

# Effects of Marriage on Mental Health

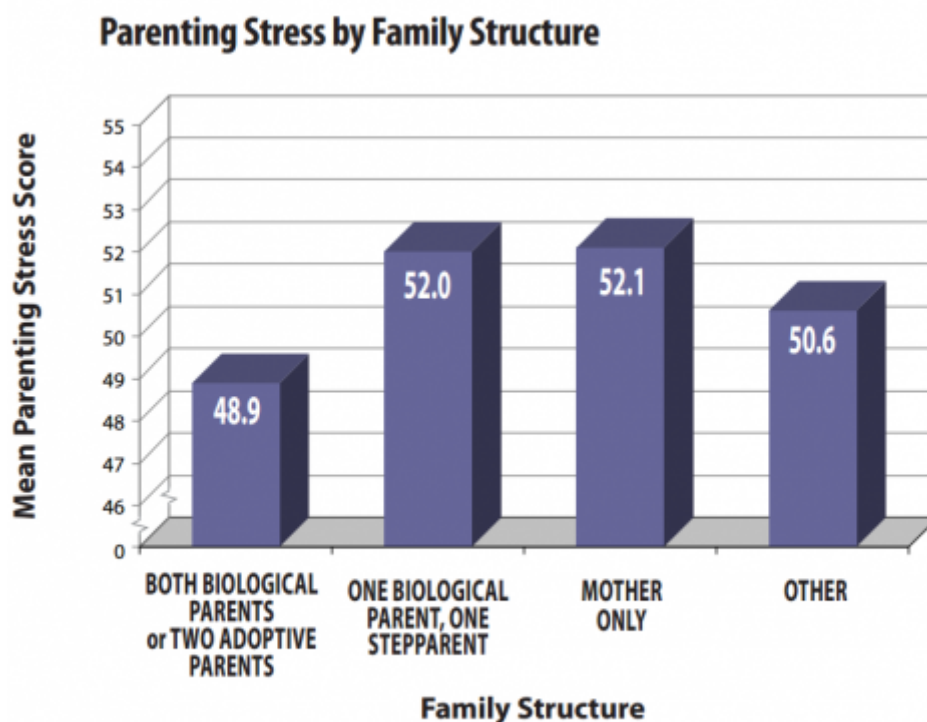
Married people are least likely to have mental disorders,<sup>1)</sup> and have higher levels of emotional and psychological well-being than those who are single, divorced, or cohabiting.<sup>2)</sup> Marriage protects against feelings of loneliness.<sup>3)</sup> Married mothers enjoy greater psychological well-being and **greater love and intimacy** than cohabiting or single mothers.<sup>4)</sup> 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.<sup>5)</sup> Married men have lower levels of stress hormones,<sup>6)</sup> and married women experience less psychological distress.<sup>7)</sup> Married mothers feel more love and intimacy, less ambivalence, and experience less conflict with their husbands than cohabiting and single women do with their partners.<sup>8)</sup>

### 1.1 Related American Demographics

According to the National Survey of Children's Health, biological parents and adoptive parents who are married 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.<sup>9)</sup> (See [Chart](#) Below)



Source: National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH)

## 2. Depression

Those who are married report less depression<sup>10)</sup> than cohabiting couples.<sup>11)</sup> Married mothers report less depression, more support from their partners, and more stable relationships than cohabiting mothers.<sup>12)</sup> 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).<sup>13)</sup>

