

Effects of Marriage on Mental Health

Research Synthesis Paper: [164 Reasons to Marry](#)

Married people are least likely to have mental disorders,¹⁾ and have higher levels of emotional and psychological well-being than those who are single, divorced, or cohabiting.²⁾ Marriage protects against feelings of loneliness.³⁾ Married mothers enjoy greater psychological well-being and [greater love and intimacy](#) than cohabiting or single mothers.⁴⁾ Marriage also has a wide range of benefits for [physical health](#).

1. Anxiety and Stress

Both adults and children in married families suffer less psychological distress than their counterparts in divorced families.⁵⁾ Married men have lower levels of stress hormones,⁶⁾ and married women experience less psychological distress.⁷⁾ According to the National Survey of Children's Health, biological parents and adoptive parents who live together report less parenting stress (48.9) than single mothers (52.1), biological parent/stepparent families (52.0), or "other" family structure (50.6) such as single fathers.⁸⁾ (See [Chart](#) Below) Married mothers feel more love and intimacy and feel less ambivalence and experience less conflict with their husbands than do cohabiting and single women with their partners.⁹⁾



2. Depression

Those who are married report less depression¹⁰⁾ than cohabiting couples.¹¹⁾ Married mothers report less depression, more support from their partners, and more stable relationships than cohabiting mothers.¹²⁾ Adolescents living with married parents are less likely to be depressed than those in stepfamilies or single-parent families (with or without other adults present).¹³⁾

3. Suicide

Married people are least likely to commit suicide.¹⁴⁾ Adolescents in divorced families are more likely to commit suicide.¹⁵⁾

4. Happiness

A larger fraction of those raised in an intact family consider themselves "very happy" than those raised in non-intact families.¹⁶⁾ (See [Chart](#) Below) Married people are much more likely to report being happy than cohabiters,¹⁷⁾ and those who do not cohabit prior to marriage report having happier marriages than those who do cohabit.¹⁸⁾ Married people (those in intact marriages and those who have

divorced and remarried) most frequently report being proud of their work.¹⁹⁾ Married mothers of infants have the most positive attitudes and report forming better home environments than single and cohabiting mothers.²⁰⁾



5. Drug and Alcohol Use

Married individuals are more likely to cease using marijuana, due in part to improvements in self-control.²¹⁾ Continuously married adults less frequently report that they sometimes drink too much.²²⁾ Married women have fewer alcohol problems.²³⁾ African-Americans who are married have lower rates of excessive drinking and drug use.²⁴⁾

Adolescents from intact married families are less likely to use cocaine than those from divorced families.²⁵⁾ Teenagers from intact families are less likely to begin smoking than those with never-married or divorced single parents.²⁶⁾

6. Community



Older married couples enjoy more social support than older cohabiters.²⁷⁾ Married mothers enjoy more social support than cohabiting or single mothers.²⁸⁾ Those in intact marriages less often report believing that most people would try to take advantage of others. According to the General Social Survey (GSS), 31.6 percent of always-intact married adults believe that, given the opportunity, most people would try to take advantage of others, followed by 39.7 percent of married, previously-divorced adults, 44 percent of single, never-married adults, and 44.3 percent of single, divorced or separated adults²⁹⁾ (See [Chart](#) Above) Married parents spend more on education and less on alcohol and Tabaco as compared to cohabiting parents.³⁰⁾

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