The Family

(KTFM)

This collection represents an analysis of the contemporary family and describes recent dramatic changes in the composition economic stability, and diversity of families in the western world. The declining prevalence of early marriage, increasing level of marital dissolution, and growing tendency to never marry, especially among some racial and ethnic groups, reflect changes in the relative economic prospects of men and women and support the conclusion that marriage is becoming less valued as a source of economic stability. These developments also imply that relatively more children are born outside of marriage, spend at least part of their childhood in a single-parent household, and endure multiple changes in family composition, paralleling these trends have been sharp changes in the economic stability of families, characterized most notably by a growing importance of women's income and increasing economic inequality among families.

Is there any detectable synchronism between trends in the number of working mothers and divorce rates, or numbers of births out of wedlock and trends in the number of teenagers gaining secondary school qualifications or going into higher education, or drug/alcohol consumption, committing suicide or murder and having children out of wedlock? Some indicators show more or less continuous improvement in the welfare of young people (proportion with secondary school qualifications) while others show deterioration (access to higher education, alcohol and drug consumption, etc.), while yet others show signs of continuous deterioration (murder, suicide, illegitimate births). It is very difficult to derive causal relationships between changes in family structure and these social outcomes as changes in the family have been paralleled with changes in media exposure, urbanization, globalization, population growth and social and political transformation. Overall, the general idea of the harmful effects of changes in the family

on the welfare of children needs to be analyzed with the greatest care and should be treated with the strongest reservations.

The theory of family policy has come of age, yet it has not achieved a status commensurate with that of economic or environmental policy. Some argue that family commitment at its core is particularly consequential in an individualistic market economy with a small social safety net. This collection chronicles some recent developments including philanthropic commitments, state and federal policy initiatives, and the use of research to inform family policy making. Selected family policy issues including family and work conflict, long-term care, family poverty, and marriage, are overviewed in this collection..

Advocates of positive change suggest that with the destabilization of family structure, family welfare is increasingly based upon affectivity and achievement emanating from an emphasis on relationship cooperation, friendship, individual choice, expressive communications, and an open-minded attitude toward changing marital and family patterns. Issues in and approaches to family welfare and marriage success are central topics in this collection. Social and psychological change are as inexorable as the tides, and changing tides call for changing perspectives. The future of the family depends on how we, as members of society, learn to control and adapt to that change. While the core values of respect for life, love, and work remain the foundation values to pass from generation to generation, we must continuously re-evaluate how to maximize the impact of this transfer of values.

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