## 3. Suicide

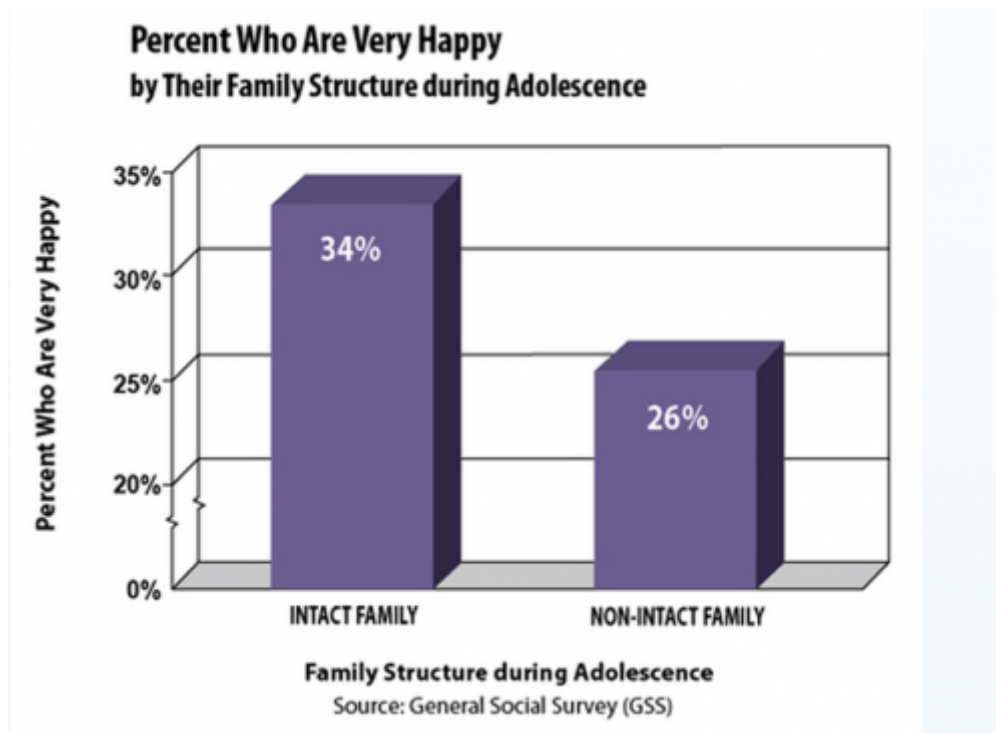
Married people are least likely to commit suicide.<sup>14)</sup> Adolescents in divorced families are more likely to commit suicide.<sup>15)</sup>

## 4. Happiness

Married people are much more likely to report being happy than cohabiters,<sup>16)</sup> and those who do not cohabit prior to marriage report having happier marriages than those who do cohabit.<sup>17)</sup> Married people (those in intact marriages and those who have divorced and remarried) most frequently report being proud of their work.<sup>18)</sup> Married mothers of infants have the most positive attitudes and report forming better home environments than single and cohabiting mothers.<sup>19)</sup>

### 4.1 Related American Demographics

A larger fraction of those raised in an intact family consider themselves “very happy” than those raised in non-intact families.<sup>20)</sup> (See [Chart](#) Below)



## 5. Drug and Alcohol Use

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

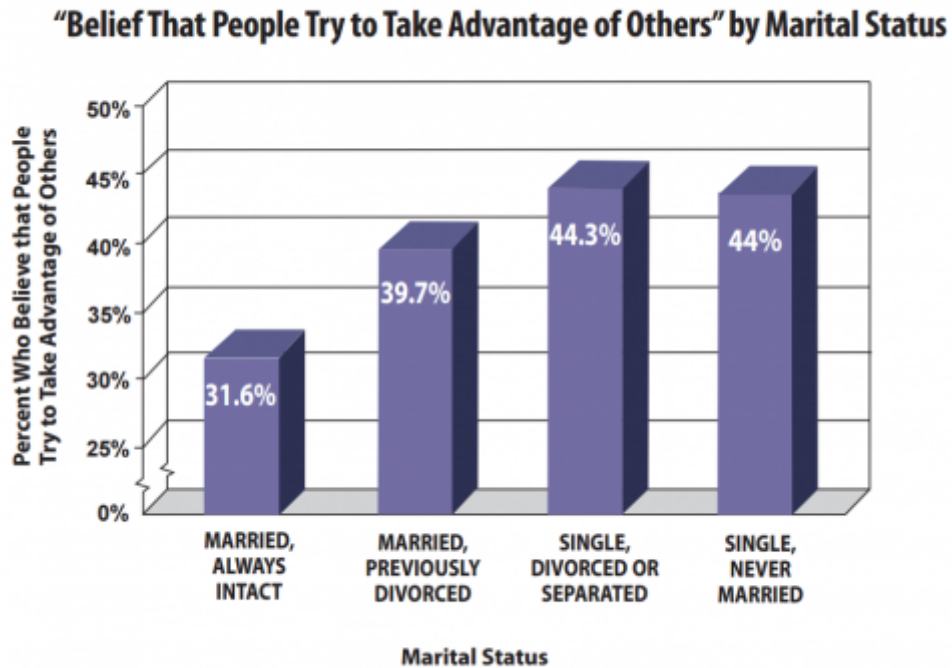
Adolescents from intact married families are less likely to use cocaine than those from divorced families.<sup>25)</sup> Teenagers from intact families are less likely to begin smoking than those with never-married or divorced single parents.<sup>26)</sup>

