

## Divorce exacts public toll

### Deseret News editorial

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Nationwide, high rates of divorce or of bearing children out of wedlock costs U.S. taxpayers an estimated \$112 billion a year, or more than \$1 trillion in the last decade. In Utah, this phenomenon accounts for \$276 million a year in government expenditures, according to a new national report, "The Taxpayer Cost of Divorce and Unwed Childbearing: First-Ever Estimates for the Nation and All 50 States."

These costs come in the form of increased expenditures for human services programs, criminal justice services and educational programs. Moreover, children who, as a consequence, suffer poverty may become less-productive adults due to a slew of factors.

These societal costs do not take into account the personal upheaval many children of divorce or unwed childbearing can experience. Researchers theorize that children with but one primary caregiver may struggle in school or engage in delinquent acts due to a lack of supervision. This is not true in every case, but it is well documented that poverty renders children vulnerable to a number of social ills.

Despite the steep public cost of high divorce rates and unwed childbearing, government has been reluctant to do more to promote the institution of marriage, even as it relates to the well-being of children. That function has largely been the purview of churches and a few nonprofit organizations, among them the Utah-based Sutherland Institute, which recently announced the launch of its Center for Family and Society. Despite these groups' best efforts, the percentage of children residing in two-parent homes has dropped from more than 85 percent in 1970 to about 68 percent in 2005, according to Census figures.

This new research suggests that government should take a more active role in promoting and strengthening marriages. Even a 1 percent reduction in what the report refers to as "family fragmentation," would save U.S. taxpayers \$1.12 billion each year.

One of the most staggering factors of this report is the researchers' assertion that their estimates of taxpayer costs are low. For instance, it does not factor in Medicare and

Medicaid costs. Researchers assume that unmarried adults in middle age do not have spouses to help them manage chronic illness or disabilities.

Somehow, Americans need to place a higher premium on marriage and preserving marriage. Not only does marriage provide more stability and opportunities for children, it reduces the social costs of a significant population in poverty and therefore at risk of physical illness, mental illness, dropping out of school, juvenile delinquency and physical and sexual abuse.

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