

Dear Friends

Who pays for sex?

A deliberately provocative title, perhaps? But I was struck by a recent article that came across my desk looking at the measurable and serious consequences, especially financially, of sexual freedom.

Legally, adults are essentially free (with some specific limitations) to act as they chose, regardless of marital or relationship status. In other words, sex is seen merely as a private matter between consenting individuals.

However, few would argue that such sexual freedom does carry huge emotional and relational consequences for any number of third parties - a cheated partner, children in the relationship and often wider family ties, such as grandparents' access to their grandchildren, as well as the inevitable fall out in friendship groups. So what we really mean is that sex between consenting adults is such an important freedom that it is worth the collateral damage - a risky claim without understanding what that damage actually costs society.

Promiscuity has direct financial costs. STIs are estimated to cost the NHS - and therefore us, the tax payer - more than £1 billion a year. HIV treatment is another £0.5 billion. Teenage pregnancies cost £63 million and abortions £118 million (£650 each). These direct costs total around £60 per taxpayer annually.

Separation from marriage or cohabiting relationships also incurs huge public costs. Now plainly relationship breakdown is not always caused directly by promiscuity or unfaithfulness. However, any activity that distances sex from its relational context - casual sex, pornography, serial monogamy - reinforces a mindset in which relationship is secondary to personal sexual fulfilment and such influence is cumulative, both personally and culturally.

The much vaunted *Breakdown Britain* report claimed that family breakdown costs the taxpayer £24 billion per year. More recent analysis by *The Relationships Foundation* has shown the figure actually to be as high as £42 billion. Much of this comes from payment of tax credits and lone parent and housing benefits. This is nearly £1,400 per year for every taxpayer. It is equivalent to 6% of public spending for 2011 or one-third of the health care budget. It is roughly the same as the entire Defence budget or the interest on the national debt. These are direct costs. They don't include, for example, the estimated £20 billion of lost working hours following divorce or the unquantifiable future costs of educational under achievement that *Breakdown Britain* identified as going hand-in-hand with relationship breakdown.

“The costs of sexual freedom and relationship breakdown to the taxpayer and wider economy are complex and difficult to calculate, but £100 billion annually is probably a reasonable starting point: about twice as much as alcohol abuse, smoking and obesity combined.” (*The Cambridge Papers* 20.4, Dec 2011)

In this light, the Bible's sexual ethic of faithfulness and stability (within marriage, between one man and one woman, for life) is not just a reflection of the character of God, but also a very pragmatic answer to our failing culture that generally views Christian standards as hopelessly out of date.

Happy Valentines!

with every blessing
Philip de Grey-Warter