

Why Marriage Matters

26 Conclusions from the Social Sciences

Does it matter if couples get and stay married?

In *Why Marriage Matters*, a diverse group of leading family scholars summarizes the findings on the difference that marriage makes.

FAMILY

1. Marriage increases the likelihood that fathers and mothers have good relationships with their children.
2. Cohabitation is not the same as marriage. Cohabiting couples on average are less committed, less faithful, and more likely to break up than married couples.
3. Growing up outside an intact marriage increases the likelihood that children will themselves divorce or become unwed parents.
4. In almost every known human society, marriage exists as a way of regulating the reproduction of children, families, and society.
5. Marriage typically fosters better romantic and parental relationships compared to other family forms, such as cohabitation. Individuals who have a firm commitment to marriage as an ideal are more likely to invest themselves in their marriage and to enjoy happier marriages.
6. Marriage has important biological consequences for adults and children. For instance, marriage appears to reduce men's testosterone levels, and girls who grow up in an intact, married family appear to have a relatively later onset of puberty.

ECONOMICS

7. Divorce and unmarried childbearing increase poverty for both children and mothers.
8. Married couples seem to build more wealth on average than singles or cohabiting couples.
9. Marriage reduces poverty and material hardship (for example, missing a meal or failing to pay rent) for disadvantaged women and their children.
10. African Americans and Latinos benefit economically from marriage.
11. Married men earn more money than do single men with similar education and job histories.
12. Parental divorce (or failure to marry) appears to increase children's risk of dropping out of high school.
13. Parental divorce reduces the likelihood that children will graduate from college and achieve high-status jobs.

PHYSICAL HEALTH AND LONGEVITY

14. Children who live with their own two married parents enjoy better physical health than do children in other family forms.
15. Parental marriage is associated with a sharply lower risk of infant mortality.
16. Marriage is associated with reduced rates of drug and alcohol use for both adults and teens.

17. Married people, especially married men, have longer life expectancies than do otherwise similar singles.
18. Marriage is associated with better health and lower rates of injury, illness, and disability for both men and women.
19. Marriage seems to be associated with better health among minorities and the poor.

MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

20. Children whose parents divorce have higher rates of psychological problems like depression and other mental illnesses.
21. Divorce is linked to higher suicide rates.
22. Married mothers have lower rates of depression than do single or cohabiting mothers.

CRIME AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

23. Boys raised in single-parent families are more likely to engage in delinquent and criminal behavior.
24. Married men and women are significantly less likely to be the perpetrators or victims of crime.
25. Married women appear to have a lower risk of experiencing domestic violence than do cohabiting or dating women.
26. A child who is not living with his or her own two married parents is at significantly greater risk for child abuse.

This summary is adapted from *Why Marriage Matters: Twenty-Six Conclusions from the Social Sciences*, 2nd edition, a publication of the Center for Marriage and Families at the

Institute for American Values. The Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that brings together approximately 100 leading scholars—from across the human sciences and across the political spectrum—for interdisciplinary deliberation, collaborative research, and joint public statements on the challenges facing families and civil society. To obtain the original edition of *Why Marriage Matters* visit www.familyscholars.org.

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