations looking at how the structure of government could change to a successful approach to strengthening families:

Recommendation 1: Ministers should talk confidently about the role of families in government policy making. Support for family policies will continue to decline if a strong case isn't made. Young people overwhelmingly aspire to form strong families in their own lives but increasingly don't make the connection that this also matters in a policy context.

Developing a language to talk confidently about family breakdown is important in embedding family policy across government and more work should be done to test language around families to establish a successful communications framework around this issue.

Recommendation 2: The Prime Minister should create a Cabinet-level Ministerial brief for family policy to mirror the responsibility for 'Women and Equalities' currently held by the Secretary of State for Education.

Recommendation 3: The new Cabinet level Minister for Family Policy should be supported by a new Office for Family Policy with dedicated budget and civil service team to co-ordinate family policies across government. Each government department should have a named Minister with responsibility for developing family policies relevant to their departmental objectives.

Recommendation 4: Replace the existing government Family Test with Family Impact Assessments and develop government wide family stability targets with measurable performance indicators, including 'social justice' metrics related to family stability and marriage in low income groups.

Chapter 1: Why family breakdown is a social justice issue

'The Family Breakdown Gap'

Policy makers increasingly understand the link between stable families and improved outcomes for children. Children from stable families tend to do better at school, are overwhelmingly less likely to be involved with the criminal justice system and have better employment outcomes than children from families where high level of parental conflict and relationship break up is the norm.

Britain is a country where family breakdown falls disproportionately on poorer children:

- Almost half of all children are no longer living with both their parents by the time they sit their GCSEs. However for children in our poorest communities, the same proportion have already seen their parents split up by the time they start primary school⁶.
- A teenager growing up in the poorest twenty per cent of households is two thirds more likely to experience family breakdown than a teenager in the top twenty per cent of households⁷.

For a Government committed to tackling the 'root causes' of poverty it is not only important to understand the inequalities associated with family breakdown but also its relationship with entrenching poverty.

- Family instability is closely associated with a higher risk of poverty largely as a consequence of loss of household income and the employment characteristics of lone parenthood⁸. Recent employment data shows a there is a significant gap between lone parents and couple families experiencing worklessness with children growing in lone-parent families more than seven times more likely to be living in workless households (35.1 per cent) than couple households (4.5 per cent)⁹.
- Children in lone parent families have almost double the risk of living in poverty than children in couple families, with 47 per cent of children in lone parent families living below the official 'poverty line' compared to 24 per cent of children in couple families¹⁰.

None of this is intended to stigmatise lone parents who suffer some of the worst effects of poverty. Instead government needs to better articulate the impact of family breakdown as a component of poverty and interventions to prevent it from happening in the first place.

In most other major areas of government policy, particularly education and health, prevention is seen as a priority. This should equally be true for the breakdown of families. Helping to build stronger and more stable relationships is particularly important in our poorest areas, where relationship breakdown is most concentrated.

6 CSJ, Fully Committed? How a Government could reverse family breakdown, 2014 p.15

7 Ibid

8 DWP, An evidence review of the drivers of child poverty for families in poverty now and for poor children growing up to be poor adults, 2014, p62

9 ONS, Working and Workless Households, April – June 2017, p.7

10 DWP, Households Below Average Income, An analysis of the income distribution 1994/95–2015/16, Table 4.14ts, London: Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 2017

The impact on long term poverty:

Children in families that break apart are more than twice as likely to experience long term poverty¹¹ and have almost double the risk of living in relative poverty compared to couple families¹².

The link to future poverty for children growing up in poorer households is also closely associated with family instability through its interaction with poor educational attainment and future worklessness¹³. Children who experience family breakdown perform less well at school, gain fewer qualifications and are more likely to be expelled from school¹⁴. All significant indicators of future poverty.

Evidence from the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) points to the quality family relationships and particularly those between parents as a 'primary' influence on a child's future life chances¹⁵.

Despite the increased poverty risks it is estimated that the Treasury spends about £1 in preventative spending for every £6,000 pounds responding to the consequences of family breakdown¹⁶.

Fathers improve life chances:

Tackling widespread levels of fatherlessness also needs to be seen within the context of the Government's approach to social reform. According to recent research from the University of Edinburgh children growing up in low income households have significantly improved chances of escaping poverty where they have an active father figure at home¹⁷.

The link between active father engagement and improved childhood outcomes, particularly educational achievement, is increasingly understood. Research cited by the Department for Work and Pensions¹⁸ shows that children with highly involved dads do better at school, have higher self-esteem and are less likely to get into trouble in adolescence. In a study published earlier this year the children of active fathers were up to 28 per cent less likely to suffer behavioural problems in their pre-teen years compared to children without a father figure at home¹⁹.

When we talk about family breakdown in practice this almost always means a father figure leaving the family home, lone fathers with dependent children make up only 14 out of every 100 lone parent families²⁰. Across the UK 2.7million children have no father figure at home, representing almost 1 in 5 of all dependent children²¹.

11 David Cameron, Life Chances Speech, January 2016

12 DWP (2017) Households below average income, 1994/95-2015/16. Table 4.14ts

13 DWP, Social Justice: transforming lives, p16

14 Mooney A, Oliver C and Smith M, Impact of Family Breakdown on Children's Well-Being: Evidence Review, London: Department for Children, Schools and Families, June 2009, p7

15 Early Intervention Foundation, What Works To Enhance Inter-Parental Relationships And Improve Outcomes For Children? 2016, p.13

16 CSJ, Fractured Families: Why stability matters, 2013, p52

17 Clapton, Gary, University of Edinburgh, Dads Matter 2014

18 Department for Work and Pensions, Father Engagement Seminar, 29th February 2016

19 Charles Opondo, Maggie Redshaw, Emily Savage-McGlynn and Maria A Quigley, Father involvement in early child-rearing and behavioural outcomes in their pre-adolescent children: evidence from the ALS-PAC UK birth cohort [accessed via: <http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/6/11/e012034.full> (15/09/17)]

20 ONS (2016) Families and Household report

21 CSJ calculation: 13.9m dependent children in the UK (2016), 22 per cent live in lone parent families (3.058m) of which 90 per cent live in lone mother families (2.752m).

