



The State of California's Unions: A Report on Marriage from a "Blue State"

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Despite, or perhaps because of, having been the state that opened the door to no-fault divorce legislation forty years ago, Californians' support for Marriage as an institution and Marriage Education as a means for helping couples achieve a healthy marriage is very much alive and well today.

California's most comprehensive survey of residents' attitudes and behaviors regarding marriage,¹ conducted in 2008 on behalf of the California Healthy Marriages Coalition,² reveals strong agreement among Californians on the value of lifelong strong marriages. Eighty-four percent surveyed believe couples who marry should make a lifelong commitment to one another, to be broken only under extreme circumstances. Eighty-two percent of California respondents see divorce as a serious national problem in the U.S. today. Eighty-four percent believe that children should ideally be raised in a household with married parents and 95% agree that fathers are as important as mothers for the proper development of children. Furthermore, 97% of Californians surveyed believe that good marriages are built on hard work, not luck. Perhaps surprisingly, findings from this Blue State correspond with results from similar surveys in other states and nationally.³

Californians' views on marriage and divorce derive from their personal experience, with 52% of respondents being currently married, 34% having previously been divorced and 24% of respondents reporting that they were the products of a broken marriage. Eighty percent of those whose parents divorced reported that the divorce negatively affected them while sixty-three percent of those who have divorced believe they and/or their spouse could have worked harder to save the marriage.

Although 58% of Californians surveyed were not aware of any Relationship Skills, Marriage Education or Marriage Preparation programs available in their communities, 22% of respondents had participated in a Marriage Education program other than pre-marital education. Of these,

¹ *The State of California's Unions: Marriage and Divorce in the Golden State* is the published results of the statewide telephone survey of 2,005 Californians age >18, conducted by Interviewing Services of America in January 2008. Results were analyzed by Gomez Research with consultation from Wilson Research Consulting. Margin of error for the polling sample as a whole is $\pm 2.2\%$. The report is available at www.CaMarriage.com

² The California Healthy Marriages Coalition is a pioneering non-profit organization that works throughout California to improve the well-being of children by strengthening the relationship of parents through Marriage Education and Relationship Skills classes. In 2006, CHMC received a five-year, \$11.9 Million grant from Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (HHS/ACF), through which they contracted for the statewide marriage baseline poll generating the data published in *The State of California's Unions*.

³ *With This Ring: A National Survey on Marriage in America*. 2005. National Fatherhood Initiative. These results include an 88% nationwide agreement on the view that marriage should be a lifelong commitment, 89% believing that children should be raised in a household with a married mother and father, 97% believing that fathers are as important as mothers for the proper development of children, and 94% viewing divorce as a serious national problem. Separate reports also available for some states, including the 2004 California survey [n=401]. The NFI reports are available at www.fatherhood.org

94% of married Californians who had taken Marriage Education classes found them helpful, compared with an 87% favorable response rate for counseling, a difference that is statistically significant. Nearly half of married respondents indicated they would be willing to consider attending Marriage Education programs and 65% of unmarried respondents said they would attend pre-marital education classes if they were to get married and those programs were available at little or no cost.

An overwhelming majority of Californians endorse public policies to improve relationships, strengthen marriages and reduce divorce. Eighty-seven percent of respondents supported the idea of government-supported incentives for taking premarital education prior to getting married, 75% believe that in a contested divorce the couple should be required to attend Marriage Education classes before a dissolution is granted, and 83% support this as a requirement in divorce petitions where children are involved. Eighty-one percent of Californians surveyed believe that public high schools should provide Relationship Skills curricula for students.

While this survey makes it clear that the state of California's unions have considerable room for improvement, the survey also provides ample evidence that the majority of residents of the State of California—who might not have been expected to be characterized as “pro-Marriage” or “pro legislation that supports Marriage Education”—have an ongoing prevailing belief in the importance of marriage for their own lives and for the lives of children. Furthermore, the residents of this Blue State strongly support public policies that help couples form and sustain healthy marriages and families.