

# Effects of Marriage on Mental Health

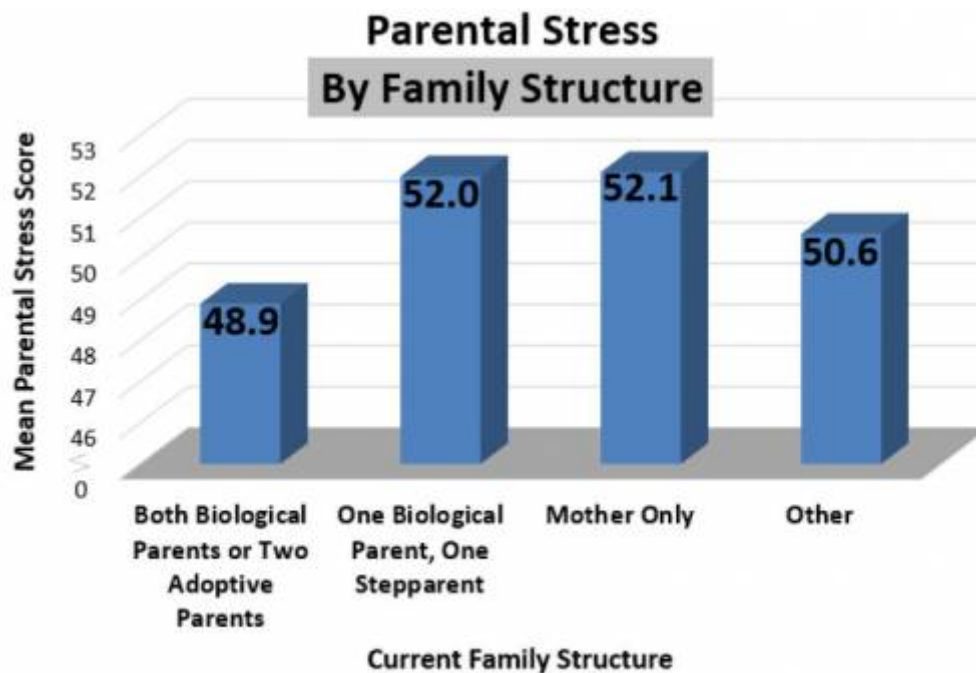
Married people are least likely to have mental disorders,<sup>1)</sup> and have higher levels of emotional and psychological well-being than those who are single, divorced, or cohabiting.<sup>2)</sup> Marriage protects against feelings of loneliness.<sup>3)</sup> Married mothers enjoy greater psychological 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, Adolescents Aged 6-17.

## 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

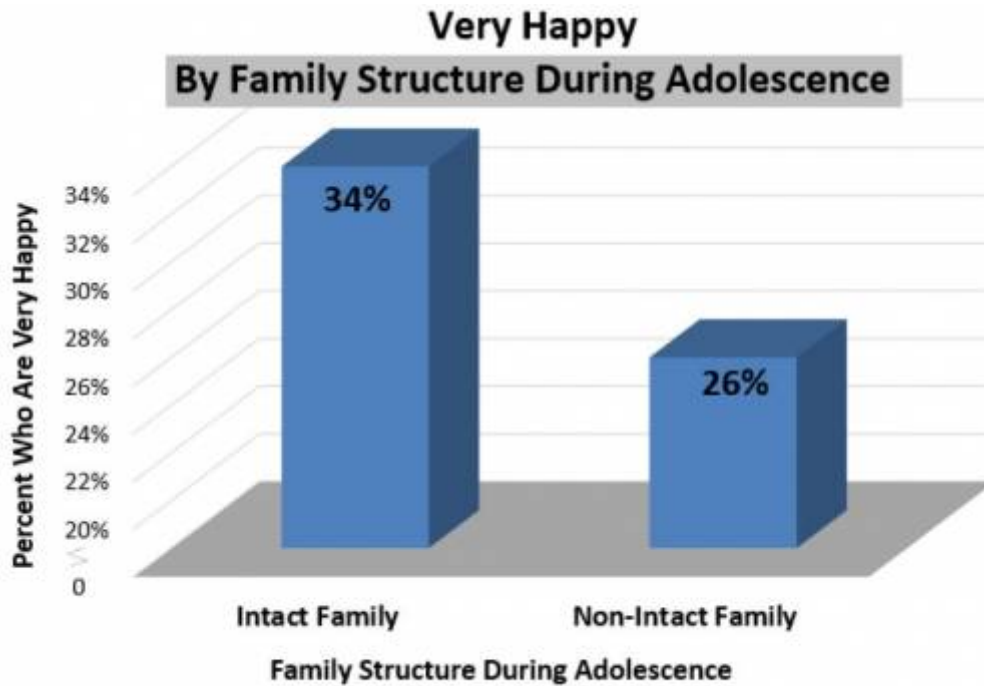
Married people are least likely to commit suicide.<sup>14)</sup> Adolescents in divorced families are more likely to commit suicide.<sup>15)</sup>

## 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)



Source: General Social Survey, 1972-2006.