Marriage:

If the Government wants to address family stability and promote stronger relationships as part of a wider social justice strategy it cannot afford to be neutral about marriage. Reference to marriage has almost disappeared from Government policy documents despite evidence that it provides the most stable form of relationship.

There is now a considerable body of evidence pointing to the stability of marriage and couples in married relationships, despite this there is a considerable 'marriage gap' between low and middle to high income families. 87 per cent of high earners (over £43,000) marry compared to only 24 per cent of low earners (under £16,000)²². Marriage is increasingly disappearing in poorer communities and with it levels of family stability.

Opinion polling contained in this report sets out public support for policy measures to promote marriage addressing political concerns over 'moralising' on family formation.

²² e Marriage Foundation, Establishing the facts about family breakdown: transforming the debate about marriage p. 2 [accessed via: <http://marriagefoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Establishing-the-facts-about-family-breakdown-1.pdf> (15/09/17)]

Chapter 2: Where is the Government's family policy?

Ahead of the general election, the Conservative Party Manifesto offered little assurance that tackling family breakdown would be a major policy priority. Despite this there are reasons to believe that Theresa May is developing a distinctive approach to family policy as Prime Minister.

Theresa May was briefly the first and only Shadow Secretary of State for the Family from June 2004 to December 2005. In a speech to Conservative Party Conference in 2004, Theresa May talked warmly about the importance of the family telling an audience of Conservative Party members that the family was back *"at the heart of the Conservative Party"*²³.

As Prime Minister, Theresa May has privately offered some strongly supportive rhetoric on the role of families. In 2016 as a candidate for the leadership of the Conservative Party Theresa May responded to a letter from Conservative MPs by stating that strong families were *"vital"* to her vision for social reform²⁴.

A little less than a year later as Prime Minister there was even warmer rhetoric in another letter to Conservative MPs, declaring that *'supporting happy and successful families is one of the most important tasks any Government can do'* and recognising that *'the overall quality of family life being a key determinate of a child's future prospects'*²⁵.

This warm rhetoric has in a very limited way found its way into some early speeches from the Prime Minister. In her 'shared society' speech to the Charity Commission in early 2017 the Prime Minister outlined her vision for a society where the social bonds of family (amongst other things) are *'as important as the role of Government'*²⁶. This speech remains one of her most significant as Prime Minister in shaping a Government narrative.

Despite the strong evidence that family breakdown and correspondingly lone parenthood is a significant predictor of poverty the Government appears ambivalent to family structure. In a Westminster Hall debate on Marriage and stable families, then Work & Pensions Minister Caroline Nokes MP offered an insight into Government attitudes towards the family by saying: *"the evidence shows that it is not the structure of a family that is important but the quality of the relationship between the parents"*²⁷.

23 Archive: <http://www.ukpol.co.uk/theresa-may-2004-speech-to-conservative-party-spring-conference/>

24 Correspondence seen by the CSJ

25 Correspondence seen by the CSJ

26 <https://www.gov.uk/Government/speeches/the-shared-society-prime-ministers-speech-at-the-charity-commission-annual-meeting>

27 Hansard, 02-01-2017, Column 388WH

In office, the Prime Minister inherited a social justice strategy (or 'Life Chances Strategy') that was all but ready to publish. This document was intended to define David Cameron's approach to social injustice and improving life chances in our poorest areas. A revised version of this Strategy called *'Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families'* was published by the Government in April 2017. This heavily revised version of the Life Chances Strategy maintains the Government's ambivalence to family structure and preference for 'parental conflict' as the primary measurement of family stability.

The Department for Work and Pensions has committed to developing a new 'parental conflict' programme focused on improving parental relationships in workless families and a revised relationship support component within the existing Troubled Families Programme²⁸.

There are several areas where Theresa May is developing a distinctive approach to family policy across her Government:

Relationships and Sex Education:

In March 2017 the Government adopted an amendment to the Children and Social Work Bill to introduce a new subject of Relationships and Sex Education in all schools in England (with 'Relationships Education' being taught in Primary Schools and 'Relationships and Sex Education' at Secondary level). With the passing of the Children and Social Work Bill into law, new statutory guidance is being developed by the Department for Education to promote the teaching of "healthy adult relationships"²⁹ in all English schools.

Domestic Violence and Abuse:

The development of relationships education in schools reflects the Prime Minister's stated 'personal interest' in tackling domestic violence and abuse. 1 in 5 teenage girls are now subject to assault from a boyfriend³⁰ and more than half of girls aged 13-18 report some form of physical relationship abuse³¹.

The Conservative Party Manifesto of 2017 sets out how an incoming Conservative Government "would and should go further" in introducing legislation to introduce a statutory definition of domestic violence, create a new 'aggravated offence' of domestic violence (if behaviour is directed at a child) and the creation of a Domestic Violence and Abuse Commissioner to police new legislation³². In June 2017 the Government introduced the Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill to enact these manifesto commitments.

28 DWP, *Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families* (2107) p19

29 DfE, Policy statement: relationships education, relationships and sex education, and personal, social, health and economic education, March 2017

30 http://www.uclan.ac.uk/news/large_numbers_teenage_girls_experience_sexual_coercion_relationships.php

31 <https://www.gov.uk/Government/news/abuse-in-teenage-relationships-highlighted-in-campaign>

32 Conservative Party Manifesto 2017, p58

The Farmer Review:

In our prisons the importance of family relationships is now recognised as an important part of any effort to promote rehabilitation. Research conducted by the Ministry of Justice has found that receiving family visits can reduce re-offending by 39 per cent³³. In August 2017 the Government enthusiastically adopted the recommendations of the Farmer Review to improve 'family ties' to reduce re-offending and intergenerational criminal behaviour. Lord Farmer described the important role of family ties as the 'golden thread' running through prison culture. In endorsing the Farmer Review, Minister for Prisons and Probation Sam Gyimah MP described family as 'the best agency for rehabilitating criminals'.

A Ministry of Justice white paper on prison safety and reform published in November 2016 proposed developing a family measurement for assessing the performance of prisons. The Farmer Review builds on this policy paper with recommendations for further measures such as the involvement of families in sentence planning, resettlement planning and decisions regarding the use of Release on Temporary Licence.