## 6. Community

Older married couples enjoy more social support than older cohabiters,<sup>27)</sup> and married mothers enjoy more social support than cohabiting or single mothers.<sup>28)</sup> Those in intact marriages less often report believing that most people would try to take advantage of others. Married parents spend more on education and less on alcohol and tobacco as compared to cohabiting parents.<sup>29)</sup>

### 6.1 Related American Demographics

According to the General Social Survey (GSS), always-intact married adults are less likely than married, previously divorced adults or unmarried adults to believe that most people would try to take advantage of others.<sup>30)</sup> (See [Chart](#) Below)



Source: General Social Survey (1972-2006)

<sup>1)</sup> D. Williams, et al., “Marital Status and Psychiatric Disorders Among Blacks and Whites,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 33, (1992): 140-157. As cited in G.T. Stanton, “Why Marriage Matters.” Available at <http://www.ampartnership.org/resourcecenter/news/89-why-marriage-matters.html>. Accessed 27 July 2011.

B. Malzberg, “Marital Status in Relation to the Prevalence of Mental Disease,” *Psychiatric Quarterly* 10, (1936): 245-261; J. Coyne, M.J. Rohrbaugh, V. Shoham, J.S. Sonnega, J.M. Nicklas, and J.A. Cranford, “Prognostic Importance of Marital Quality for Survival of Congestive Heart Failure” *American Journal of Cardiology* 88, no. 5 (2001): 526-529. As cited in California Healthy Marriages Coalition, “Healthy Marriages, Mental Health. Research on the Alignment of Marital Outcomes and Mental Health.” Available at <http://camarriage.com/content/resources/7b8690b0-784f-46e7-af7d-438a9b064557.pdf>. Accessed 25 August 2011.

<sup>2)</sup> S.L. Brown, “Relationship Quality Dynamics of Cohabiting Unions,” *Journal of Family Issues* 24, no. 5 (2003): 583-601.

S.L. Brown, “The Effect of Union Type on Psychological Well-being: Depression among Cohabitors versus Marrieds,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 41, no. 3 (2000): 241-255.

B.A. Hahn, “Marital Status and Women’s Health: the Effect of Economic Marital Acquisitions,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 55, no. 2 (1993): 495-504; Y. Hu and N. Goldman, “Mortality Differentials by Marital Status: An International Comparison,” *Demography* 27, no. 2 (1990): 233-250; J.K. Kiecolt-Glaser and T.L. Newton, “Marriage and Health: His and Hers,” *Psychological Bulletin* 127, no. 4 (2001): 472-503; L.A. Lillard and C.W.A. Panis, “Marital Status and Mortality: The Role of Health,” *Demography* 33, no. 3 (1996): 313-327; L.A. Lillard and L.J. Waite, “Til Death Do us Part: Marital Disruption and Mortality,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 100, no. 5 (1995): 1131-1156; K. Marcussen, “Explaining Differences in Mental Health Between Married and Cohabiting Individuals,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (1999): 239-257; S. Stack and J.R. Eshleman, “Marital Status and Happiness: A 17-Nation Study,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60, (1998): 527-536; K.A.S. Wickrama, et al., “Marital Quality and Physical Illness: A Latent Growth Curve Analysis,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 59, no. 1 (1997): 143-155. All as cited in D. Lees, “The Psychological Benefits of Marriage,” *Research Note* (2007): 1-4. Available at

[http://www.maxim.org.nz/files/pdf/psychological\\_benefits\\_of\\_marriage.pdf](http://www.maxim.org.nz/files/pdf/psychological_benefits_of_marriage.pdf). Accessed 27 July 2011

