

The £49bn bill we pay for children who can't celebrate Father's Day: The devastating financial - and human - cost of our fatherless society

- Britain's 'fatherlessness' is costing each taxpayer £1,541 per year
- Money spent on benefits, criminal activity and educational failure
- Four in ten children have no contact with their fathers at all

By Peter Hitchens



No role models: The 'fatherless society' is costing UK taxpayers £49billion

By the end of his or her childhood, a British boy or girl is much more likely to have a TV set in the bedroom than a father at home.

Our 45-year national war against traditional family life has been so successful that almost 50 per cent of 15-year-olds no longer live with both their parents.

At the same time we have indulged our neglected and abandoned young with electronics, so that 79 per cent of children aged between five and 16 have a TV in their room. As we sopfully mark 'Father's Day' with cards, socks, sentimentality and meals out, we should remember that in almost all cases the absent parent is the father. There is no doubt about the facts here. Let me list some of them. The cost of our wild, unprecedented national experiment in fatherlessness is now £49 billion each year – more than the defence budget.

This figure, currently costing each taxpayer £1,541 per year, is rising all the time, and has gone up by almost a quarter since 2009.

The money partly goes on handouts and housing, which an old-fashioned family with a working father would not have needed.

Partly it goes on trying to cope with crime, disorder, truancy, educational failure, physical and mental illness and general misery, which are so much more common among the fatherless than in those from stable homes. And there is more to come. One in three marriages ends in divorce, while many who would once have married never even bother. About 300,000 families of all kinds separate every year. There are now three million children growing up in fatherless homes.

another 58 fatherless families are launched every day. And be in no doubt that it is the fathers who are, overwhelmingly, absent in these new-style modern households. Only eight per cent of single-parent homes are headed by a lone father.

Four in ten children being brought up by their mothers – nearly 1.2 million – have no contact with their fathers at all. Another 67,000 (in England alone) dwell in the organised despair and neglect which are cruelly misnamed 'care'. In the past 40 years the proportion of adults who are married has sunk from 70 per cent to fewer than half. The number of single adults has hugely increased (up 50 per cent). A quarter of a million people each year spend Christmas alone.



Raised alone: Three million children are being brought up by single mothers and 40 per cent of them have no contact with their fathers at all

One in six adults now co-habits, compared with one in 50 in the 1960s. Co-habiting households, which have doubled in number since 1996, are the fastest-growing type of family arrangement in the UK. By 2015, there will be two million lone parents (up 120,000 since 2010); more than 24 per cent of children will be in lone-parent households.

It matters. Young people from fractured homes are statistically twice as likely to have behaviour problems as those from stable households. They are more likely to be depressed, to abuse drugs or alcohol, to do badly at school, and end up living in relative poverty.

According to studies in the USA and New Zealand, girls with absent fathers have teenage pregnancy rates seven or eight times as high as those whose fathers have stayed in meaningful touch with them. By contrast, the link between marriage and good health is so strong that one study showed the health gain achieved by marrying was as great as that received from giving up smoking.

In all these dismal statistics of marriage decline and failure, the UK is one of the worst afflicted among advanced nations. And in many of the poorest and most desolate parts of the country, the problem is concentrated into certain areas where fathers in the home are an endangered species. From Gosport in Hampshire, to Cardiff, Liverpool, Easington in County Durham, inner London, Bristol, Birmingham and Sheffield, there are whole city wards where at least 60 per cent of the households are headed by a lone parent. And it is in such circumstances that a procession of serial boyfriends, a type of domestic arrangement closely

associated with physical and sexual abuse of children, is most likely to exist. This great fleet of hard truths is known in general to those who govern the country, and in hard detail to millions who suffer from their consequences. How, as a country and a people, can we manage to be so indifferent to them when we claim to set fathers and fatherhood at the centre of our culture? The fundamental prayer of the Christian Church begins with the words 'Our Father'. Americans speak of their 'founding fathers'.