Supporting fathers:

One noticeably consistent feature of Theresa May's approach to the family is her commitment to supporting fathers following separation. Her 2004 speech to Conservative Party Conference focused on potential reforms to family law to improve the rights of fathers following separation. In a link to her period as Shadow Secretary of State for the Family a commitment to address 'family justice' found its way into the 2017 Conservative Party Manifesto.

The DWP policy paper 'Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families' recognises the important role of fathers in improving outcomes for children. In response to this a new Government parenting programme will specifically support fathers and look at 'what more could be done' to help fathers play a positive and active role in supporting their children.

Following publication of this policy paper the Department for Work and Pensions has confirmed it is looking to develop the first national strategy for fatherhood.

How strengthening families could support the Government's social reform agenda:

The Government's ambition to deliver a programme of 'social reform' is reflected in the personal policy priorities of the Prime Minister: addressing our childhood mental health crisis, opening up high quality schooling to children from poorer backgrounds and ensuring work remains the best route out of poverty - all with the aim of creating a 'country that works for everyone'. Each of these areas has an important relationship with family breakdown.

1. Childhood Mental Health:

Britain has an increasingly serious childhood mental health problem with one in ten children estimated to have a diagnosable mental health condition³⁴. In a survey of over 4,500 children seen by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in 2015 'family relationship problems' were cited by half of these children as the cause of their mental health problems³⁵.

2. Educational Underachievement:

Ensuring the best education is available to our poorest children is a distinctive feature of the Prime Minister's attitude to 'social reform'. It is hard to disentangle educational attainment from the effects of the home environment where children who experience family breakdown are more likely to experience behavioural problems and perform less well in school³⁶.

It is increasingly understood that poor relationships at home will drive negative behaviours which in turn lead to poor attainment at school³⁷. High levels of parental conflict are now recognised a significant contributing factor to later life outcomes for children³⁸.

3. Work as the best route out of poverty:

Stronger families are often overlooked as part of a successful economy and underpin the Government's concern over comparatively low productivity levels. Underemployment is a significantly bigger problem for lone parents, with underemployment rates around 3.5 times higher than couple families with children and double the unemployment level³⁹.

Stable families are more likely to be in work and economically productive than fractured families. Helping couples to stay together reduces worklessness and decreases dependency on the state. The average lone parent household receives 130 per cent higher weekly benefit income than the average couple with children⁴⁰. For a Government committed to 'work as the best route out of poverty' supporting families should be seen as an economic as well as social policy issue.

In reflecting on Theresa May's record as Prime Minister so far there is little that can be described as a coherent approach to strengthening family life and even less public rhetoric to suggest this is a strong policy priority for the Government.

A Manifesto to Strengthen Families

In September 2017, almost 50 Conservative MPs wrote to Theresa May endorsing a Manifesto document containing a series of policies to strengthen family life⁴¹. Being recognised as the 'party of the family' remains a strong priority for Conservative MPs. In an uncertain political environment stabilising family life in our poorest areas offers the Prime Minister a clear policy platform for her social reform ambitions which would not only find support among her own MPs but as new opinion polling shows, would be supported by the public too.

34 Mental Health Foundation: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-children-and-young-people>

35 Relate: https://www.relate.org.uk/sites/default/files/relationships_alliance_submission_to_2017_manifestos_-_supporting_evidence.pdf

36 CSJ, Fractured Families (2013), p14

37 DWP, An evidence review of the drivers of child poverty for families in poverty now and for poor children growing up to be poor adults (2014), p92

38 DWP/EIF: what works to enhance inter-parental relationships and improve outcomes for children (2016), p28

39 Policy Exchange, Parenting Alone (2014), p30

40 Policy Exchange, Parenting Alone (2014), p14

41 www.strengtheningfamiliesmanifesto.com

Chapter 3: Centre for Social Justice polling on the family

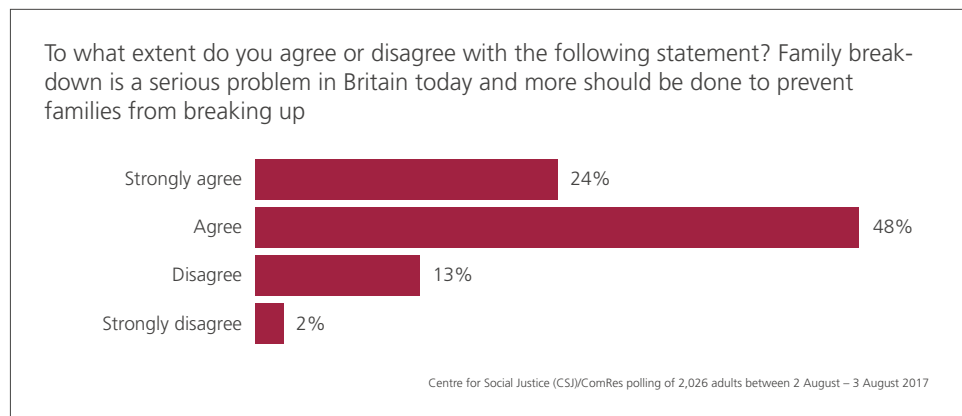
The CSJ conducted three polling exercises during July - August 2017 to test public attitudes towards the role of family in government policy. These survey results challenge a political orthodoxy which says the public are strongly ambivalent to the family. Any reluctance to discuss family is an entirely 'Westminster Village' based concern not supported by the attitudes of voters on this issue. The results of these opinion polls should provide politicians and policy makers with confidence to talk openly about strengthening families.

Despite the long term trend of family breakdown in the UK, with many voters experiencing relationship break up in their own lives, support for stronger families (and in particular marriage) remains strong.