- <sup>3)</sup> R. Page and G. Cole, "Demographic Predictors of Self-Reported Loneliness in Adults," *Psychological Reports* 68, (1991): 939-945. As cited in G.T. Stanton, "Why Marriage Matters," Available at [http://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/gods\\_design\\_for\\_marriage/marriage\\_gods\\_idea/why\\_marriage\\_matters\\_for\\_adults.aspx#footnoteRef17](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/gods_design_for_marriage/marriage_gods_idea/why_marriage_matters_for_adults.aspx#footnoteRef17), accessed 12 April, 2013.
- M.A. Distel, I. Rebollo-Mesa, A. Abdellaoui, C.A. Derom, G. Willemsen, J.T. Cacioppo, D.I. Boomsma, "Familial Resemblance for Loneliness," *Behavior Genetics* 40, no. 4 (2010): 480, 488,490.
- <sup>4)</sup> S.R. Aronson and A.C. Huston, "The Mother-Infant Relationship in Single, Cohabiting, and Married Families: A Case for Marriage?" *Journal of Family Psychology* 18, no. 1 (2004): 5-18. As cited by The Heritage Foundation: Family Facts. Available at <http://www.familyfacts.org/search?q=huston%20and%20aronson&type=findings&page=1>. Accessed 1 September 2011.
- <sup>5)</sup> P.R. Amato, "The Consequence of Divorce for Adults and Children," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62, (2000): 1269-1287. As cited in N. Zill, "Parenting Stress and Family Structure." Available at <http://www.frc.org/mappingamerica/mapping-america-35-parenting-stress-and-family-structure>. Accessed 26 August 2011.
- <sup>6)</sup> D. Maestriperi, "Between- and Within-Sex Variation in Hormonal Responses to Psychological Stress In a Large Sample of College Students," *Stress* 13, no. 5 (2010): 413-442; J. Holt-Lunstad, "Is There Something Unique about Marriage? The Relative Impact of Marital Status, Relationship Quality, and Network Social Support on Ambulatory Blood Pressure and Mental Health," *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* 35, no. 2 (2008): 239-244. As cited in K. Blanchard, "Health & Marriage: Benefits for Men." Available at <http://www.foxnews.com/health/2010/10/13/health-marriage-benefits-men/#ixzz1TDmcdmCc>. Accessed 26 July 2011.
- <sup>7)</sup> D. Cramer, "Living Alone, Marital Status, Gender and Health," *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* 3, (1993): 9.
- W.R. Avison, J. Ali, and D. Walters, "Family Structure, Stress, and Psychological Distress: A Demonstration of the Impact of Differential Exposure," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 48, (2007): 306.
- <sup>8)</sup> S.R. Aronson and A.C. Huston, "The Mother-Infant Relationship In Single, Cohabiting, and Married Families: A Case for Marriage?" *Journal of Family Psychology* 18, no. 1 (2004): 5-18. As cited by The Heritage Foundation: Family Facts. Available at <http://www.familyfacts.org/search?q=huston%20and%20aronson&type=findings&page=1>. Accessed 1 September 2011.
- <sup>9)</sup> This chart draws on data collected by the National Center for Health Statistics in the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) in 2003. The data sample consisted of parents of 102,353 children and teens in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. 68,996 of these children and teens were between six and 17 years old, the age group that was the focus of the study. The survey sample in this age range represented a population of nearly 49 million young people nationwide.
- N. Zill, "Parenting Stress and Family Structure," Mapping America Project. Available at <http://downloads.frc.org/EF/EF09A28.pdf>
- <sup>10)</sup> S. Brown, "The Effect of Union Type on Psychological Well-Being: Depression among Cohabitators versus Marrieds," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 41, no. 3 (2000): 247-248.
- <sup>11)</sup> K. Marcussen, "Explaining Differences in Mental Health between Married and Cohabiting Individuals," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (2005): 239-257; S.L. Brown, G.R. Lee, and R.J. Bulanda, "The Significance of Nonmarital Cohabitation: Marital Status and Mental Health Benefits among Middle-Aged and Older Adults," *The Journals of Gerontology* 60, no. 1 (2005): S21-S29. Both as cited in Daniel Lees, "The Psychological Benefits of Marriage," *Research Note* (April 2007): 1-4. Available at [http://www.maxim.org.nz/files/pdf/psychological\\_benefits\\_of\\_marriage.pdf](http://www.maxim.org.nz/files/pdf/psychological_benefits_of_marriage.pdf). Accessed 27 July 2011.
- <sup>12)</sup> Valarie King, "Stepfamily Formation: Implications for Adolescent Ties to Mothers, Nonresident Fathers, and Stepfathers," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71, no. 4 (November 2009): 4.

