

## **Marriage**

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Official legislation on the touted “fundamental right” of marriage dates back to the 1800s in the United States, showing the prominence and important that the concept of marriage has on society. Changes in laws and policy have increased the opportunity for marriage to a larger population and as such, research on the construct, its benefits, challenges and statistics has become an area of significant interest. The legal and financial implications of a marriage contract have also encouraged researchers due to the serious and long-lasting implications such a contract can have. Reasons to marry are endless, are highly individualized and can range from affection and love, to financial to necessity in order to obtain various legal rights, as just a few examples.

Research has suggested that marriage and its role in American society has shifted in recent decades. The most recent comprehensive reports for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report that 2,140,272 marriages occurred in the United States in 2014. This breaks down to 6.9 marriages per 1,000 people according to CDC statistics. The average American marriage lasts approximately eight years before culminating in divorce. Older research has shown that in more recent decades cohabitation without marriage has increased and rates of marriage have decreased. Seemingly, the American population is spending a smaller proportion of their lives being in a marriage, according to research. This decrease is due to an increase in average age of marriage, now roughly 27 years old for females, according to the CDC. This age has been trending upwards and marriage postponement has become increasingly common in the United States for several societal reasons including increased earning potential for women in the workforce and more equal gender roles in society. Increased cost of marriage associated activities, for instance a

wedding, have also increased substantially and have, as suggested by statisticians, impacted the ability to get married. Additionally, research suggests that individuals no longer see marriage as a necessity or singlehood as a negative concept, thereby increasing one's comfort level in being unmarried.

Research has demonstrated that marriage offers several benefits to those within the partnership. It is noted that married males and females have more financial savings and higher earnings, are more proactive and aware of their physical health, have less depression and anxiety symptomatology, increased self-acceptance, lower rates of risky behavior, increased self-reported satisfaction with their sex lives and lower mortality overall. More recent literature has coined the term "retreat from marriage" indicative of the shift in views on marriage and a tendency to delay or choose not to marry. Work on demographics shows that overall rates of a female marrying at any point in her life is 80% in 2016, an all-time low in the United States, as seen in Robert Shoen's population analysis. His work suggests that a true societal shift in marriage began in 1995 and has since continued a slight downward trend in regards to marriage rates, with an upward trend of age at first marriage.

When thinking of marriage, it is important to keep in mind race, age and education. Several studies and statistical analyses have demonstrated that there are differences in marriage rates, ages and divorces depending on age and race. Being married by age 30 was more likely in Hispanic and Caucasian female cohorts as compared to African American and Asian women. Furthermore, Hispanic and Caucasian females are also much more likely to be married, by age 25 as compared to African American and Asian women.

Lower levels of education were also correlated with younger ages for marriage, including early marriage before the age of 18. This trend was seen across multiple racial groups. Early

marriage has also been shown to be associated with poverty level, low median family income, living location (i.e. urban, suburban), religious identification (i.e. Protestant), and living in the Southern region of the United States. Religion, finances, living location, timing of first birth, overall number of children, family history of intact marriage or divorce and a diagnosis of Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) in female partners were all also found to contribute to age of marriage and the success of the marriage.

### **Further Readings:**

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