

Family Structures

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Forms

Family structure has a growing number of forms that are continually in motion. Since 1965 family structures in America have changed immensely. Evolving family structures emerge from social upheaval, crisis of belief and the endless needs of people to redefine God's ways in order to permit their choices.

Family structure has an economic impact. The last five decades have given us a clear rear view of the cost of disintegrating family structures. Just a few of the costs to taxpayers alone include:

- Assistance to a growing population of children living in poverty
- The cost of teenage childbearing approaching \$10 billion annually
- The cost of caring for single parented children of over \$100 billion annually

Family structures include:

- Cohabitation
- Single Parent
- Marriage
- Dysfunctional

Cohabitation

The number of children born outside of marriage per year has quadrupled since the 1980's.

Cohabitation is now the fastest growing family structure. During the 1960's and 1970's the percentage of marriages preceded by cohabitation was about 10%. Between 1990 and 1994 marriage preceded by cohabitation rose to over fifty percent. Today, marriage before cohabitation is rare.

Comparatively, cohabitating couples tend to be less religious and more liberal in their understanding of traditional family roles. (Smock, 2000).

Few cohabitating couples stay together for life. Most break up their cohabitating union within just a few years resulting in issues sometimes worse than in cases of divorce. Rebuilding new cohabitating relationships becomes more difficult with the number of repetitions as conditions from previous cohabitations compound. Negative circumstances associated with cohabitation such as lack of commitment, dysfunctional parenting and counterproductive role modeling continue to accumulate. Children are frequently procreated in cohabitation. Multiple parental combinations make it difficult for children to attach and creates an endless variety of complication.

Women fare worse than men as men tend to vacate their responsibilities when cohabitation breaks up. Ironically a significant number of cohabitating couples view marriage favorably. Many say they someday want to marry however, women who give birth of wedlock have more difficulty achieving marriage. A second child doubles her difficulty. (Wu, Bumpass, and Musick, 1999).

Other symptoms more prevalent in cohabitating family structures include;

- Higher incidence of poverty
- Fewer and weaker supportive family and friend networks
- Higher unemployment
- More frequent substance abuse
- Increased male incarceration rates
- More physical and mental health issues
- Poor communication and conflict resolution
- Lack of trust
- Conflicting parenting styles

Indications point a lack of confidence in Biblical covenant marriage as a viable, satisfying family structure. People are waiting longer to marry which increases the chances that their drive for intimate companionship will push them into some kind of in-between relational structure.

Biblical covenant marriage isn't the issue. People are.

Single Parenting

Single parenting has been a quickly growing family structure since the 1960's. The percentage of children born outside of marriage has increased fourfold during the last forty years. This generation has three times more single mothers than the last. While the term 'single parent' is more politically correct, the more accurate word is 'single mothering.'

Unlike other circumstances causing single parent households such as divorce and death of fathers, many fathers simply reject their role as a father. While many factors seem to contribute to father involvement, none compares to a father's experience and involvement with his own father such as:

- Length of time partners knew each other prior to pregnancy
- Number of children they share
- Past and current relationship status
- Whether or not they have new partners
- Father-mother conflict
- Mothers interference with his involvement
- Court restrictions
- Older maternal age
- Employment stability
- Criminal activities
- Incarceration

Marriage

Through the first half of the twentieth century, marriage was the most prevalent family structure. This model was characterized by mutual commitment and companionship. Spouses understood and generally performed complementary family roles. Society placed a high value on marriage and there was an expectation that marriage was meant to last a lifetime.

Not only has marriage declined in popularity, but its definition is now changed frequently by politics. Interestingly, politics never defined marriage to begin with. God did. Equally odd, the same supreme courts that redefine marriage have nothing to do with its political regulation.

Marriage isn't thought of as reliable any longer, and rightfully so. The number of children experiencing divorce every year is approaching one million. Combined with non-marital births, half of all American children will experience single-parent households at some point during their childhood. Those children eventually engage in companion seeking and birth families of their own and must choose a family structure for themselves. Why would they feel marriage is the best choice? Many of them either have a negative bias or no point of reference at all that would encourage them to choose Biblical covenant marriage as a family structure.

Today Biblical covenant marriage is one of the least chosen of all family structures by clients of pregnancy resource centers even though it is clearly proven to be the healthiest, most productive and beneficial choices of all options. This means the opportunities are great and that there is every reason to expect significant outcomes by intervening, equipping, encouraging and guiding these new families toward the best possible family structure they can choose. All of them may not make that choice, but some will who may not have if no one presents the opportunity.

Dysfunctional

Discourses on the subject of family structures don't have much to say about the *dysfunctional family* structure. In fact, we are unaware of the term being used in this fashion before. Dysfunctional family structures include relationships that are dangerous, chaotic, and chronically in crisis bizarrely conflicting. This family structure poses unique challenges.

What is plainly evident is actually very simple and needs no research to discover. The farther we move away from God's plan, the worse things get.