

164 Reasons to Marry

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Introduction

Marriage is the foundational relationship for all of society. All other relationships in society stem from the father-mother relationship, and these other relationships thrive most if that father-mother relationship is simultaneously a close and a closed husband-wife relationship. Good marriages are the bedrock of strong societies, for they are the foundations of strong families. One can see this strength manifested at the national and state level, as indicated in other works of the authors, such as the Index of Family Belonging and Rejection and its relationship to various outcomes.¹

The future of the human race and all its component societies is embodied in each newborn. Whether that newborn grows to be a strong, capable adult depends much on the marriage of his parents. Whether he is physically strong; whether she is intelligent; whether he is hardworking or a dropout; whether she will be mentally healthy and happy; whether he will be more educated; whether she will marry in her own turn; whether he will be a taxpayer or a drain on the commons; whether she enjoys her own sexuality to the full; whether he worships and prays; whether she has children and how many; whether he finishes high school and goes to college or learns a trade; whether she is law-abiding; whether he grows old with a family surrounding him—all these most desirable outcomes (common goods) are strongly connected to the strength of the marriage of that child's parents.

The findings herein demonstrate that in marriage are contained all the five basic institutions, all the basic tasks, of society: family, church, school, marketplace and government. These fundamental tasks, well done, in unity between father and mother, make for a very good marriage. Within a family built on such a marriage, the child gradually learns to value and perform these five fundamental tasks of every competent adult and of every functional society. Gradually he is mentored in them, often unconsciously. Gradually she learns that she is expected to act similarly. Eventually, he and she become more and more expert in performing all five tasks. In other words, they gradually grow in competence and are ready to strike out into society and, eventually, to build their own family. How they do that will depend much on what they experienced in growing up in their families of origin.

With fewer than half our children now reaching the end of childhood in an intact married family,² it will be good for all adolescents to learn again and again that an intact married life is a great good to aim for. If they are clear on the goal, they may be motivated to reach it. Just as the children who grew up in the Great Depression became the wealthiest generation in history, maybe we can hope that the children who experienced so much rejection between their parents will become the greatest generation of parents who belong to each other in lifelong marriage.

The future strength of our nation depends on good marriages to yield strong revenues, good health, low crime, high education, and high human capital. As the following enumeration shows, smart parents and smart societies pay attention to the state and strength of marriage.

I. Reasons to Marry: Family

1. A larger fraction of those in always-intact marriages report that being married is very important to them, compared to those who are divorced, single, or remarried (although these may also regard marriage as important).³
2. Women raised in intact married families have the lowest average number of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and births.⁴
3. Family intactness has a very precisely determinable, negative influence on what fraction of an area's births take place out of wedlock.⁵
4. Those raised in married families have higher expectations of eventually marrying.⁶
5. A larger fraction of those from intact families than non-intact families are happy in their marriages.⁷
6. A lower percentage of those raised in intact families divorce.⁸
7. Daughters raised in intact families are less likely to say they do not plan to have children than daughters living with divorced or remarried mothers.⁹

Spousal Relationships

8. Cohabiting couples enjoy diminished relational happiness and fairness and increased relational disagreement and violence, relative to married couples. When duration of cohabitation was factored in, cohabitation's effect became nonsignificant, but increased duration of cohabitation worsened (relative to marriage) happiness, disagreement, and violence.¹⁰
9. Those who marry experience increased commitment and stability.¹¹
10. Men raised in married families have more open, affectionate, and cooperative relationships with the women to whom they are attracted than do those from divorced families.¹²
11. Married mothers report more love and intimacy in their romantic/spousal relationships than cohabiting or single mothers.¹³

Attachment

12. Families with both biological or adoptive parents present have the highest quality of parent-child relationships.¹⁴
13. Married people are more likely to give and receive support with their parents and are more likely to consider their parents as means for possible support in case of an emergency.¹⁵

Parenting

14. A larger fraction of married adults than remarried, divorced, separated, or single adults report valuing the importance of having their own children.¹⁶
15. Marriage enhances an adult's ability to parent.¹⁷

Sexuality

16. A lower fraction of children from intact married families than from married stepfamilies, intact cohabiting families, cohabiting stepfamilies, divorced single-parent families, and always-single parent families have intercourse before age 14.¹⁸
17. A lower fraction of girls from intact married families than from married stepfamilies, intact cohabiting families, cohabiting stepfamilies, divorced single-parent families, and always-single parent families have intercourse before age 18.¹⁹

