

**The Problem Requiring a Solution: Increasing Divorce and Decreasing Marital Satisfaction**

Despite the fact that 93% of Americans rate having a happy marriage as one of their most important objectives in life, a disappointingly high percentage of marriages fail. The US divorce rate doubled from 25% to 50%, between 1960 and 1980 and has appeared to stabilize at around 48%. Another negative trend associated with marriage is that the number of cohabitating couples has grown by over 1000%. Finally, among those couples who choose to remain married, many experience stress and unhappiness. One estimate suggests that of the marriages that do not end in divorce, fewer than 50% of the couples are happy. Currently, there is no substantial evidence of a turnaround, although a more “pro-marriage” attitude seems to be on the rise in our country.

Northwest Arkansas is one of the fastest growing regions in the nation, supported by the presence of Wal-Mart, Tyson Foods, and J.B. Hunt Transportation. However, the benefits of an economic boom have not reached everyone. Social service agencies struggle to meet the needs for affordable housing, medical care (33% of Arkansans lack medical insurance), and food banks. Strong employment, rapidly growing businesses and population growth are not adequate protection against poverty and/or marital discord. The region has one of the nation’s highest divorce rates at 54%. (See Table 1) The number of divorced individuals per 1,000 people in NWA (5.8) exceeds the national rate by 1.6. Between 2001 and 2005, 12,780 couples in NWA divorced and impacted 9,867 children.

	<b>Northwest Arkansas</b>	<b>US</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>		
<b>Never married</b>	21%	27.1%
<b>Now married</b>	57.2%	54.4%
<b>Separated</b>	4.9%	2.2%

<b>Widowed</b>	6.0%	6.6%
<b>Female</b>	4.3%	5.4%
<b>Divorced</b>	10.9%	9.7%
<b>Female</b>	6.1%	5.6%
<b>Divorce per 1000 people</b>	5.8	4.2
<b>Divorce Rate<sup>2</sup></b>	54% <sup>2</sup>	48%

<sup>1</sup>2000 Census DP-2. Profile of Selected Social Characteristics: 2000; <sup>2</sup>2004 County Clerk's Offices

Divorce adversely affects communities in many ways. Children born out of wedlock or whose parents divorce are much more likely to experience poverty and abuse and have lower academic achievement. The evidence is overwhelming that children's lives are better when they grow up in a two-parent family. They visit doctors less often for physical or emotional problems, have fewer developmental problems, perform better in intellectual and academic development, and are more likely to attend college. They are less likely to be in trouble at school, at home or with the police, to use drugs, to be involved in delinquent or violent behavior, or to engage in premarital sexual activity and childbearing. It is less common for children who live with married parents to live in poverty or become victims of physical or sexual abuse.<sup>i</sup>

The positive impact of healthy marriages extends to adults. Adults in healthy marriages do better in virtually every measure of well-being, including lifespan, physical and mental health, lifetime earnings, stable employment and stress. Married people live longer, happier lives<sup>ii</sup> and these benefits have direct positive impacts on the community. Communities with a higher percentage of married couples have more physically and emotionally healthy citizens and a decreased need for social services, lower domestic violence rates, crime, teenage pregnancy, and juvenile delinquency. Business benefits from stronger marriages as well, since work loss associated with family stress, marital problems and parenting issues translates into a loss of approximately \$10 billion per

year.<sup>iii</sup>

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### Footnotes

<sup>i</sup> David Popenoe, *Life Without Father: Compelling Evidence that Fatherhood and Marriage Are Indispensable for the Good of Children*, (New York, The Free Press, 1997); Glenn T. Stanton *Why Marriage Matters: Reasons to Believe in Marriage in Postmodern Society*, (Colorado Springs, Pinon Press, 1997); Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Deborah Dawson, "Family Structure and Children's Health and Well-Being: Data from the 1988 National Health Interview Survey on Child Health," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53 (1991): 573-584; Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi, *A General Theory of Crime*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 103; Richard Koestner, et al., "The Family Origins of Empathic Concern: A Twenty-Six Year Longitudinal Study," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 58 (1990): 709-717; E. Mavis Hetherington, "Effects of Father Absence on Personality Development in Adolescent Daughters," *Developmental Psychology* 7 (1972): 313 -326; Irwin Garfinkel and Sara McLanahan, *Single Mothers and Their Children: A New American Dilemma* (Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 1986), pp. 30-31; David Ellwood, *Poor Support: Poverty in the American Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p. 46; Ronald J. Angel and Jacqueline Worobey, "Single Motherhood and Children's Health," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 29 (1988): 38-52; L. Remez, "Children Who Don't Live with Both Parents Face Behavioral Problems," *Family Planning Perspectives*, January/February 1992; Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *Second Chances: Men and Women a Decade After Divorce*, (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1990); Judith Wallerstein, et al., *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25 Year Landmark Study*, (New York: Hyperion, 2000); Nicholas Zill, Donna Morrison, and Mary Jo Coiro, "Long-Term Effects of Parental Divorce on Parent-Child Relationships, Adjustment, and Achievement in Young Adulthood," *Journal of Family Psychology*, 7 (1993): 91-103.

<sup>ii</sup> Glenn T. Stanton, *Why Marriage Matters: Reasons to Believe in Marriage in Postmodern Society*, (Colorado Springs, Pinon Press, 1997); Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially*, (New York: Doubleday, 2000); Robert Coombs, "Marital Status and Personal Well-Being: A Literature Review," *Family Relations* 40 (1991) 97-102;

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Lois Verbrugge and Donald Balaban, "Patterns of Change, Disability and Well-Being," *Medical Care* 27 (1989): S128- S147; I.M. Joung, et al., "Differences in Self-Reported Morbidity by Marital Status and by Living Arrangement," *International Journal of Epidemiology* 23 (1994): 91-97; Linda Waite, "Does Marriage Matter?" *Demography* 32 (1995): 483-507; Harold Morowitz, "Hiding in the Hammond Report," *Hospital Practice* (August 1975), p. 39; James Goodwin, et al., "The Effect of Marital Status on Stage, Treatment, and Survival of Cancer Patients," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 258 (1987): 3152-3130; Benjamin Malzberg, "Marital Status in Relation to the Prevalence of Mental Disease," *Psychiatric Quarterly* 10 (1936): 245-261; David Williams, et al., "Marital Status and Psychiatric Disorders Among Blacks and Whites," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 33 (1992): 140-157; Steven Stack and J. Ross Eshleman, "Marital Status and Happiness: A 17-Nation Study," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60 (1998): 527-536; Robert T. Michael, et al., *Sex in America: A Definitive Survey*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1994), p. 124-129; Randy Page and Galen Cole, "Demographic Predictors of Self-Reported Loneliness in Adults," *Psychological Reports* 68 (1991): 939-945; Jan Stets, "Cohabiting and Marital Aggression: The Role of Social Isolation," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53 (1991): 669-680; "Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1992," U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, (March 1994), p. 31, NCJ-145125; Ronald Angel and Jacqueline Angel, *Painful Inheritance: Health and the New Generation of Fatherless Families*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), pp. 139, 148; Richard Rogers, "Marriage, Sex, and Mortality," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 57 (1995): 515-526.

<sup>iii</sup> Forthofer, Markman, Cox, Stanley, & Kessler 1996; Woosley, 2003; Sampson, 1999