

# New Study Disproves Three Myths about Cohabitation



We're currently in the midst of National Marriage Week (Feb. 7-14), a yearly celebration that recognizes the importance of this most basic human institution.

We're also living in an age where cohabitation rates are [increasing](#), in part because our culture increasingly doesn't value the importance of God's sacred and foundational gift to men and women.

Too many couples simply don't see the value in getting married. To them, "marriage is just a piece of paper." From their vantage point, marriage doesn't bring any added benefits as long as they're "secure" in their relationship. Living together, they contend, without the formal legal ties, is also liberating and better for everyone.

But what does the research say?

A [new study](#) disproves three commonly held myths about cohabitation and affirms the value of marital commitment.

The 2017 World Family Map's main essay, "The Cohabitation-Go-Round: Cohabitation and Family Instability Across the Globe," compares the family stability of children born to cohabiting couples to those born to married couples. It spans 12 years and more than 60 countries.

The big finding is that marriage matters *greatly* to children because it helps provide the stability that experts agree children desperately need to thrive. Kids suffer in a myriad of ways when mom and dad break up.

And this study confirms that cohabitation provides children with *significantly less* stability.

"In the U.S. and 17 European countries, children born to cohabiting couples are *96 percent more likely* to see their parents split by the time they are 12, compared to those who were born to married couples," summarized an [article](#) in The Desert News on the study (emphasis mine).

As noted earlier, the study also [disproved](#) three commonly held myths about cohabitation, according to one of the study's lead authors, Dr. Laurie DeRose. Here they are:

### Myth 1: Cohabitation is less stable just because poorer people are more likely to choose it.

To address the issue of how family economics might influence stability, researchers looked at the mother's education level – low, medium and high – in the families they studied. They found that “children have more stable family lives when born within marriage regardless of their mother's education background.”

In fact, DeRose reports they found “in the overwhelming majority of countries, the most educated cohabiting parents still have a far higher rate of break-up than the lowest educated married couples.”

### Myth 2: Cohabitation becomes more similar to marriage as it becomes more widespread.

Researchers found that the increasing frequency of cohabitation as a family structure did not make it more similar to marriage in terms of stability for children. While the “stability advantage” of marriage varies country-to-country, marriage provided more stability for children even in countries where cohabiting births were part of the norm.

“In more than 60 countries, we see that the rise in cohabitation is linked to an increase in family instability for children,” IFS senior fellow W. Bradford Wilcox, study co-author and sociology professor at the University of Virginia, [told](#) Desert News. “It suggests there's something about marriage as an institution that signals commitment.”

### Myth 3: Where cohabitation has been a long-standing alternative to marriage, further growth of the institution will not affect children's lives.

Scholars who study Latin America and the Caribbean note the region has a “[dual nuptiality system](#)” where marriage and cohabitation coexist as “alternatives for life-long unions.”

But, even there, marriage sets itself apart.

“Relative stability doesn't vary much. Cohabitation is twice as fragile as marriage; it's much more uniform than you would expect. Even in Latin America, where cohabitation coexists alongside marriage and is a longstanding cultural alternative, it's still more fragile,” DeRose [told](#) the Deseret News.

These findings only add to the mountains of social science research over decades that prove that [marriage matters](#). It matters to children, as we've seen here.

It also matters to women – married women have such a large advantage over those who are cohabiting that marriage has been called “a [feminist institution](#).” Focus marriage expert Glenn Stanton further fleshes out this thinking in his book, “The Ring Makes All the Difference.”

And just this week, additional research has emerged showing how [marriage benefits men](#). The benefits are substantial by every conceivable measure, including greater financial well-being, higher quality of sexual life, and significantly better physical and mental health outcomes.

