

WORLD CONGRESS OF FAMILIES II

Special Report: Results of a Global Survey on Marriage and the Family

Sponsored by The Howard Center for Family, Religion & Society and the World Family Policy Center at Brigham Young University

SURVEY FINDS WORLDWIDE SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY of adults around the world agree that the natural family, based on the lawful marriage of a man and a woman, is the fundamental unit of society. People of all cultures affirm that a lasting marriage between a husband and wife and the raising of children are keys to family happiness.

These are among the findings of a new international survey by Wirthlin Worldwide, sponsored by The Howard Center for Family, Religion, and Society and the World Family Policy Center at Brigham Young University.

This groundbreaking study, conducted to coincide with the second World Congress of Families, is one of the first research investigations regarding world opinion toward the importance of marriage, family, and children and their roles in today's world and in individual societies.

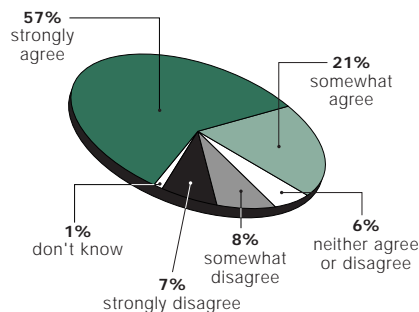
Interviews were conducted with a total of 2,893 individuals aged 18 and older, living in 19 different countries representing five regions of the world: Europe, Asia, Latin America, Middle East/Africa, and the United States. While many hypotheses hold that varying cultures, religions, regions, and socio-economic factors impact the importance placed on the family and children, this study shows that there is strong cross-cultural agreement on the importance of the natural family.

FAMILY IS CENTRAL

Nearly eight in ten respondents (78%) worldwide agree that "A family created

through lawful marriage is the fundamental unit of society." Almost six in ten (57%) strongly agree with this statement. Only 15% disagree, while 7% are neutral or don't know.

THE FAMILY IS THE FUNDAMENTAL UNIT OF SOCIETY



Opinion regarding this statement is so universal that majorities in every region of the world agree. The only region where support is not over 70% is in Europe, where 54% agree and 30% disagree.

Not only do most people acknowledge that the family is central to civilization, they prefer it that way. When presented with the hypothetical possibility of creating their own society and asked to identify which institution would be the central components of that society, 64%—including a majority from each region—say they would center their society around the family. Others would center their society around the government (17%), the individual (17%), the church (12%), or the business community (10%).

MARRIAGE: FOUNDATION FOR A STRONG FAMILY

One of the most significant outcomes of World Congress of Families I was the reaffirmation that the "natural family" is

HIGHLIGHTS

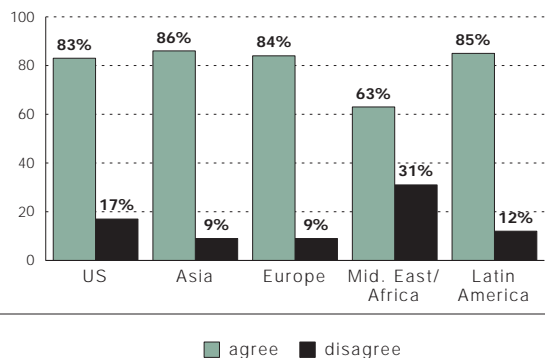
- 1 **THE IDEAL SOCIETY**
Centered on the family
- 2 **DEFINING MARRIAGE**
Majority agree: One man, one woman
- 2 **RAISING CHILDREN**
Natural family unit is the best way
- 2 **LARGE FAMILIES**
Do they help or hurt society?
- 3 **WHAT WOULD YOU GIVE UP?**
Good marriage, happy family are top life priorities, study shows
- 3 **UNCERTAIN FUTURE**
Many foresee a decline in quality of family life
- 4 **STUDY METHODOLOGY**



based on “a man and woman bound in a lifelong covenant of marriage.” Despite current attempts by a very vocal minority to redefine marriage, the vast majority (84%) of those surveyed around the globe agree that “The definition of marriage is one man and one woman.” Nearly two out of three people (65%) agree *strongly* with this statement, while 19% agree somewhat. Over 80% of adults in all regions of the world agree with this definition of marriage, except in the Middle East/Africa.

SUPPORT FOR TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE

“THE DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE IS ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN”



When asked to name the most important factor in creating a good quality of family life, a plurality of respondents in all regions place *a lasting marriage between a husband and wife* at the top of the list. Worldwide, more than one in three (37%) feel this is the basis of a happy family.

With regard to the other important factors, there are notable differences among the regions of the world. Respondents in the Middle East/Africa cite *religious faith* (28%); Asians cite *financial security* (28%); Europeans are split between *financial security* (28%) and *interaction with extended family* (24%); Latin Americans mention *interaction with extended family* (22%); and respondents in the US cite *interaction with extended family* (26%) and *religious faith* (23%).

