

Cohabitation Vs. Smart Marriages

From: Smart Marriages

Linda Waite will present at the Denver Smart Marriages conference.

Study lists drawbacks of cohabitation

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BY SUSAN DODGE STAFF REPORTER

Unmarried couples who live together are more likely to physically abuse their partners and be unfaithful, and less likely to get assistance from family members than married couples, according to a new study.

People who live together without marrying tend to be younger, are less educated, more likely to attract partners who are less committed to marriage, and less likely to be successful at marriage, said Linda Waite, author of the study titled "The Negative Effects of Cohabitation."

"These tentative and uncommitted relationships are bound together by the 'cohabitation deal' rather than the 'marriage bargain,' but that deal has costs," said Waite, a sociology professor at the University of Chicago.

Cohabitation has become increasingly popular in recent years, with about 4 million couples living together outside of marriage in 1990, eight times as many as in 1970, according to the U.S. Census.

Many couples live together as a prelude to marriage, and they tend to share the characteristics of married couples, the study found. But those who had no intention of marrying often had short relationships with few benefits, according to the study.

"People who cohabit often contend that marriage is just about a piece of paper," Waite said. "We've found, however, that there is quite a bit of difference between being married and living together."

Partner abuse occurred among 17 percent of unmarried couples who had no plans to get married, in 14 percent of unmarried couples who planned to get married and in 5 percent of married couples, the study found.

Married couples were about half as likely as cohabiting couples to say that they had physical arguments in the previous year, the study found. Cohabiting couples were more than three times as likely to say "hitting, shoving and throwing things" occurred between them and their partner in the previous year.

"Some researchers suggest that commitment to the relationship and to the partner reduces violence," Waite said.

The study also found that family members were not likely to loan money to a partner living with someone and not provide other kinds of support normally extended to a family member.

Waite studied U.S. Census data, and national surveys including the National Survey of Families and Households and the National Health Social Life Survey, all of which included more than 10,000 people, to look at the costs and benefits of cohabitation.

Her survey also found that cohabiting couples were more likely to be unfaithful. Twenty percent of cohabiting women had a secondary sex partner, compared with 4 percent of married women.

PROS AND CONS

Here are some of the advantages and disadvantages of living together outside of marriage, according to the University of Chicago study:

- * Cohabiting couples had sex more often than married couples, an average of one additional sex act a month.
- * Women in cohabiting relationships did 10 hours more housework than their male partners, while married women did 14 more hours of housework than their husbands.
- * Men in cohabiting relationships were less likely to support their partners financially than married men.
- * Cohabiting couples had the lowest level of wealth among household types, comparable to families headed by a single mother. Two-parent families and stepfamilies had the highest level of wealth.

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