Social change: What will become of the fatherless generations? asks Peter Hitchens

The father has, since human society began, been protector, provider and source of authority, bound by honour and fidelity to defend his hearth. If he is gone, who takes his place? Of all people, D.H. Lawrence, author of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, wrote of a man and his wife as 'a king and queen with one or two subjects and a few square yards of territory of their own . . . true freedom because it is a true fulfilment for man, woman and children'. But he warned of a great danger if marriage, which makes fatherhood what it is, fell. 'Break it, and you will have to go back to the overwhelming dominance of the State, which existed before the Christian era.' And now we see his prophecy fulfilled. The State spends billions, and intervenes incessantly, to try to replace the lost force of fatherhood, and it fails.

I owe most of the facts listed to the Centre for Social Justice, which on Friday published its full report into what it calls 'Fractured Families'.

The CSJ is very close to the Tory Party, to the Government and to Iain Duncan Smith, the Work and Pensions Secretary. So it is startling to find that the report is coldly savage in its dismissal of the Cameron Government's efforts to fix this problem.

'Conservatives say they would have been more radical on family policy had it not been for their Liberal Democrat colleagues, but even those commitments made in the Programme for Government have been ignored so far,' it says. 'So for all of the promises the Conservatives made in Opposition, for all of the gimmick giveaways politicians have unveiled for middle-class families, and for all of the safe "families come in all shapes and sizes" rhetoric Ministers have used for decades, hardly anything has been done to resist the tsunami of family breakdown battering the United Kingdom.'

The authors continue: 'Saying that family form is irrelevant is inaccurate and ultimately counter-productive . . .' This is true. Someone ought to speak up for marriage. But is it entirely true to say that 'backing commitment and setting a goal of reducing instability does not equate to criticising or stigmatising lone parents'? Doesn't approval of the one inevitably stigmatise the other? And if you aren't prepared to do that, will you get anywhere?

They also assert that 'marriage is not a Right-wing obsession', though, speaking as a Right-winger I rather think it is. It certainly isn't a Left-wing priority.

The authors argue: 'People throughout society want to marry, but the cultural and financial barriers faced by those in the poorest communities thwart their aspirations.'



Standing alone: By 2015 more than 24 per cent of children will be in single-parent households

It is certainly true that some benefits actively discourage couples from being or staying married. But it is the 'cultural' barriers I want to talk about here. Anyone who dares to discuss this subject is quickly accused of 'hating' or wishing to persecute 'single mothers'. Any article on the subject is supposed (maybe it is an EU regulation?) to contain a disclaimer saying that many single mothers do a great job.

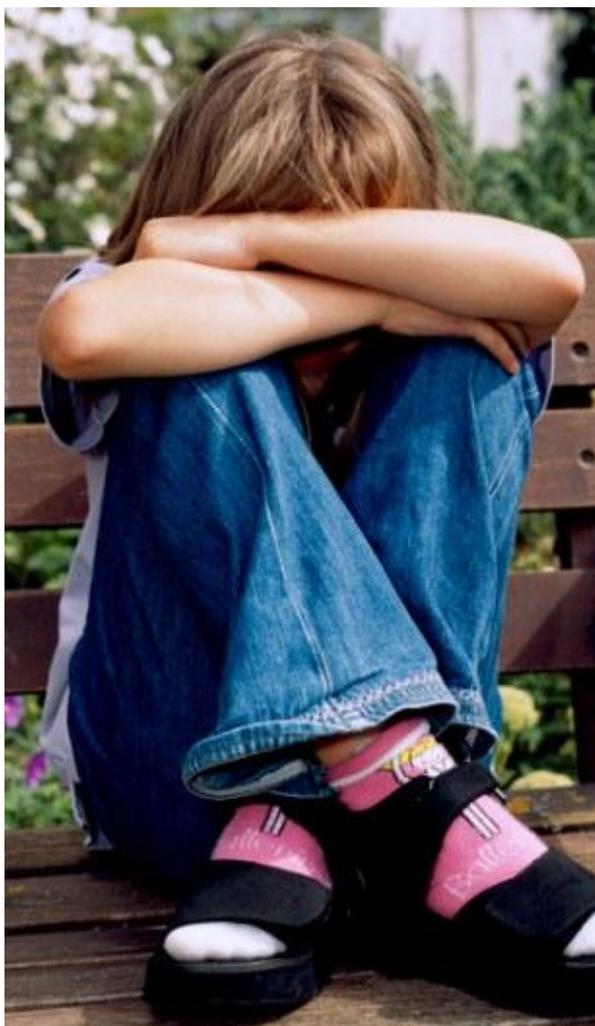
Well, I neither hate single mothers nor wish to persecute them, and I am perfectly prepared to believe that many of them do a great job. But it isn't the point. The main problem with single mothers is that they are acting rationally, in a society which actively encourages them with money and approval. Who can blame them? There is a lot of piety about this. Suggest that anyone deliberately gets pregnant (or rather, in this age of morning-after pills and abortion on-demand, deliberately stays pregnant) to get a house and a handout, and you are angrily dismissed as some kind of snobbish hate-figure.

