

Subsidize what kills you?

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Social scientists have long documented the cultural costs of divorce and unwed childbearing, but a report released this week reveals a new array of consequences: the economic ones.

Conducted by Georgia College & State University economics professor Benjamin Scafidi along with several pro-family organizations, the study found that U.S. taxpayers spend billions each year on fragmented families. To arrive at an estimated cost, researchers traced the [relationship](#) between broken homes and poverty and the resulting increased public costs in criminal justice, welfare measures and education programs.

The total tab: at least \$112 billion per year, or over \$1 trillion each decade.

Apparently, private decisions about [marriage](#), sex, and childbearing are not so private after all.

It's not a conclusion we want to hear in an individualistic society. Contemporary America puts a high value on personal moral license – so much, in fact, that government subsidizes the results of our behavior. The public costs associated with treating and preventing sexually transmitted diseases are hard to fathom, let alone the millions in taxpayer dollars devoted to abortion. And those are just two examples of many.

That's the trouble with a citizenry that seeks a government solution to every problem. Income redistribution is simply a catalyst for punishing one taxpayer for the poor choices of another (assuming the other even [pays taxes](#)). A young man who waits to have sex until he is able to support a wife and child is penalized in [favor](#) of his friend who chooses the path of loose living.

Take health care as another example. Government-run care, and the inevitable [tax](#) increases associated with it, would have the effect of punishing the healthy since those who exercise and eat right could pay out significant amounts but receive fewer services than couch potatoes and fast food aficionados. Government subsidies always encourage the activity being subsidized.

It's hard to argue that personal decisions about sexual activity and divorce have no impact on anyone beyond the individuals immediately involved. If a taxpayer has to shell out a

portion of his income because government subsidizes another's poor choices, it's not unreasonable to expect that taxpayer to want a say in how his friend's activity is regulated.

That's why social conservatives have legitimate cause to fight for the cornerstones of our society: heterosexual marriage, two-parent families and child rearing, to name three. Unlike single-parent families and unwed motherhood, these institutions and activities bring myriad benefits to culture. They don't drain the public coffers but rather create stability and serve as a means of [economic growth](#).

If we're interested in societal progress, look at what works. No clear-thinking social scientist can argue that a stable, two-parent family leads to poverty and crime. On the contrary, research shows that traditional families are the best atmosphere for raising children. Yet in our politically correct era, it's taboo to say heterosexual marriage and family are the best way to go.

In his study, Scafidi is wise enough to connect the dots. Broken families generate greater public costs, while stable families generate greater economic growth. "Marriage is more than a moral or even social institution; it is also an economic one, a generator of social and human capital, especially when it comes to children," he writes.

In a society with massive rates of divorce and cohabitation, it's easy to lose sight of the value the institution of marriage brings to all areas of culture and the negative implications of living arrangements that attempt to mimic traditional matrimony. Many of us ignore that value because it doesn't agree with our lifestyle or beliefs. So be it. That doesn't change the facts.

It's legitimate to discuss and debate whether government's role is to encourage institutions and behaviors – like heterosexual marriage – that benefit society. What should not be up for debate is whether government should subsidize institutions and behaviors that harm society. Nothing could more regressive than government outlays for irresponsible behavior.

That's the crux of the matter. America is swiftly drowning in a sea of decadence, and taxpayer dollars are paying the way for many of the worst offenders. Such a system can't endure for long. We're concerned with rising gas prices and a falling dollar, and rightly so, but what about tax policies that promote cultural decay? Is America strong enough to weather such a [financial](#) burden?

Or is it the more likely case that America is subsidizing her own death?

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