Adults across the globe, regardless of culture, agree that the most important factor for creating a strong marriage is good communication (40%). Following good communication are lifelong commitment to one’s spouse (20%); shared interests and goals (18%); ability to resolve conflict (12%); close friendship (7%); and sexual satisfaction (1%).

THE WORTH OF CHILDREN

While recognizing that reality falls short of the ideal for many people, this study affirms that children are best nurtured within the traditional family unit. Six out of seven non-US adults (86%) agree with the statement “All things being equal, it is better for children to be raised in a household that has a married mother and father.” Only 15% disagree and 5% neither agree nor disagree with the statement. Support for this statement is strongest in Asia (92% agree) and weakest in Europe (66% agree). A similar question from a 1995 survey showed that US adults feel just as strongly about the benefits to children of growing up in a home where a husband and wife support each other in the parenting role.

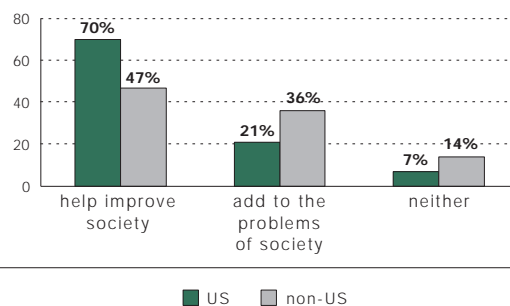
According to our study, not only are children benefitted by a strong marriage, but vice-versa. In fact, 69% of adults worldwide say that children are very important to having a strong marriage and 77% say having and raising a child or children is very important to the quality of family life. These findings are consistent across the globe and in each region sampled.

Along with attacks on the institution of marriage, the other predominant anti-family message in the world today is that children are a liability.

In October, according to U.N. demographers, world population passed the six billion mark. This has focused renewed attention on the issue of overpopulation and the stresses which current birthrates are said to be placing on the world’s resources, societies, and families. We investigated these Malthusian arguments and found that 50% of adults believe that families with multiple children help *improve* society, while just 34% feel families with multiple children add to the problems of society.

Respondents in the US (70%) and Europe (68%) are most likely to believe that families with multiple

FAMILIES WITH MULTIPLE CHILDREN



children help to improve society. Conversely, and as suspected due to possible socioeconomic and governmental reasons, respondents in Latin America (68%) and the Middle East/Africa (50%) are most likely to say families with multiple children add to the problems of society. Asians surveyed are closer to the global norm, with 51% saying large families “help improve” versus 32% “add to the problem” of society.

In counterpoint to these broad socioeconomic arguments against large families, another message frequently heard nowadays is distinctly personal; namely, that children are an inconvenience. However, six in ten (61%) non-US adults surveyed *disagree* that “Having children interferes too much with the freedom of parents.” Three in ten (30%) agree with the statement, while 8% neither agree nor disagree. Respondents in the Middle East/Africa and in Latin America are more likely than elsewhere to feel children interfere too much with the freedom of parents (42% and 38%, respectively).

No parent can honestly say that raising children is always easy or convenient. Nevertheless, this study demonstrates that many people throughout the world still value the selfless efforts of committed parents, and recognize the power of families to contribute to stable and enduring societies.

To get another perspective on the priority that people around the world place on children and the family, we asked non-US survey respondents to name one life goal someone should be most willing to give up if they had to. The results clearly show that people of all cultures value marriage and family above material possessions. Nearly half (45%) would sooner give up *a nice home* and 17% would sacrifice *financial security* before they would give up *a good marriage* (8%) or *a strong family with happy children* (6%). Only *a healthy life* (6%) is seen as equating a happy family in importance.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

This study reflects the challenges faced by families around the world, both today and in the future. Comparing today’s quality of family life to 30 years ago, non-US respondents are split, with 44% indicating that today’s quality of family life in the country where they live is stronger and 45% indicating it is weaker. One in ten (9%) feel it is about the same.

