

Encouraging two-parent households

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Government should take a more active role in promoting “stable, low-conflict” families, researchers from the Woodrow Wilson School and the Brookings Institution have concluded. The researchers said that children raised in two-parent families are significantly more likely to have financial, emotional, and academic success than those raised in single-parent households.

A Brookings-Wilson School conference Sept. 13 in Washington, D.C., explored how healthy marriages benefit children. The event coincided with the release of the second issue of *The Future of Children* (www.futureofchildren.org), a journal published at Princeton by the two institutions.

Since 1970, the number of children living with a single parent has grown from 12 percent to 27 percent, with considerably higher numbers among low-income families. “Marriage penalties” built into the federal tax and welfare systems can discourage marriage, especially for low-income parents, researchers said. Noting that marriage correlates with higher earnings for each parent, senior Brookings fellow Isabel Sawhill said, “If we could get back to where our society was 25 years ago, the child poverty rate would drop by 3 or 4 percentage points.”

The Bush administration's proposed Healthy Marriage Initiative would provide \$1.5 billion over five years to research and test programs promoting marriage. Sara McLanahan, Princeton sociology professor and editor-in-chief of the journal, said the administration's plan is “good policy” but should be tried cautiously. Marriage education programs “are not a magic bullet,” she added, “and we should continue our efforts to reduce unintended pregnancies and improve services for children of single mothers.”