Voters would welcome a government talking about family:

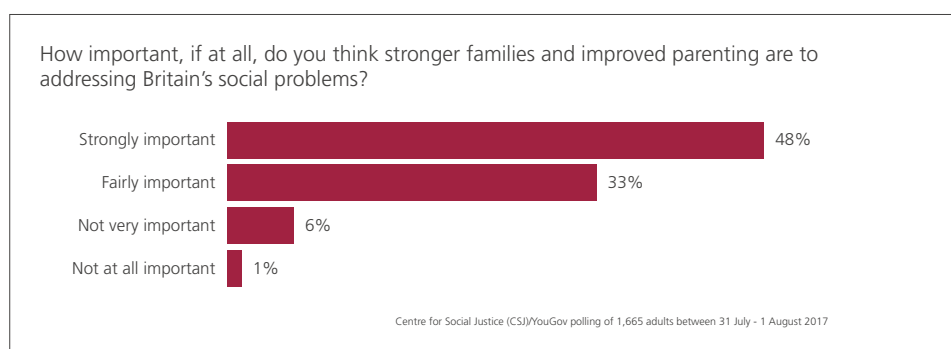
There is clear public support for a government which is willing to adopt strongly pro-family rhetoric and develop policies to strengthen families and improve parenting, particularly as part of a wider programme to reduce poverty and improve life chances.

Approaching three in four (72 per cent)⁴² adults in Britain think that family breakdown 'is a serious problem and that more should be done to prevent families from breaking up'.



⁴² Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/ComRes polling of 2,026 adults between 2 August – 3 August 2017, To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Family breakdown is a serious problem in Britain today and more should be done to prevent families from breaking up.

More than eight out of ten adults (81 per cent)⁴³ think that ‘stronger families and improved parenting are important in addressing Britain’s social problems’. Only seven per cent⁴⁴ of respondents think that stronger families and improved parenting are not important in addressing social problems.



When it comes to spending money on strengthening families 76 per cent⁴⁵ of adults in Britain support the policy proposal of government spending extra money with the goal of strengthening families and improving parenting to prevent social problems. 87 per cent⁴⁶ think a strong family life is important for children growing up in poverty, only five per cent⁴⁷ disagree.

Even younger people overwhelmingly agree that stronger families should play a part in any government’s approach to reducing poverty, with over three quarters (76 per cent)⁴⁸ saying a strong family life is important for children growing up in poverty. This figure is 93 per cent⁴⁹ for over 65s.

There is a generational divide in support for talking about families:

There is a clear generational divide in attitudes towards the family with younger adults less likely to support strongly pro-family positions than their parents and grandparents.

The reasons for this could be explained by the inevitable impact of having children or a generation who have grown up with widespread personal experience of their own family break up.

While almost two thirds (63 per cent)⁵⁰ of all adults think family breakdown is a ‘serious problem for society’ only 45 per cent⁵¹ of 18-24 year olds agree compared to 74 per cent⁵² of older adults aged 65 or over.

When asked to consider how important stronger families and improved parenting are to addressing social problems, an even larger generational gap emerges with 61 per cent⁵³ of younger adults agreeing compared to almost all (93 per cent)⁵⁴ over 65s.

43 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/YouGov polling of 1,665 adults between 31 July - 1 August 2017, How important, if at all, do you think stronger families and improved parenting are to addressing Britain’s social problems?

44 Ibid

45 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/ComRes polling of 2,026 adults between 2 August – 3 August 2017, Do you support or oppose the following policy proposals? The Government should spend extra money with the goal of strengthening families and improving parenting in order to prevent social problems

46 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/YouGov polling of 1,665 adults between 31 July - 1 August 2017, How important, if at all, do you think a strong family life is for children growing up in poverty?

47 Ibid

48 Ibid

49 Ibid

50 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/YouGov polling of 1,665 adults between 31 July - 1 August 2017, How serious a problem, if at all, do you think family breakdown is in today’s society?

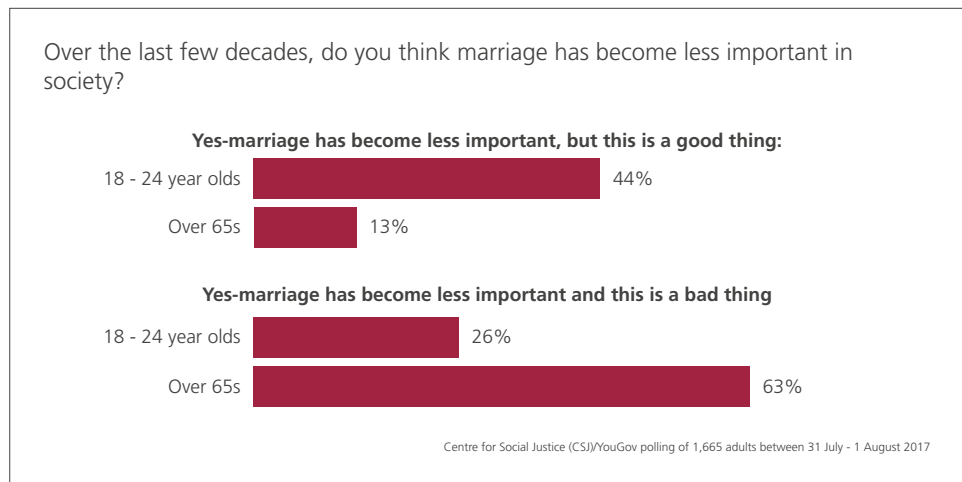
51 Ibid

52 Ibid

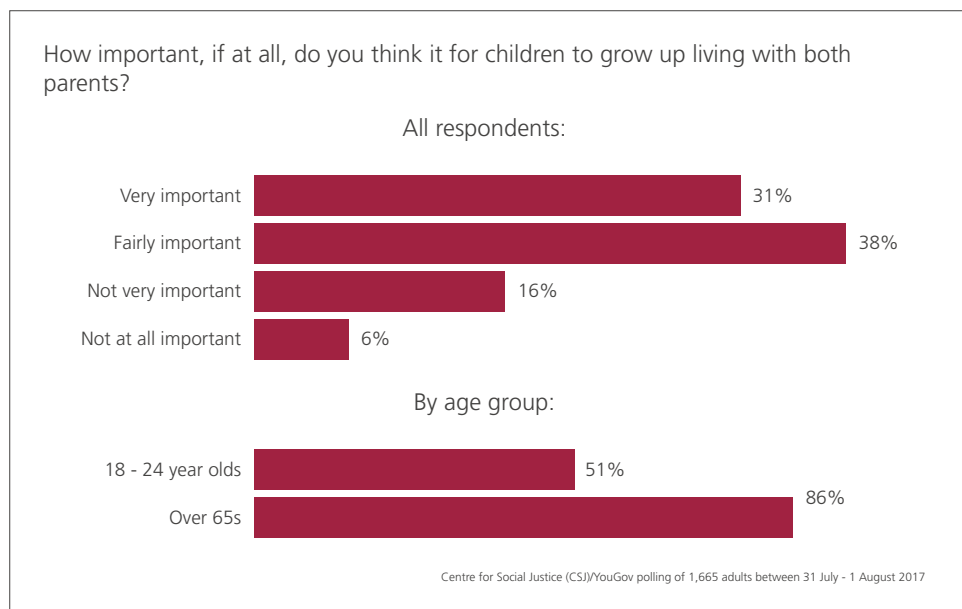
53 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/YouGov polling of 1,665 adults between 31 July - 1 August 2017, How important, if at all, do you think stronger families and improved parenting are to addressing Britain’s social problems?

