

Children 'no strain on future marriages'
By Sarah Womack, Social Affairs Correspondent
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Having children with a previous partner does not affect the stability of a woman's future relationships, Government-funded research shows.

Nor are children any longer an "impediment" in the marriage market, according to researchers at the University of London.

Using data collected from more than 5,000 British women born in 1958, researchers looked at the effect of children on separation and marriage.

"Contrary to popular belief, children from previous relationships do not put future relationships at risk," said Fiona Steele, a research lecturer at the Institute of Education who worked on the study.

"With marriage and partnership break-ups increasing over recent years, this is a very positive finding," she said. "Factors like social class and level of education made no difference to this finding."

Children living with their biological mother and a man who is not their biological father can help cement a partnership, contrary to the idea that children put future relationships under strain.

Miss Steele said: "Women with children who enter a new partnership have already experienced the breakdown of the relationship with the child's father and may be more selective in their choice of a future partner.

"Most previous research on marital dissolution has found that the presence of stepchildren increases the risk of separation. But we found that women with children by a previous partner are no more likely to separate from a future partner than are women who do not have children."

Married parents with young children are less likely to divorce. Having one pre-school child together makes them 40 per cent less likely to separate than couples without children. This is reduced by a further 38 per cent if they have two or more young children.

The odds of cohabiting couples separating are reduced by 25 per cent with one pre-school child and a further 44 per cent with two or more.

But the stabilising effect of children weakens as they become older.

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