



Cohabitation – Census Results & Social Research Findings

Overview

In 2005, the Council on Family Law issued a study that reveals the rise of cohabitation in our society. The trend is to view cohabitation and marriage as equal, when in fact they are two very different types of relationships.¹

The 2000 Census revealed that the percentage of U.S. cohabiting households increased by 72% during the 1990's. While popular sentiment may be that cohabitation is an effective method to test the “fitness” of a potential long-term relationship, this sentiment has no basis in reality.

An August 2006 study concludes that cohabitation before marriage is harmful to the long-term prospects of a marriage. Those who moved in together before marriage were between 50 and 100 percent more likely to have their marriage end in divorce. In fact, the study found that the longer a couple lives together before marriage, the more problems the marriage is likely to experience. Those couples tended to manage conflicts within their marriage with more heated arguments, hitting, and throwing. The longer couples lived together before marriage, the less satisfied they were with their current marriage.²

Perhaps the troubles are merely symptoms of an underlying problem – living under the pretense of an enduring relationship while lacking the essential elements of commitment and security.

Although cohabiting households – unmarried couples living together – continue to represent a small portion of the overall population of the U.S., there has been a significant increase during the last decade. This increase has come at the expense of households that historically have been headed by married couples:

	<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>Change</u>
Married households	55%	52%	-3%
Cohabiting households	3%	5%	+2%
Single, noncohabiting households	42%	43%	+1%

Prepared by The Center for Arizona Policy, a non-profit, non-partisan research and education organization.
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Marriage ◇ 2

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Results of Social Research Studies

- **Increased Rate of Domestic Violence** Cohabiting couples are **180% more likely** than married couples to report episodes of hitting, shoving, and throwing things, even after controlling for income, race, education and age.³

A study using a nationally representative sample of more than two thousand 19 to 48-year-old adults found that partners in cohabiting unions have **more disagreements, fight more often, and report lower levels of happiness** than their married counterparts.⁴
 - **Increased Rate of Divorce in Subsequent Marriage** A study of cohabiting couples found that cohabitation **increased acceptance of divorce** and the longer the existence of the cohabiting relationship, the **less enthusiastic** the couple was toward marriage and childbearing.⁵

In a study of cohabiting couples, it was found that: Couples who cohabit before marriage are **72% more likely to divorce** within ten years than couples who did not cohabit.⁶
 - **Poorer Psychological Health** Cohabiting couples **report lower levels of happiness and sexual satisfaction** with each other as well as poorer relationships with their parents.⁷

Cohabiting couples **reported depression at a level 2.8 times higher** than married couples.⁸
 - **Increased Alcohol Problems** In a seven-year study involving 1200 unmarried adults aged 18 to 24 years, researchers found that **participants who chose to cohabit during the seven-year study had significantly more alcohol problems than participants who chose to marry**. Neither premarital levels of alcohol problems among cohabitators nor other demographic characteristics could explain the greater number of alcohol problems among cohabitators. The researchers concluded that there is something peculiar about the status of cohabitation, rather than the characteristics of cohabitators, that causes a significantly higher rate of alcohol problems.⁹
- Child Abuse** Children living in households with unrelated adults are nearly 50 times as likely to die of inflicted injuries as children living with two biological parents. In 82% of these cases, the situation was a mother with a live-in boyfriend, with 74% of the deaths being caused by the boyfriend.¹⁰

A study in Great Britain found that rates of child abuse for children living with married biological parents were phenomenally lower when compared to other child household living arrangements:¹¹

<u>Child Household Living Arrangement</u>	<u>Percentage of Higher Child Abuse Rate</u>
Living with a single, biological parent	1500%
Living with a cohabiting , unmarried biological parent	2100%
Living with a biological mother and a cohabiting boyfriend who is not the father of the child	3400%

¹ Cere, D. (2005). *The Future of Family Law: Law and the Marriage Crisis in North America* (Rep. No. [Http://www.marriedebate.com/pdf/future_of_family_law.pdf](http://www.marriedebate.com/pdf/future_of_family_law.pdf)). New York: Institute for American Values.

² Hill, J. R. (2006). Effects of Cohabitation Length on Personal and Relational Well-Being. *Alabama Policy Institute*. Retrieved from <http://www.alabamapolicy.org/>

³ Whitehead, Dafoe, B., & Waite, L. (1999). How We Mate. *City Journal*, 38-49.

⁴ Brown, & Booth. (1996). Cohabitation Versus Marriage: A Comparison of Relationship Quality. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 58, 668-678.

⁵ Axinn, & Barber. (1997). Living Arrangements and Family Formation Attitudes in Early Adulthood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 59, 595-611.

⁶ Hewitt, B. (2006, October 27). 'Trial Marriage': Is premarital cohabitation an effective risk minimization strategy for marriage breakdown?. Retrieved January 19, 2008, from http://eprints.qut.edu.au/archive/00006134/01/Hewitt_FIN.pdf

⁷ Waite, & Joyner. (1996). *Men's and Women's General Happiness and Sexual Satisfaction in Marriage, Cohabitation and Single Living*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Chicago-Population Research Center. Amato, & Booth. (1997). A Generation at Risk. *Harvard University Press*, p. 258.

⁸ "The Effect of Union Type on Psychological Well-being: Depression Among Cohabitors Versus Marrieds" Brown, Susan L. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* Vol. 41, Number . September, 2000. Page(s) 241-255.

⁹ Horowitz, & White. (1998). The Relationship of Cohabitation and Mental Health: A Study of a Young Adult Cohort. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 505-514.

¹⁰ Children at higher risk in nontraditional homes. (2007, November 18). *MSNBC*. Retrieved January 20, 2008, from <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/21838575/>

¹¹ Whelan. (1993). Broken Homes and Battered Children: A Study of the Relationship Between Child Abuse and Family Type. *Family Education Trust*, 29..