

## Law shake-up 'will fuel the epidemic of fatherless families': Proposals condemned by IDS think-tank

By [TIM SHIPMAN](#)

Plans to deny fathers and grandparents the legal right to see children after a family break-up will fuel an 'epidemic of fatherlessness' in Britain, it was claimed yesterday.

A think-tank set up by Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith warned that the proposals could further undermine the family.

Downing Street also turned on the Family Justice Review, drawn up by former civil servant David Norgrove, insisting its conclusions are not in line with Government policy and saying it was not duty-bound to implement it. Mr Norgrove has recommended fathers get no legal right to equal access and reneged on an earlier pledge to write into legislation that the courts should insist a child has a 'meaningful relationship' with both parents. He said handing out greater rights would lead to more legal battles for custody and delays in deciding who a child should live with.

Mr Norgrove also angered grandparents by rejecting calls to scrap an existing rule which means they have to go to court twice to gain access to their grandchildren. He also argued grandparents can do more harm than good by interfering in fraught custody battles.

Mr Norgrove told the Mail yesterday that the Centre for Social Justice – the pro-family group established by Mr Duncan Smith and of which he remains patron – 'supported' his interim report in March.

But minutes later the CSJ issued a powerful denunciation of the final plans, saying they would fuel the numbers of fatherless feral youths blamed for the riots this summer.

Mr Duncan Smith is leading a study of what drives young men into gangs and has vowed to fight Mr Norgrove's proposals. He is furious the proposals could undermine David Cameron's pledge to create the most family-friendly government ever.

The CSJ said: 'The final report from the Norgrove Review fails to address the bias in the family law system against fathers and grandparents and will fuel the epidemic of fatherlessness in the UK. Urgent changes are required in this legislation to reflect the vital role non-resident parents play, usually fathers, for their child's wellbeing.'

A spokesman for the Prime Minister said: 'It is Coalition policy that we are in favour of a meaningful relationship. We are committed to shared parenting. We're firmly of the view that children should have a meaningful relationship

with both parents.

'It's an independent report. We will examine carefully the panel's recommendations and come back with a response in due course.'

Mr Norgrove said: 'Grandparents are very important in children's lives but there are occasions when grandparents can either cause problems for themselves or be used by their children to get at their partner.' 'In highly conflicted cases, grandparents can play a damaging role.'

He said two court hearings were needed to 'weed out malicious and potentially damaging' access claims by grandparents. 'Most of them are not a malign influence but some are,' he added. Numerous studies have found that grandparents should play a bigger role in the event that a child's parents split.

Verity Gill, the founder of Grannynet, the online community for grandparents, said: 'We are horrified to hear the rulings put forward in the report. One million grandparents are denied access to their grandchildren in the UK today.'

'Grandparents currently contribute £3.4 billion per year in childcare costs, but behind that number is the love and support that creates a stable home life for millions of children.'

CSJ executive director Gavin Poole said: 'Norgrove's refusal to acknowledge the importance of fathers and recommend a change to the law ignores the vast majority of public opinion and evidence about the effect absent dads have on children.'

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2057383/Law-shake-fuel-epidemic-fatherless-families-Proposals-condemned-IDS-think-tank.html#ixzz1dEFGQ88>