

The eReview provides analysis on public policy relating to Canadian families and marriage.



Top Ten Family Items for January 2010

Families were in the news this month. Here we highlight some of those items

By Institute of Marriage and Family Canada Staff

10. Here come the brides, here come the complicated court cases

South African President Jakob Zuma took his third wife in a traditional Zulu wedding ceremony as Canadian polygamist Winston Blackmore countersued the B.C. government after they failed to convict him of polygamy. On January 14 reports said Blackmore came out swinging, saying that the B.C. Attorney General's ministry had been "high-handed, arbitrary, reckless, abusive, improper and inconsistent with the honor of the Crown and the administration of justice." [1]

While this mess in the courts is going to be around for a while, there's no place for polygamy in Canada.

9. Common sense parenting

On January 6, a Michigan psychologist's study results hit the press, suggesting that spanking does not harm kids. [2] Critics immediately cited reams of material indicating the opposite. We entered the fray saying the biggest takeaway is that the government should not tell parents how to parent by outlawing any discipline form, as the Canadian Senate has tried to do in the past.

The final word goes to Barbara Kay: "Human beings are too complex for conventional methodology to isolate any single element of child-rearing as a predictor for future behaviour." [3]

8. Too much media, too few rules

Children and teens are afloat on a sea of entertainment media according to a new study released January 20 of 2002 American teens by the Kaiser Family Foundation. [4] On average, the study says young people spend 7 hours and 38 minutes consuming media a day – a number that jumps to ten hours 45 minutes when 'media multitasking' is included. The study adds only 1 in 3 teens have rules limiting media consumption. Fewer than half of teens say their parents have rules about the content they consume.

Parenting teenagers— isn't there an app for that?

7. Now I know my ABCs. Next time won't you sing with me

No one is singing about the Abortion Breast Cancer (ABC) link, except possibly MP Maurice Vellacott, who had good reason to gloat when Gloria Galloway reported on January 8 that he may be right for saying the link exists. [5] One Louise Brinton, chief of the Hormonal and Reproductive Epidemiology Branch of the National Cancer Institute published a study in April 2009 in a prestigious journal, showing a 40 per cent increased risk of breast cancer after abortion. [6]

All this would be unremarkable, except that the National Cancer Institute denies any link at all. [7]

The National Cancer Institute and its own affiliated researcher should sing from the same song sheet.

6. Double standards

Two cases from Britain this January have sent a seriously mixed message about the standing of the law regarding assisted suicide.

In the first, a British mother was convicted of murdering of her son, who suffered brain damage in July 2007. Before the jury left the courtroom to deliberate, the judge instructed them: "there is no concept in law of mercy killing - it is still killing". [8]

In the second, a mother who killed her daughter was found not guilty of murder. The daughter had been living with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome for 17 years and required round-the-clock care. Here, the judge said: "I do not normally comment on the verdicts of juries but in this case their decision ... shows that common sense, decency and humanity which makes jury trials so important in a case of this kind." [9]

We're not so sure people in Britain with chronic conditions, brain damage or other disabilities would agree with the second judge.

5. What would happen if we diverted this energy into helping marriages work?

January is a sad month. The holidays are over, and it has the highest rate of divorce filings annually. Enter the best and brightest legal minds to "help," with a "divorce fair" in Halifax. [10] Back in December, the Attorney General of Ontario introduced new measures to make filing for divorce easier. [11]

With the undisputed benefits of marriage for wives, husbands and children, and the associated costs of marital breakdown, we think that these officials are looking at the wrong end of the issue.

Let's find ways to support marriage, and work toward lowering the divorce rate.

4. Voters or courts—who should decide?

Back in November 2008, California said no to same sex marriage. 52.5 per cent of voters supported Proposition 8, which said "[o]nly marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California." [12]

This January, opponents of Proposition 8 are appealing the voters' decision in California courts in a highly publicized, contentious case called Perry versus Schwarzenegger. It is possible this case could travel all the way to the Supreme Court, where a federal decision would affect state decisions on the matter. Forty-one states maintain statutes defining marriage as one man and one woman. [13]

We think the voters' wishes ought to be respected in California and that traditional marriage should be protected in every state.

3. It used to be called nagging

Grandparents have looked forward to grandkids since the beginning of time. But these days, they're waiting longer, as their children postpone marriage and childbearing. On January 4, one report compared this desire to the ticking biological clock that women face as they near the end of their childbearing years. [14]

It's a new twist on an age-old question: delayed childbearing has potential grandparents wondering if they'll be able to play with their grandkids when they finally arrive.

2. Appearances can be deceiving

The Ontario government is pushing full-day kindergarten for the fall of 2010. On first glance, it may look like a sweet deal. But parents, existing daycares and school boards are starting to notice the idea is fraught with problems. A spate of articles this January decries the poor organization and lack of funding, among other factors. [15] Toronto school board trustee Irene Atkinson was quoted as saying: "My personal feeling is that this is the most ill-conceived program I've ever encountered." [16]

Good that opposition is mounting; this expensive program will curtail parental choice by increasing taxes and diminishing existing daycare options, all at a time of economic downturn. Ill-conceived, indeed.

1. "Good job, well done!"

Could well meaning parents be harming their children with undue praise? One news item gave voice to three psychologists critical of parents constantly praising their children. [17] The experts cited, psychologist Madeline Levine, author of *The Price of Privilege*, Alfie Kohn, author of *Punished by Rewards*, and Richard Weissbourd, author of *The Parents We Mean to Be: How Well-Intentioned Adults Undermine Children's Moral and Emotional Development* warn frivolous back-patting inhibits a child's moral development and encourages kids to become self-absorbed, turning them into "praise junkies." Instead, they recommend praising kids for a sincere effort and for actions displaying integrity.

If you really enjoyed this eReview, please email us at info@imfcanada.org with "Well done!" in the subject heading. More seriously, however, we do welcome your feedback and questions on this and other family-related topics throughout 2010.

Endnotes

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- [11] Institute of Marriage and Family Canada press release, available online at http://www.imfcanada.org/article_files/AttorneyGeneralDivorce_Dec2009.pdf
- [12] Information retrieved online from <http://www.whatisprop8.com/>
- [13] National Conference of State Legislatures. (Last update, January 2010). Same Sex Marriage, Civil Unions and Domestic Partnerships. Retrieved January 26, 2010 from <http://www.ncsl.org/IssuesResearch/HumanServices/SameSexMarriage/tabid/16430/Default.aspx>
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