



## **For Immediate Release**

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### **Unmarried Couples Living with Children: It's Practical**

*As Cohabitation Becomes More Common, Marriage Does Not*

**Evanston, IL – December XX, 2006** – Many changes in family structure in the U.S. have occurred over the past few decades. A recent article in *Journal of Marriage and Family* explores a demographic trend surrounding family formation – unmarried cohabitation and childbearing.

The author investigated how partners in 44 unmarried couples view their relationships and how the presence of children influences the meanings they attach to their partnerships. Although most cohabiting parents live together in response to a pregnancy, these partners do not believe they should stay in a relationship because of shared children. Cohabitation instead is viewed as a practical response to parenthood that allows them to share expenses and responsibilities, yet avoid the greater expectations of commitment, relationship quality and the more traditional family roles they associate with marriage.

Other research has identified disadvantages to cohabitation. These relationships often do not last as long as those of married parents, which may place children at a higher risk for poverty and for multiple transitions in family structure. For these reasons, some have raised concerns about how life in a cohabiting family affects the well-being of children.

The current administration, for example, has invested funds in programs that encourage unwed parents to marry. Yet “Births to unmarried, cohabiting women account for almost all the increase in non-marital childbearing over the past two decades, and the proportion of children born to cohabiting parents has more than doubled since the 1980s,” says Joanna M. Reed, author of the article.

These cohabiting parents value the symbolic aspects of marriage but they do not believe they should marry because they have a child together. They view cohabitation as a way to raise their child together, but see little instrumental value to marriage since they already live together. “They largely believe there is not much to lose, but perhaps much to gain by cohabiting” says Joanna M. Reed, the author of the study. “By living together, they can share expenses and parenting responsibilities and get to know each other better. If things go well, they could eventually marry. If the relationship sours, they have made no

permanent commitment and feel they gave the relationship and coparenting an attempt at success.”

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