Well, mightn't it be true? As far as I know, nobody has ever researched the motives of the young women who accept this sparse arrangement. I wish they would. But is it unreasonable to suggest that if you reward certain types of behaviour with money and housing, and with social approval, then that behaviour will increase? It's not just me. Singer Adele Adkins once recalled: 'The ambition at my State school was to get pregnant and sponge off the Government', adding: 'That ain't cool.'

Perhaps successful singing stars can get away with saying what others only think. I don't myself see that it is a particularly harsh view to hold.

A baby is a wonderful thing, and many young women long to be mothers, and good luck to them. Many modern males are a pretty unattractive proposition, so why marry one, if the State will give you a home and an income on your own?

Meanwhile, men have learned enough about the divorce courts to know that marriage is a big risk. If it goes wrong, they are the ones who have to move out, and yet they will still have to pay.



Dwindling path: Children with absent fathers are statistically more likely to turn to crimes, become alcoholics and end up living in poverty

Why not take advantage of the fact that the State – which once demanded the father's name when any baby was registered so he could be made to pay for his child – now happily allows us to leave this space blank? My guess is that doing anything really radical about this scares all politicians too much. For the War on Fatherhood is protected by a great taboo.

In every family, every workplace, every school, every pub, every weekend football or cricket team, every political party, every church congregation, there are now large numbers of people who signed up for the Great Cultural and Moral Revolution which was launched in the 1960s and swept through the land like a mighty rushing wind in the 1970s.

The fiery heart of this was the Divorce Law Reform Act of 1969. This change was very popular. It is interesting to note that, just before it began its way through Parliament, Engelbert Humperdinck's hymn for would-be divorcees, Release Me, pushed the Beatles off the top of the music charts for weeks on end. The new law pretty much embodied the song's plea, 'Please release me, let me go/For I don't love you any more/To waste our lives would be a sin/Release me and let me love again.' Portrayed at the time as a kindness to those trapped in loveless marriages, the new law made it much easier to end a troubled union than to fight to save it.

And once this had become general, marriage changed with amazing speed from a lifelong commitment into a lifestyle choice. And from a lifestyle choice it changed into a risky and often inconvenient contract. Divorce wasn't shameful or embarrassing any more. The country was littered with male divorcees complaining about the division of the property and the child support payments.

Men began to calculate that marriage wasn't worth it. And the Pill and easy abortion (other parts of the 1960s revolution) put an end to shotgun weddings.

Who, in such a society, could condemn the pregnant teenager without hypocrisy? Hardly anyone, especially rackets politicians and flexible churchmen.

The middle classes had abandoned lifelong marriage with a sigh of relief. The aristocracy had never cared for it much. Even the Royal Family was riddled with divorce.

The housing estate poor were simply following the same moral code as those who posed as their betters, and weren't actually better at all. And the adults of the era have all had a lot of fun as a result. But everyone, throughout this great period of release and revolt, forgot one small thing. What was to become of the children? Now we are finding out. And a generation which has never known fathers, or family life, or fidelity or constancy, is now busy begetting children of its own. What will become of them? How will boys who have never seen a father learn to be fathers?

I would have a moral panic at this stage if I thought it would do any good. But perhaps it will be the victims of this selfish generation, our children and grandchildren, who – having suffered its effects – will re-establish stable family life in our country.