- <sup>13)</sup> Anne E. Barrett and R. Jay Turner, "Family structure and mental health: The mediating effects of socioeconomic status, family process and social stress," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 46, no. 2 (2005): 156-169. As cited in *National Healthy Marriage Resource Center Research Brief* by Jana Staton, "Making the Connection Between Healthy Marriage and Health Outcomes: What the Research Says" (2009): 1-18.
- <sup>14)</sup> Maria Masocco, et al., "Suicide and marital status in Italy," *Psychiatric Quarterly* 79, no. 4 (2008): 275-285. As cited in Roger Dobson, "From cancer to heart disease, the amazing, life-saving benefits of marriage," Available at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-1049134/From-cancer-heart-disease-amazing-life-saving-benefits-marriage.html>, accessed 5 April 2013.
- <sup>15)</sup> David M. Cutler, et al., "Explaining the Rise in Youth Suicide," Working Paper 7713 (Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research): 2000. As cited in Glenn T. Stanton, "Why Marriage Matters," [http://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/gods\\_design\\_for\\_marriage/marriage\\_gods\\_idea/why\\_marriage\\_matters\\_for\\_adults.aspx#footnoteRef17](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/gods_design_for_marriage/marriage_gods_idea/why_marriage_matters_for_adults.aspx#footnoteRef17), accessed 12 April, 2013.
- <sup>16)</sup> Steven Stack and J. Ross Eshleman, "Marital Status and Happiness: A 17-Nation Study," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60 (1998): 527-536. As cited in Daniel Lees, "The Psychological Benefits of Marriage" Research Note, (April 2007): 1-4. Available at [http://www.maxim.org.nz/files/pdf/psychological\\_benefits\\_of\\_marriage.pdf](http://www.maxim.org.nz/files/pdf/psychological_benefits_of_marriage.pdf). Accessed 27 July 2011.
- Lee, Kristen Schultz, and Hiroshi Ono, "Marriage, Cohabitation, and Happiness: A Cross-National Analysis of 27 Countries," *Journal of Marriage & Family* 74, no. 5 (October 2012): 961-962.
- <sup>17)</sup> James, Spencer L., and Brett A. Beattie, "Reassessing the Link between Women's Premarital Cohabitation and Marital Quality," *Social Forces* 91, no. 2 (December 2012): 651, 652.
- <sup>18)</sup> Patrick F. Fagan and Althea Nagai, "I Am Proud of the Type of Work I Do." Available at <http://www.frc.org/mappingamerica/mapping-america-77-i-am-proud-of-the-type-of-work-i-do-by-marital-status>. Accessed 26 August 2011.
- <sup>19)</sup> , <sup>28)</sup> Stacy Rosenkrantz Aronson and Aletha C. Huston, "The mother-infant relationship in single, cohabiting, and married families: a case for marriage?" *Journal of Family Psychology* 18, no. 1 (March 2004): 5-18. As cited by The Heritage Foundation: Family Facts. Available at <http://www.familyfacts.org/search?q=huston%20and%20aronson&type=findings&page=1>. Accessed 1 September 2011
- <sup>20)</sup> This chart draws on data collected by the General Social Survey, 1972-2006. From 1972 to 1993, the sample size averaged 1,500 each year. No GSS was conducted in 1979, 1981, or 1992. Since 1994, the GSS has been conducted only in even-numbered years and uses two samples per GSS that total approximately 3,000. In 2006, a third sample was added for a total sample size of 4,510.
- Patrick F. Fagan and Althea Nagai, "Intergenerational Links to Happiness: Family Structure." Available at <http://www.frc.org/mappingamerica/mapping-america-50-intergenerational-links-to-happiness-family-structure>. Accessed 26 August 2011.
- <sup>21)</sup> Walter Forrest and Carter Hay, "Life-course transitions, self-control and desistance from crime," *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 11, no. 5 (November 2011): 487-513. As cited in Physorg article, "The Benefits of Marriage." Available at <http://www.physorg.com/news/2011-09-benefits-marriage.html>. Accessed 2 December 2011.
- <sup>22)</sup> Patrick F. Fagan and Althea Nagai, "'Sometimes Drinks too Much Alcohol' by Marital Status." Available at <http://www.frc.org/mappingamerica/mapping-america-86-sometimes-drinks-too-much-alcohol-by-marital-status->. Accessed 26 August 2011.
- <sup>23)</sup> Allan V. Horwitz, Helene Raskin White, and Sandra Howell-White, "Becoming Married and Mental Health: A Longitudinal Study of a Cohort of Young Adults," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 58 (November 1996): 895-907.
- <sup>24)</sup> Ali, Mir M., and Olugbenga Ajilore, "Can Marriage Reduce Risky Health Behavior for African-