54 Ibid

Just over a quarter of 18 - 24 year olds (26 per cent)⁵⁵ agree that marriage had become less important and felt this was a bad thing compared to 63 per cent⁵⁶ of over 65s. Almost half (44 per cent)⁵⁷ of young adults think it is a good thing that marriage has become less important to society.



51 per cent⁵⁸ of younger adults (18-24) think it is important for children to 'grow up with both parents' compared to 86 per cent⁵⁹ of older voters (over 65). A similar generational gap exists when voters are asked to consider the importance of fathers in families, 46 per cent⁶⁰ of 18 - 24 year olds think 'fatherlessness is a serious problem' compared to 80 per cent⁶¹ of over 65s. Almost nine out of ten (88 per cent) parents polled by Bounty.com agreed it was important for children to grow up with both parents, including 6 out of 10 lone parents (62 per cent)⁶².



55 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/YouGov polling of 1,665 adults between 31 July - 1 August 2017, Over the last few decades, do you think marriage has become less important in society?

56 Ibid

57 Ibid

58 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/YouGov polling of 1,665 adults between 31 July - 1 August 2017, How important, if at all, do you think it for children to grow up living with BOTH parents?

59 Ibid

60 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/YouGov polling of 1,665 adults between 31 July - 1 August 2017, How serious a problem, if at all, do you think fatherlessness, in particular, is in today's society?

61 Ibid

62 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/Bounty.com polling of 1,658 pre-natal and post-natal members via their online newsletter between 14th-25th August 2017, How important is it for children to grow up with both parents?

This generational divide may also explain a noticeable overall downward trend in support for strongly pro-family value statements. Where we have repeated questions from a similar polling exercises in 2011 and 2012. The number of all UK adults who believe family breakdown is a serious problem for society has fallen from **83 per cent** to **63 per cent**⁶³ over a six year period.

In 2012 **81 per cent**⁶⁴ of UK adults felt it was important for children to grow up with both parents, a figure which has fallen to **69 per cent**⁶⁵ in 2017. A similar decline can be found in support for the institution of marriage in 2012 **60 per cent**⁶⁶ of all adults said marriage had become less important and that this was a bad thing compared to **45 per cent**⁶⁷ today. Despite this young people overwhelmingly aspire to a stable family life in their own lives, much more needs to be done to communicate the link between their own aspirations and the role of policy in encouraging stronger families for other people.

Almost nine out of ten (**88 per cent**) parents polled by Bounty.com agreed it was important for children to grow up with both parents, including 6 out of 10 lone parents (**62 per cent**)⁶⁸.

It is noticeable that this gap shrinks when the public are asked to link a strongly pro-family statement to government activity. When asked whether or not they support the policy proposal: 'the Government should spend extra money with the goal of strengthening families and improving parenting in order to prevent social problems', **70 per cent**⁶⁹ of 18-24 year olds agree compared to **79 per cent**⁷⁰ of adults over 65. Similarly when asked if they agree with the statement: 'family breakdown is a serious problem in Britain today and more should be done to prevent families from breaking up', there is a 12 point gap between the youngest and oldest age groups (**66 per cent**⁷¹ of 18 -24 year olds agreeing versus **78 per cent**⁷² of adults in Britain over 65).

This trend is repeated in our online Bounty.com poll of parents where almost 9 out of 10 parents – across every family type and household income group – support public money being spent on strengthening families and improving parenting with children in poverty⁷³.

Despite the generational divide, support for talking about the role of families in policy exists across all age groups in large numbers. Enough to make politicians think again about their reluctance to talk about this issue.

63 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/YouGov polling of 1,665 adults between 31 July - 1 August 2017, How serious a problem, if at all, do you think family breakdown is in today's society?

64 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/YouGov polling of 1,665 adults between 31 July - 1 August 2017, How important, if at all, do you think it for children to grow up living with BOTH parents?

65 Ibid

66 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/YouGov polling of 1,665 adults between 31 July - 1 August 2017, Over the last few decades, do you think marriage has become less important in society?

67 Ibid

68 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/Bounty.com polling of 1,658 pre-natal and post-natal members via their online newsletter between 14th-25th August 2017, How important is it for children to grow up with both parents?

69 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/ComRes polling of 2,026 adults between 2 August – 3 August 2017, Do you support or oppose the following policy proposals? The Government should spend extra money with the goal of strengthening families and improving parenting in order to prevent social problems

70 Ibid

71 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/Bounty.com polling of 1,658 pre-natal and post-natal members via their online newsletter between 14th-25th August 2017, How important is it for children to grow up with both parents?

72 Ibid

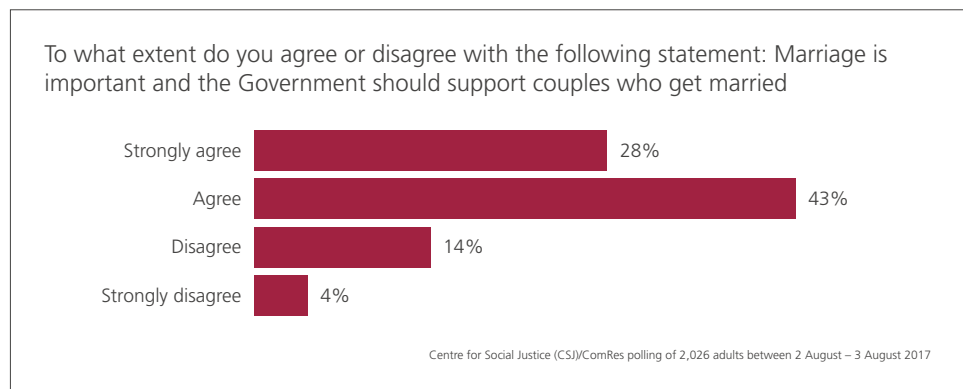
73 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/Bounty.com polling of 1,658 pre-natal and post-natal members via their online newsletter between 14th-25th August 2017, Do you support public money being spent on strengthening families and improving parenting with children in poverty?