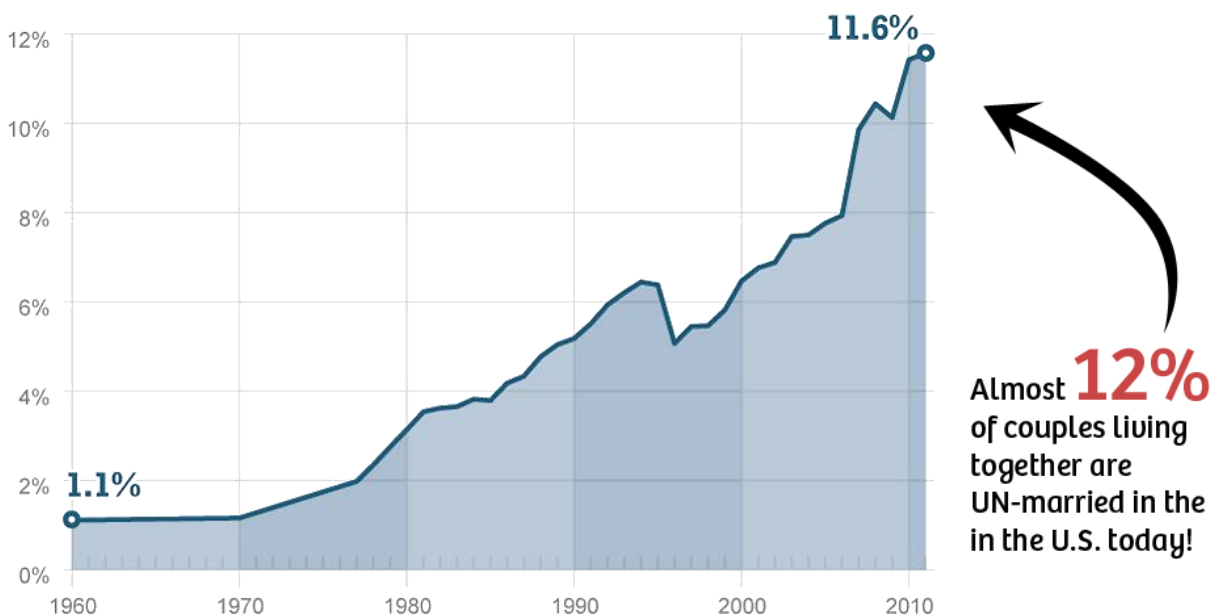
Finally, as I explain in my most recent book, “Marriage Done Right,” marriage benefits society as a whole.

So during National Marriage Week, won’t you help us spread the good news that God’s design for family formation – marriage – is far superior to any manmade alternative?

You can do this by sharing about the beauty and benefits of marriage by working hard on your own and supporting those around you.

February 8, 2017 [Jim Daly](#) President of Focus on the Family

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## The Results of Cohabitation vs. Marriage by John Curtis, PhD

- Those involved in serial cohabitation find it is easier to continually dissolve relationships including marriages. However, those who never cohabit but marry and divorce, find it easier to file for another divorce, as well. The failure rate of second or even third marriages bears this out.
- Most cohabiting couples who break up will end up in another cohabiting relationship.

- Women often get dumped by men who move onto younger women as their next cohabiting partner.
- If children are involved, they usually stay with the mother, which reduces her chances of finding another suitable partner.
- In addition, children continue to suffer since they are not clear about the relationship between parents and how they fit into their life.
- Religion is less likely to be an important part of the life of a cohabiting couple since, in most cases, religion does not approve of cohabiting partnerships.
- At the same time while many cohabiting partners recognized that their living together is wrong by religious standards, they could not envision an alternative way of living.
- Cohabiting couples report being less happy and less sexually satisfied due, in part, to less monogamy among cohabiting couples.
- Cohabiting couples report feeling less connected to a community and need to make an effort to reach out to socialize with others since cohabiting couples are not as readily accepted in society, at least not yet.
- Depression among cohabiting couples is triple the rate of married couples, while physical aggression happens twice as often as it does among married partners, and cohabiting women are more likely than married women to suffer physical and sexual abuse.
- 75% of children born to cohabiting parents will see their parents split up before they reach age 16 while this happens to only 1/3 of children born to married parents.
- The rise in and acceptance of cohabitation means that legal marriage is becoming one of just several alternative lifestyle choices.
- As cohabitation becomes stronger, the institution of marriage is likely to be weakened but the gap between the two is closing as cohabiting couples increasingly gain the same legal benefits and responsibilities as married couples.
- Some claim that extending the benefits of being married condones a fragile family structure where women and children are at greater risk.
- Mainstreaming cohabitation may mean that societal expectations of live-in relationships will rise, pressuring cohabiting couples to be more mindful and purposeful when forming and maintaining cohabiting family units.
- Many women tend to see living together as the next step before marriage while many men see it as a sexual opportunity without the commitment.
- Current evidence does not show that living together before marriage increases the likelihood of happy and long-lasting marriages.

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