



Family Lives briefing in advance of Lord Knight of Weymouth's call to attention of the impact of Government policies on family budgets: House of Lords, October 27th

Family Lives believes that there is a link between family budgets being stretched and the impact it can have on a parent's relationship with their children and their partner.

Who we are

Family Lives (previously operating as Parentline Plus) is a leading family and parenting support charity. In 2010 we supported over 1 million families. We provide a range of services including face to face individual and group support, phone based support and online support. We are committed to providing evidence-based practice, adapted to the needs of local families and communities. We continually evolve our services to meet the growing and changing needs of families, particularly the most vulnerable or disadvantaged. We work in a variety of community settings including Schools, Sure Start Children's Centres, GP surgeries and criminal justice settings, as well as undertaking outreach work with families sometimes considered as "hard to reach" by statutory services. We have recently merged with the anti-bullying charity 'Teen Boundaries' who are devoted to stopping sexual bullying and encouraging positive gender relationships.

Family Budgets

Families are feeling the effects of the economic recession. A Family Lives survey in December 2010 found that **53.3% of respondents said that their family finances were in a worse state than last year.** Family finances were ranked as respondent's greatest worry above other concerns such as child's education, behaviour, health and wellbeing. As families' budgets become more stretched we are concerned about the impact this can have on the different relationships within a family.

Families under pressure

The Family Stress Model¹ proposes that economic hardship leads to economic pressure in the family. When economic pressure is high then parents are at an increased risk of emotional distress and behavioural problems. These problems can lead to increased marital conflict and reduced marital warmth, a process which diminishes nurturing and involved parenting. Parents that become distracted by their own personal problems and marital distress may demonstrate less affection towards their children and become less involved in their children's daily activities. Economic hardship and poverty puts additional pressure on couple's relationship and inhibits positive parenting, leading in some cases to poorer outcomes for children.

¹ Conger's Family Stress Model, Families Matter
http://familylives.org.uk/families_matter_the_realities_of_family_life_in_britain_today.pdf

Impact of economic downturn on family life

A Family Lives survey in 2009 carried out by YouGov assessed the impact of the economic downturn on family life. We found:

- **39% of parents believed that financial strains had impacted on their children's quality of life.**
- **19% of parents had less time to spend with their family because they had to work more to make ends meet.**
- **31% of parents felt drained and lacking in enthusiasm in the time that they spend with their children because of financial worries.**
- **49% of parents reported feeling that the uncertainty of potential job losses had increased the strain on their day to day life.**

The worry over family finances also impacts on parent's personal relationships with **10% of parents feeling that concerns about money were putting them at greater risk of separation or divorce.** The worry over job insecurity, redundancy and consequent unemployment has been shown to have a negative impact on mental health.

Conclusion

Family Lives is concerned that the impact of increasing pressure on family finances is having a detrimental impact on the quality of life for many families. The stress put on parents can be unhealthy for the parent's marital relationship and the relationship they have with their children. In the long term, cuts which put further strain on family budgets may cost the Government more, if relationships breakdown, parenting quality is impaired and children's outcomes suffer.