## 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>

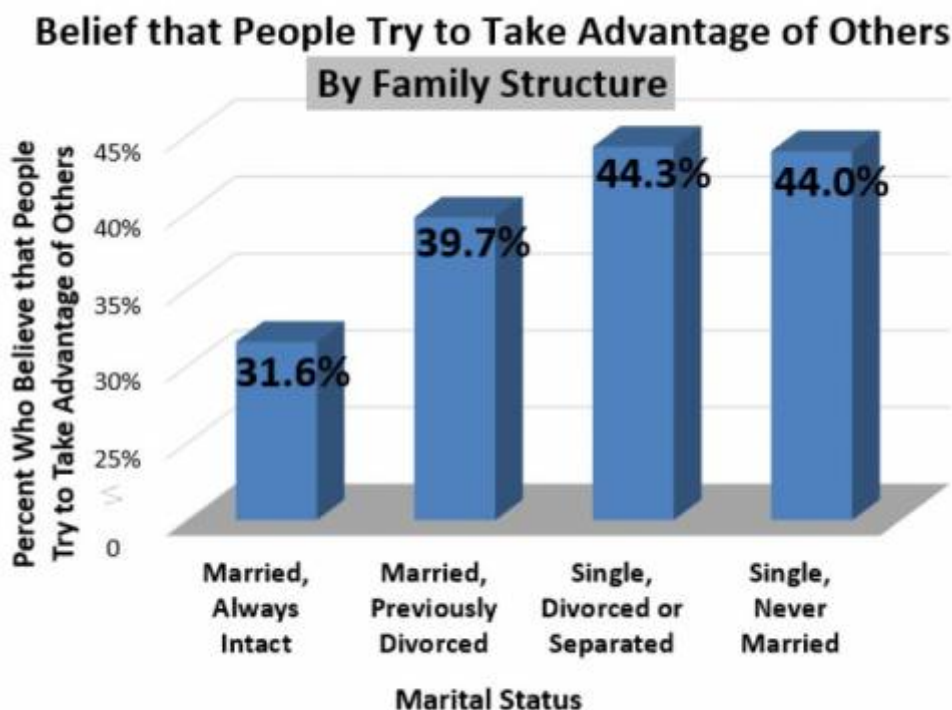
Adolescents from intact married families are less likely to use cocaine than those from divorced families.<sup>25)</sup> Teenagers from intact families are less likely to begin smoking than those with never-married or divorced single parents.<sup>26)</sup>

## 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> David 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.

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

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<sup>3)</sup> Randy Page and Galen Cole, "Demographic Predictors of Self-Reported Loneliness in Adults,"

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- <sup>7)</sup> Duncan 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.
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- <sup>10)</sup> Susan L. 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> Kristen Marcussen, "Explaining Differences in Mental Health between Married and Cohabiting Individuals," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (2005): 239-257; Susan L. Brown, Gary R. Lee, and Jennifer R. 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* (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.
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<sup>13)</sup> Anne E. Barrett and R.J. 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.

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<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* (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. Kristen S. Lee, and Hiroshi Ono, "Marriage, Cohabitation, and Happiness: A Cross-National Analysis of 27 Countries," *Journal of Marriage & Family* 74, no. 5 (2012): 961-962.

<sup>17)</sup> Spencer L. James and Brett A. Beattie, "Reassessing the Link between Women's Premarital Cohabitation and Marital Quality," *Social Forces* 91, no. 2 (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 R. 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 (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://marri.us/wp-content/uploads/MA-49-51-165.pdf>. 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 (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.

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<sup>24)</sup> Mir M. Ali, and Olugbenga Ajilore, "Can Marriage Reduce Risky Health Behavior for African-Americans?" *Journal of Family & Economic Issues* 32, no. 2 (2011): 198, 200.

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<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://marri.us/wp-content/uploads/MA-88-90-178.pdf>. Accessed 26 August 2011.

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