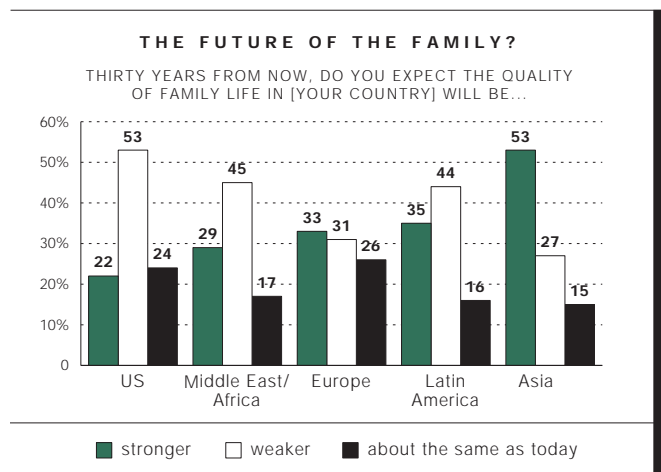
Notably, Asia is the only region where a majority of survey respondents feel today’s quality of family life is stronger (55%) than 30 years ago. The other

regions are much more pessimistic, with just 28% in Europe, 25% in the Middle East/Africa, and 24% in Latin America indicating that the quality of today’s family life is stronger.

Looking ahead, 43% of all respondents feel the quality of family life will be stronger 30 years from now, but one in three (34%) feel that the quality of family life will be weaker than today. One in five (18%) feel the quality of family life 30 years from now will be about the same as it is today.

Regional differences are quite pronounced on this question. The most pessimistic region is the United States, where those who anticipate a declining quality of family life (53%) outnumber the optimists (24%) by more than two to one. Latin America and the Middle East/Africa, while more evenly divided, offer a similarly gloomy forecast for the family.

In contrast, Asia is again the most optimistic region, with 53% indicating the quality of family life will be stronger in 30 years. Europe has no clear leanings, with 33% saying the family will be stronger in 30 years, 31% weaker, and 26% about the same.



There is no doubt that current trends, if left unchecked, threaten the existence of the family. Yet at the same time, this study offers reasons for hope. It confirms that most people throughout the world place a very high level of importance on marriage, children, and the family. It reaffirms that the natural family is indeed the foundation of civilized society.

It follows that the very survival of society depends on maintaining a social and political environment which protects and encourages lasting marriages between men and women, fosters child-rearing within the natural family, and gives parents and families the tools they need to strengthen the family unit now and in the future. ■

STUDY METHODOLOGY

The results presented in this Report are from a global survey of 2,893 adults eighteen years of age and older. The survey was conducted by Wirthlin Worldwide, a leading international research and consulting firm, on behalf of The Howard Center for Family, Religion & Society, and NGO Family Voice, the World Family Policy Center at Brigham Young University.

Interviews were conducted during the months of September and October 1999, among a randomly selected audience of adults in each country.

Interviews were conducted either over the phone or in person, depending on the country and the prevalence of telephones. This resulted in a pure random sampling methodology in most of the developed countries and a cluster sampling methodology in some of the developing countries.

All interviews were conducted in the native language of the respondent. The questionnaire was translated from English into the native language using a double-blind translation technique, whereby the questionnaire is translated from English into the native language, then translated back into English by a different translator. This allowed us to determine if there were any words, phrases, or slang that did not translate properly. In these cases, corrections were made prior to the start of the study.

Scaling for questions was designed so as to minimize cultural variances with numerical values. In most cases, a five point or seven point scale was used to further minimize differences and cultural biases.

In the United States, interviews were completed using Wirthlin Worldwide's National Quorum omnibus survey, a nationally representative random telephone survey of 1,000+ adults. In other countries, interviewing was completed using standalone survey techniques and methods.

The sampling frame for this study was not designed to allow for an investigation of attitudes within each country. Rather, the sample was created to allow for analysis by region. Therefore, the data has been weighted and validated according to the countries that comprise each region. In calculating worldwide averages, each region was weighted in proportion to the total population living within those countries that were selected for sampling. Following is a list of each region, sample size interviewed, weighting factor, and the countries where interviewing took place:

- United States: $n = 1,023$ (weighted to 13% of total)
- Europe: $n = 537$ (weighted to 11% of total); [France, Italy, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom]
- Asia: $n = 507$ (weighted to 56% of total); [India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Thailand]
- Latin America: $n = 426$ (weighted to 13% of total); [Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Mexico]
- Middle East/Africa: $n = 400$ (weighted to 7% of total); [Israel, Kenya, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia]

Note that China, Indonesia, Taiwan, and Russia were not included. China was not included because of the 50th anniversary of Communism and government threats to confiscate the interviews. This would have jeopardized the integrity of the project because Chinese respondents might have felt compelled to voice "acceptable" points of view rather than their own true opinions. Indonesia was not included because of rioting and civil conflict. Taiwan was not included because of an earthquake. Russia was not included because of internal civil problems at the time the interviewing was scheduled.

In short, it should be remembered that any global survey will never include every nation in the world. The objective in the design of the sample frame is to include those countries which will collectively represent public opinion for that region under investigation.

All references to non-US respondents refer to the weighted average of all regions surveyed except the United States. The margin of sampling error for a sample size of 2,893 is ± 1.8 percentage points in 95 out of 100 cases. ■