

## **British Study Links Single Parenthood, Social Problems**

By Mike Wendling, CNSNews.com London Bureau Chief

London (CNSNews.com) - A study released Monday by a British think tank found a link between family instability and social problems that probably won't be broken by giving legal rights to cohabiting couples.

Report author Jill Kirby said legislation recently introduced in the U.K. parliament to give legal recognition to unmarried partners would do little to prevent the breakdown of the British family. "It would bring the problems of cohabitation without giving the gains of marriage," she said. Kirby's report, "Broken Hearts: Family Decline and the Consequence for Society," was commissioned by the Center for Policy Studies and examined a wide range of statistics from government sources and charity groups.

The study found correlations between family break-ups and "child homelessness, drug abuse among the young, the physical abuse and neglect of babies and children, high rates of teenage pregnancy and a continuing cycle of broken relationships."

"We can see a sharp rise in children born out of wedlock in the U.K.," Kirby said in a phone interview Monday. "The report also identifies that children born outside of marriage experience the break up of their parents at a much faster rate than those born to married couples."

From a high of about 400,000 in the early 70s, the number of marriages in Britain has steadily gone down.

In 2000, for the first time in seven years, the number of marriages in England increased - but some experts believe that the two percent rise was the result of "millennium fever" rather than a renewed desire for stable family units.

Last month, Britain's upper legislative chamber debated a bill that would have established "civil partnerships" to give gay and unmarried heterosexual couples the same legal rights as married people.

The legislation will most likely never come to a vote, but some high-ranking members of both the Conservative and Labour parties have expressed support for legal sanctioning of non-marital relationships.

Kirby attacked the proposals, saying they would do nothing to solve deeper social problems.

"Marriage is not just a question of a piece of paper, it's a foundation for a more stable relationship," she said. "Children are at risk of greater involvement in crime, greater mental illness and other problems if they are in 'alternative' arrangements."

The report identifies several areas where the British government could promote stable families, and suggests removing disincentives to marriage in the welfare and tax systems and educational programs about the value of matrimony.

Kirby said the British government officials could learn from their American and European counterparts about formulating public policy to promote stable families. Last year, President Bush signed into law a sweeping tax cut that among other things eliminated the "marriage penalty" and increased the \$500-per-child tax credit.

"In the U.K., we are realizing that problems such as crime and social breakdown are rapidly increasing, but we haven't yet got to the part where we realize that family stability is at the heart of it all - there's a reluctance to talk about families in such a way," she said.

"The United States, on the other hand, has confronted the problem and the results are beginning to show," Kirby added. "We've also seen that there are more stable families in Europe, so there may be lessons to be learned there."