Americans?" *Journal of Family & Economic Issues* 32, no. 2 (June 2011): 198, 200.

<sup>25)</sup> Lisa A. Cubbins and Daniel H. Klepinger, "Childhood Family, Ethnicity, and Drug Use over the Life Course," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69, no. 3 (August 2007): 810-830. As cited by The Heritage Foundation: Family Facts. Available at <http://www.familyfacts.org/briefs/24/keeping-teens-safe-how-the-intact-family-buffers-against-teen-substance-use>. Accessed 20 July 2011.

<sup>26)</sup> Chery Amey and Stan Albrecht, "Race and Ethnic Differences in Adolescent Drug Use: The Impact of Family Structure and the Quantity and Quality of Parental Interaction," *Journal of Drug Issues* 28, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 283-298. As cited by The Heritage Foundation: Family Facts. Available at <http://www.familyfacts.org/briefs/24/keeping-teens-safe-how-the-intact-family-buffers-against-teen-substance-use>. Accessed 20 July 2011.

Brown, Susan L., and Lauren N Rinelli, "Family Structure, Family Processes, and Adolescent Smoking and Drinking," *Journal Of Research On Adolescence* (Wiley-Blackwell) 20, no. 2 (June 2010): 264, 266.

<sup>27)</sup> Susan L. Brown, Gary R. Lee, and Jennifer Roebuck Bulanda, "Cohabitation among Older Adults: A National Portrait," *The Journals of Gerontology* 61B, no. 2 (March 2006): S75

<sup>29)</sup> Thomas DeLeire and Ariel Kalil, "How Do Cohabiting Couples with Children Spend Their Money?" *Journal of Marriage and Family*, no. 67 (2005): 286-295. As cited in Institute for American Values, "Why Marriage Matters: 26 Conclusions from the Social Sciences," 13. Available at [http://www.americanvalues.org/pdfs/why\\_marriage\\_matters2.pdf](http://www.americanvalues.org/pdfs/why_marriage_matters2.pdf). Accessed 2 April 2013.

<sup>30)</sup> This chart draws on data collected by the General Social Survey, 1972-2006. From 1972 to 1993, the sample size averaged 1,500 each year. No GSS was conducted in 1979, 1981, or 1992. Since 1994, the GSS has been conducted only in even-numbered years and uses two samples per GSS that total approximately 3,000. In 2006, a third sample was added for a total sample size of 4,510.

Patrick F. Fagan and Althea Nagai, "'Belief That People Try to Take Advantage of Others' by Marital Status." Available at <http://www.frc.org/mappingamerica/mapping-america-89-belief-that-people-try-to-take-advantage-of-others-by-marital-status>. Accessed 26 August 2011.

This entry draws heavily from [164 Reasons to Marry](#).

From:

<http://marripedia.org/> - **Marripedia**

Permanent link:

<http://marripedia.org/effects.of.marriage.on.mental.health?rev=1446826254>

Last update: **2015/11/06 08:10**