Marriage is not the 'M' word for voters and they support policies which support married couples:

Politicians are perhaps most reluctant to talk confidently about the institution of marriage. This reticence is not shared amongst the public. Levels of support for promoting marriage are strong with both support for the institution of marriage and active tax policies to promote it:

Almost half the public (45 per cent)⁷⁴ feel marriage had become less important over the last few decades and agreed that this was a bad thing including 47 per cent⁷⁵ of adults in social grades C2DE. Overall only a quarter (25 per cent)⁷⁶ of adults were happy to see the decline of marriage as an 'important' institution.

When people are prompted to consider the role of government in supporting marriage more than seven out of ten (71 per cent)⁷⁷ agreed that 'marriage is important and government should support married couples' including over two thirds of adults in social grades C2DE (70 per cent)⁷⁸ where family breakdown is highest. Only one in five (19 per cent)⁷⁹ adults in Britain disagree with this statement.



74 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/YouGov polling of 1,665 adults between 31 July - 1 August 2017, Over the last few decades, do you think marriage has become less important in society?

75 Ibid

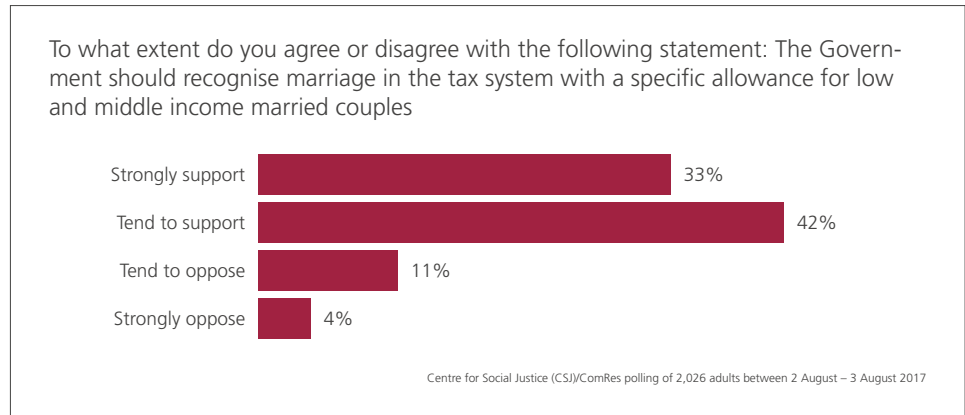
76 Ibid

77 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/ComRes polling of 2,026 adults between 2 August – 3 August 2017, To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Marriage is important and the Government should support couples who get married

78 Ibid

79 Ibid

Support for policy statements which promote marriage are also popular. **Three quarters of adults in Britain (75 per cent)**⁸⁰ support the policy proposal that 'the Government should recognise marriage in the tax system with a specific allowance for low and middle income married couples' with only one in six (**15 per cent**)⁸¹ disagreeing.



The idea of government providing a tax allowance for married couples is supported across all social grades including **72 per cent**⁸² of adults in social groups AB who would not personally benefit from this proposal. Tax incentives to support marriage are supported across all age groups by a clear majority. In our online poll of parents with Bounty.com almost **eight out of ten (78 per cent)**⁸³ parents supported a tax allowance for married couples including a majority of lone parents (**57 per cent**)⁸⁴.

80 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/ComRes polling of 2,026 adults between 2 August – 3 August 2017, Do you support or oppose the following policy proposals? The Government should recognise marriage in the tax system with a specific allowance for low and middle income married couples

81 Ibid

82 Ibid

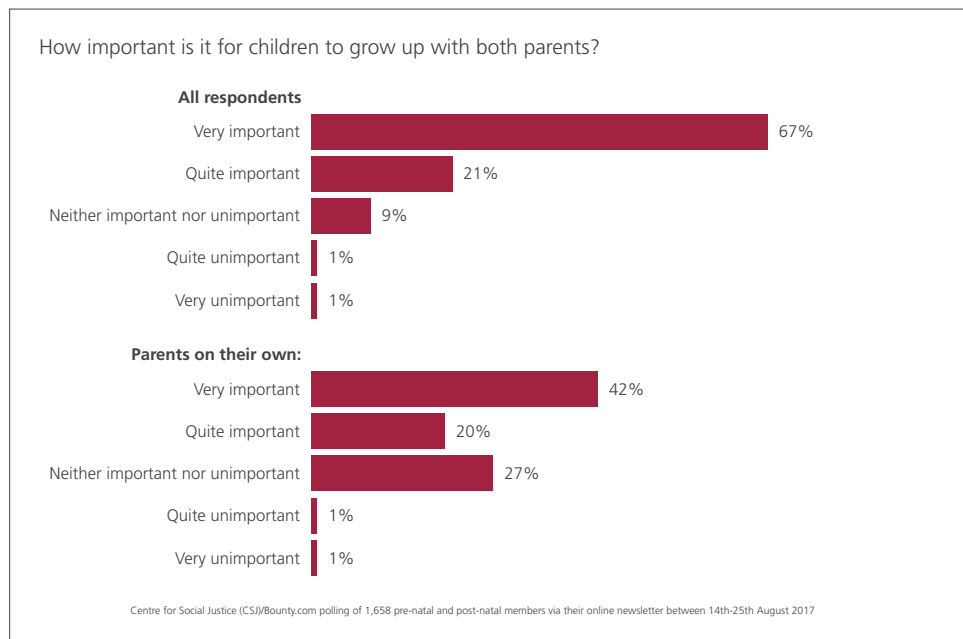
83 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/Bounty.com polling of 1,658 pre-natal and post-natal members via their online newsletter between 14th-25th August 2017, Do you support a tax allowance for married couples?

