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Article

Title: Putting an end to ‘fatherless’ children?

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‘Right now only married couples have to name the father on the birth certificate, but that is all about to change’ says Cathy Hunt of Phillips Solicitors, ‘Under the new Welfare Reform Bill, to be introduced in the autumn, mothers will be forced to name their child’s father on birth certificates, a measure which the Government hopes will ensure that fathers support their children financially.

But it’s not just the child maintenance that is important - the new law is intended to give children the security of knowing who both their mother and father are and promote the idea of shared parenting. At the moment, if the father is not named on the birth certificate, he is not entitled to have any say in the important decisions in his child’s life, such as his child’s education or any medical treatment his child may need. A father can obtain parental responsibility, however, either by entering into an agreement with the mother or by applying to the court for a parental responsibility order.

So is this a good thing? Fathers’ organisations have welcomed the new law and said the 7% of children registered solely by their mother would benefit from having two parents in their lives. But critics argue that the new law makes the assumption that it is in a child’s best interests to know who his or her father is. There may be situations where it would simply be undesirable or difficult for a mother to be compelled to declare the name of her child’s father. For example, where a child is born as a result of a fling with a married man, or where the mother does not know who the child’s father is. The exceptional circumstances for omitting the father’s name include where the child is born as a result of rape.

‘Putting parental responsibility centre stage has to be good’ concludes Cathy Hunt ‘and this new law may just help to ensure that both parents become involved in the lifetime commitment to their child’s life.’

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