18. Adolescent girls in intact married families have a lower average number of sexual partners than adolescent girls in any other family structure.²⁰
19. The fraction of people with only one lifetime sexual partner is lowest among those in intact, married families.²¹
20. A lower fraction of women from intact married families than from married stepfamilies, intact cohabiting families, cohabiting stepfamilies, divorced single-parent families, and always-single parent families cohabit with their eventual first husband.²²
21. Young adults raised in intact married families are more likely to enter legal marriage as their first union than are those who experienced the disruption of their parents' marriage.²³
22. Young adults raised in intact married families are less likely than those who have experienced marital disruption to cohabit before marrying.²⁴
23. A lower fraction of women from intact married families than from married stepfamilies, intact cohabiting families, cohabiting stepfamilies, divorced single-parent families, and always-single parent families have had a homosexual partner in the past year.²⁵
24. Those in intact marriages commit adultery less frequently than divorced and remarried or divorced or separated persons.²⁶
25. Current cohabiters are more likely to have been unfaithful in the past 12 months than married persons.²⁷
26. A lower fraction of intact, married than always single, divorced and remarried, or divorced or separated persons have ever paid or been paid for sex.²⁸

Sexual Satisfaction

27. Married men and women report the most sexual pleasure and fulfillment.²⁹
28. Married men and women report having more enjoyable sexual intercourse more often.³⁰
29. Married couples find their sexual relationship more satisfying than cohabiters do.³¹
30. A larger fraction of individuals in intact marriages than always-single, divorced or separated, or divorced and remarried persons report "very, extremely" enjoying intercourse with their current sexual partner.³²
31. A larger fraction of individuals in intact marriages than always-single, divorced or separated, or divorced and remarried persons report feeling satisfied,³³ loved,³⁴ "taken care of,"³⁵ and thrilled or excited³⁶ during intercourse with their current sexual partner.
32. A smaller fraction of individuals in intact marriages than always-single, divorced or separated, or divorced and remarried persons report feeling guilty,³⁷ sad,³⁸ or scared or afraid³⁹ during intercourse with their current sexual partner.

II. Reasons to Marry: Church and Religion

33. Direct marriage (rather than cohabitation prior to marriage) has a positive effect on religious participation in young adults.⁴⁰
34. Young adults raised in happily married families are more religious than young adults raised in stepfamilies.⁴¹

35. A larger fraction of adults who grew up in an intact married family than from non-intact family structures attend religious services at least monthly.⁴²
36. Those from married families are less likely to see religion decline in importance in their lives, less likely to begin attending church less frequently, and less likely to disassociate themselves from their religious affiliation.⁴³

III. Reasons to Marry: Education

37. Parents in always-intact married families are more likely to help their children do their homework than are parents in stepfamilies or single-parent families.⁴⁴
38. Fathers in always-intact married families are more involved in their children's homework than are stepfathers.⁴⁵
39. Children of married parents are more engaged in school than children from all other family structures.⁴⁶
40. Kindergarten children from married families have higher reading scores than those from cohabiting families.⁴⁷
41. Compared with children in stable married families, students experiencing parental divorce have lower academic expectations and test scores.⁴⁸

GPA

42. A greater fraction of children from intact married families earn mostly As in school.⁴⁹
43. Children in intact married families have the highest combined English and math grade point averages (GPAs.)⁵⁰

Level of Education Attained

44. Having obtained a Bachelor's degree or higher is most common among mothers in intact marriages.⁵¹
45. Children from intact families exceed their parents' educational attainment (sons by 2.8 years, daughters by 2.5 years), after controlling for mother's level of education.⁵²
46. Family intactness has a very precisely determinable, positive influence on what fraction of an area's 19- and 20-year-olds have graduated from high school.⁵³
47. Children from intact married families have the highest high school graduation rate.⁵⁴
48. Those from married families are more likely to gain more education after graduating from high school than those from other family structures.⁵⁵

Behavioral Problems

49. Children from intact families have fewer behavioral problems in school.⁵⁶
50. First-grade children born to married mothers are less likely to exhibit disruptive behavior, such as disobeying a teacher or behaving aggressively towards peers, than children born to cohabiting or single mothers.⁵⁷
51. Adolescents from intact married families are less frequently suspended, expelled, or delinquent, and less frequently experience school problems than children from other family structures.⁵⁸

IV. Reasons to Marry: Marketplace (Work and Finances)

Employment

- 52. Family intactness has a very precisely determinable, positive influence on what fraction of an area's 25- to 54-year-old males are working.⁵⁹
- 53. Married men are more likely to work than cohabiting men.⁶⁰
- 54. Married fathers work more hours than cohabiting fathers.⁶¹
- 55. Men's productivity increases by 26 percent as a result of marrying.⁶²