84 Ibid

The forgotten role of fathers:

The public are strongly supportive of the role of fathers in families and ensuring children grow up living with both parents.

Over two thirds (69 per cent)⁸⁵ agree that it is 'important for children to grow up living with both parents' with 22 per cent disagreeing. This includes a similar proportion of women (64 per cent)⁸⁶. In an online poll of parents conducted by Bounty.com, 88 per cent⁸⁷ of parents agreed with the statement 'it is important for children to grow up with both parents', including almost two thirds (62 per cent)⁸⁸ of lone parents. For parents who live together with their own children this figures rises to 94 per cent⁸⁹.



The role of fathers in strengthening families and as part of a 'social reform' strategy is strongly supported by the public with 71 per cent⁹⁰ of British adults agreeing 'the absence of fathers in families has a negative impact on children growing up in poverty' and 13 per cent disagreeing.

64 per cent⁹¹ of the public think the trend of 'fatherlessness' is a 'serious' problem for society. This area sees the biggest differential in generational agreement with a 34 per cent⁹² gap between young adults (18-24) who see a lack of fathers as important (46 per cent)⁹³ versus 80 per cent⁹⁴ of older adults (over 65).

85 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/YouGov polling of 1,665 adults between 31 July - 1 August 2017, How important, if at all, do you think it for children to grow up living with BOTH parents?

86 Ibid

87 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/Bounty.com polling of 1,658 pre-natal and post-natal members via their online newsletter between 14th-25th August 2017, How important is it for children to grow up with both parents?

88 Ibid

89 Ibid

90 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/ComRes polling of 2,026 adults between 2 August - 3 August 2017, To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? The absence of fathers (or 'fatherlessness') in families has a negative impact on children growing up in poverty

91 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/YouGov polling of 1,665 adults between 31 July - 1 August 2017, How serious a problem, if at all, do you think fatherlessness, in particular, is in today's society?

92 Ibid

93 Ibid

94 Ibid

Chapter 4: Creating a Government focused on supporting families

In recent years David Cameron tested the idea that politicians shouldn't talk about families. As Prime Minister David Cameron famously described families '*as the greatest poverty fighting tool ever invented*'⁹⁵ and talked extensively about his personal support for family.

Polling commissioned by the CSJ demonstrates voters - even younger voters - are willing to hear strongly pro-family messages as part of a wider Government approach to tackling poverty and pitched in social justice terms.

It shouldn't be 'political taboo' to talk confidently about how we can support families to stay together, especially for children growing up in our poorest areas where the costs of family breakdown fall disproportionately. In our surveys over **88 per cent** of parents from social class C2DE (where levels of family breakdown are highest) agreed that the Government is right to say that stability matters for children⁹⁶. Even lone parents overwhelmingly agreed it was an 'important' message⁹⁷. One noticeable trend of our polling is a general increase in support for strongly pro-family messages alongside government activity (or spending) across all age groups and demographics.

Above all if we are going to strengthen relationships, improve parenting and reduce the inequalities associated with family breakdown we need politicians who are willing to talk about this issue and discover a way of talking confidently about family breakdown and its consequences. The evidence from our polling is that voters would overwhelmingly support such an approach.

With a significant body of evidence of the impact and consequences of family breakdown no politician needs to fall into the trap of 'moralising'. Few people pretend that strengthening families is the only thing that matters to policy makers but talking about the consequences of families breaking up and the relationship with poverty and life chances should be part of the political conversation.

The UK has some of the highest levels of family breakdown in the world, but it's the inequality around family breakdown that should concern policy makers and our politicians. Your chances of seeing your family break apart shouldn't be defined by birth or circumstance, but in the UK it is and this inequality or unfairness should guide politicians on the language to use around this issue.

95 David Cameron, Life Chances Speech, January 2016

96 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/Bounty.com polling of 1,658 pre-natal and post-natal members via their online newsletter between 14th-25th August 2017, The Government is right to say stability matters for children

97 *ibid*

Recommendation 1: Ministers should talk confidently about the role of families in government policy making. Support for family policies will continue to decline if a strong case isn't made. Young people overwhelmingly aspire to form strong families in their own lives but increasingly don't make the connection that this also matters in a policy context.

Developing a language to talk confidently about family breakdown is important in embedding family policy across government and more work should be done to test language around families to establish a successful communications framework around this issue.

Supporting families cuts across every part of government and requires a high level of cross departmental working. This has historically been one of the challenges to developing strong family policies. Strengthening families is not simply about discrete policies but a government wide approach to address pressures on family life across every area of policy. In short it requires a different approach to government.

Recommendation 2: The Prime Minister should create a Cabinet-level Ministerial brief for family policy to mirror the responsibility for 'Women and Equalities' currently held by the Secretary of State for Education.

A recent 'Manifesto to Strengthen Families' supported by almost a third of backbench Conservatives called for a Cabinet Minister to be appointed with responsibility for families. This Cabinet Minister would hold another brief in the same way that the Secretary of State for Education is also responsible for the Government's equalities agenda. A Cabinet level Minister with specific responsibility for families would have the political authority to deliver this area of policy across government through Cabinet Sub-Committees.

To support a new cross-departmental Ministerial responsibility for families. A new body similar to the Government Equalities Office based inside the Department of Education should be established. Like the Government Equalities Office a new Office for Family Policy should have a dedicated budget and civil service team to enable the prioritisation and co-ordination of family policies across Government.

Every government department should take responsibility for strengthening families and appoint a named Minister who is responsible for ensuring that policies aimed at strengthening families are delivered as part of their Department's policymaking process. Supporting families should be included within all Departmental Business Plans to drive the development of bespoke family policies across every area of government.

Recommendation 3: The new Cabinet level Minister for Family Policy should be supported by a new Office for Family Policy with dedicated budget and civil service team to co-ordinate family policies across government. Each government department should have a named Minister with responsibility for developing family policies relevant to their departmental objectives.

The first act of a new Cabinet level Minister for families should be to replace the 'Family Test' with 'Family Impact Assessments' contained within the Family Relationships (Impact Assessment and Targets) Bill recently introduced to the House of Lords by Conservative Peer, Lord Farmer. Family Impact Assessments build on the 'Family Test' introduced in 2014 by introducing statutory measurements to help officials understand the impact of policy development on reducing family breakdown and improving family life.

The binary nature of the Family Test introduced by David Cameron in 2014 created a politically hostile environment for applying a test where policies would either pass or fail. Without a statutory requirement to apply the Family Test few government departments embraced this policy making tool. Family Impact Assessments based in law would require every minister with a departmental remit for families to apply a series of measurements on family formation and stability to the development of policy in their department.

The Family Relationships (Impact Assessment and Targets) Bill also requires the government to establish reportable family stability objectives and targets. The government should be unafraid of setting out an ambitious approach to strengthening families and establishing the metrics to measure this, abiding by the adage 'what gets measured, gets done'.

Recommendation 4: Replace the existing government Family Test with Family Impact Assessments and develop government wide family stability targets with measurable performance indicators, including 'social justice' metrics related to family stability and marriage in low income groups.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

There are early signs that family policies might become embedded within wider Government policy making.

The evidence from this report and the work of many other organisations should give the Prime Minister the confidence that there is both public and political support for policies to strengthen families and a strong social justice narrative to describe them.

If we are going to strengthen relationships, improve parenting and reduce the inequalities associated with family breakdown we need politicians who are willing to talk about this issue and discover a way of talking confidently about family breakdown and its consequences. This report demonstrates that not only is this issue important for a Government committed to 'social reform' but it is potentially popular with voters.

Appendix 1

The Centre for Social Justice conducted three polling exercises during the summer of 2017 to test public attitudes to family and Government activity to strengthen families as part of a wider social justice strategy. A summary of this polling data is outlined below.

YouGov:

YouGov polled a representative sample of 1,665 British adults between 31 July - 1 August:

How serious a problem, if at all, do you think family breakdown is in today's society?

63% of British adults think family breakdown is a serious problem. 20% think it is not serious.

(compared to September 2011: 83% thought it was serious; 13% thought it was not serious)

45% of 18-24 year olds think it is serious, compared to 74% of adults over 65.

Over the last few decades, do you think marriages has become less important in society?

45% of British adults think that marriage has become less important and that this is a bad thing (a fall from 60% of people who thought the same thing in November 2012).

25% of British adults think that marriage has become less important but that this is a good thing (a rise from 19% of people who thought the same in November 2012).

26% of 18-24 year olds think that marriage has become less important and that this is a bad thing, compared to 63% of British adults over 65. 44% of 18-24 year olds think that marriage has become less important but that this is a good thing, compared to just 13% of over 65s.

How important, if at all, do you think stronger families and improved parenting are to addressing Britain's social problems?

81% of British adults think that this is important compared to 7% who believe it is not important.

61% of 18-24 year olds think this is important compared to 93% of over 65s.

How important, if at all, do you think it is for children to grow up living with both parents?

69% of British adults think this is important, whilst 22% think it is not important (for comparison, 81% of people thought that this was important in 2012)

51% of 18-24 year olds think that this is important, compared to 86% of British adults over 65.

How serious a problem, if at all, do you think fatherlessness, in particular, is in today's society?

64% of British adults think that this is a serious problem, whilst 23% think it is not.

46% of 18-24 year olds think that this was a serious problem, as opposed to 80% of over 65s.

How important, if at all, do you think a strong family life is for children growing up in poverty?

87% of British adults think this is important, whilst only 5% think it is not.

ComRes

ComRes polled a representative sample of 2,026 adults between 2 August - 3 August

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Family breakdown is a serious problem in Britain today and more should be done to prevent families from breaking up

72% of British adults agree with this statement, with 24% strongly agreeing.

Marriage is important and the Government should support couples who get married

71% of British adults agree with this statement, with 28% strongly agreeing. 59% of 18-24 year olds agree compared to 80% of adults over 65.

The absence of fathers (or 'fatherlessness') in families has a negative impact on children growing up in poverty

71% of British adults agree with this statement, with 29% strongly agreeing.

Do you support or oppose the following policy proposals?

The Government should recognize marriage in the tax system with a specific allowance for low and middle income married couples?

75% of British adults support this policy proposal, with 33% of strongly supporting it. 15% of people oppose this.

The Government should spend extra money with the goal of strengthening families and improving parenting in order to prevent social problems?

76% of British adults support this policy proposal, with 26% of strongly supporting it. 12% of oppose it.

Bounty.com

Bounty.com surveyed 1,658 pre-natal and post-natal members via their online newsletter between 14th-25th August 2017.

How important is it for children to grow up with both parents?

88% of respondents agree that it is important for children to grow up with both parents (67% very important and 21% quite important) - including 62% of lone parents.

When we had a baby, my baby's father and I began to argue a lot more

43% agreed that they argued more with the baby's father when they had a baby. For lone parents the figure is 61%.

The Government is right to say that stability matters for children

91% agree that the Government is right to say 'stability matters for children' (71% agree strongly and 20% agree slightly). 93% of parents living with their partner agree. 86% of lone parents agree.

Relationship tips should be part of the advice you get when you have a baby

68% of all respondents think that relationship tips should be part of the advice you get when you have a baby including 56% of lone parents.

Do you support a tax allowance for married couples?

78% of all respondents support this policy, 22% oppose it. Support is highest (81% - 82%) amongst couple families and lowest amongst lone parents (57%)

76% of respondents from social groups C2DE agree with this policy.

Do you support public money being spent on strengthening families and improving parenting with children in poverty?

89% of all respondents support this, only 10% oppose this action.

Methodology:

ComRes interviewed 2,026 GB adults online between 2nd and 3rd August 2017. Data were weighted by age, gender, region and socio-economic grade to be demographically representative of all GB adults. ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.

Total sample size for the **YouGov** polling was 1,665 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 31st July - 1st August 2017. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+). YouGov is a member of the British Polling Council and abide by their rules.

Bounty.com conducted an online survey to Bounty pre-natal and post-natal members via the Bounty newsletter 14th-25th August 2017. 1,658 surveys were completed.

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