Income

- 56. Married families have larger incomes.⁶³
- 57. Intact married families have the largest annual income of all family structures with children under 18.⁶⁴
- 58. Married households have larger incomes than male and female householders.⁶⁵
- 59. Marriage increases the income of single African-American women by 81 percent and single white women by 45 percent. African-American men also see an increase in income after marriage.⁶⁶
- 60. Married households have the highest income-to-needs ratio.⁶⁷
- 61. Men enjoy a larger "wage premium" (the financial gain men enjoy when they join a female partner) when they marry rather than cohabit.⁶⁸
- 62. The marriage premium produces an *annual income increase* of approximately .9 percent for men.⁶⁹
- 63. Women in intact marriages have a higher income-to-needs ratio than divorced, separated, widowed, and never-married women. Mothers in stable marriages have higher income-to-needs ratios as well than women with a long-term history of single motherhood.⁷⁰

Financial Benefits

- 64. Married individuals often qualify for discounts or family rates on car, health and homeowners insurance.⁷¹
- 65. Married families receive various tax benefits.⁷²
- 66. Marriage can raise one's credit score.⁷³

Savings and Net Worth

- 67. Married couples save more than unmarried couples.⁷⁴
- 68. Married households have larger average net worth at retirement than other family structures.⁷⁵
- 69. Relative to being continuously married, nearly all relationship pathways (e.g., never marrying, divorcing once, divorcing twice) have a significant, negative influence on total wealth. The exceptions are twice-divorced or twice-widowed cohabiters and those who marry after being widowed once.⁷⁶
- 70. Intact married families have the highest net worth of all families with children (widowed families excepted).⁷⁷
- 71. Married households enjoyed net worth growth \$3,000-17,000 higher (over two years) than did other family structures, according to 1992-2006 data.⁷⁸
- 72. Married African-Americans and Latinos hold higher levels of home equity than their unmarried peers.⁷⁹

Poverty

73. Family intactness has a very precisely determinable, negative influence on what fraction of an area's overall population lives below the poverty line.⁸⁰
74. The married family is less likely to be poor than male or female householders.⁸¹
75. Marriage between the biological single parents of impoverished children would move 70 percent of them immediately above the poverty line.⁸²
76. Marriage increases one's probability of moving (if at all) from a poor neighborhood to a non-poor neighborhood. Marital breakup increases the probability of moving to a non-poor neighborhood and to a poor neighborhood, rather than staying in the non-poor neighborhood, and moving to a poor neighborhood is more likely than moving to a non-poor neighborhood.⁸³
77. Family intactness has a very precisely determinable, negative influence on what fraction of an area's 25- to 54-year-old females lives below the poverty line.⁸⁴
78. Family intactness has a very precisely determinable, negative influence on what fraction of an area's minors lives below the poverty line.⁸⁵
79. Marriage decreases a child's chances of living in a low-income condition.⁸⁶
80. Children from intact married families and married stepfamilies are less likely to live in poverty than children from other family structures.⁸⁷
81. The children of married mothers experience more upward economic mobility than children of divorced mothers.⁸⁸
82. Married couples are less likely to receive welfare.⁸⁹
83. Family intactness has a very precisely determinable, negative influence on an area's average TANF and state welfare transfers per 25- to 54-year-old female.⁹⁰
84. Children from single-mother families, intact cohabiting families, and (biological father or mother) cohabiting stepfamilies are significantly more likely than children from married families to receive most forms of welfare, including AFDC (Aid for Families with Dependent Children, now Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), food stamps, and Medicaid.⁹¹
85. Family intactness has a very precisely determinable, negative influence on what fraction of an area's households receives food stamps.⁹²
86. Intact married families are less likely to have participated in the Food Stamp Program (now SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) than cohabiting couples.⁹³
87. Family intactness has a precisely determinable, negative influence on an area's average Social Security Disability Income transfer per 25- to 54-year-old individual.⁹⁴
88. Family intactness has a very precisely determinable, negative influence on an area's average Supplemental Security Income transfer per 25- to 54-year-old male or female.⁹⁵

V. Reasons to Marry: Government and Crime

89. Marriage may diminish individual propensity to commit crime.⁹⁶
90. Married men are less likely to commit crimes.⁹⁷
91. Living in a non-intact family is associated with an increased likelihood of committing violent and non-violent crime and drunk driving.⁹⁸

92. A lower fraction of adults and youths raised in intact families are picked up by police than those from non-intact families.⁹⁹
93. Adolescents living in an intact married family less frequently steal than adolescents living in any other family structure.¹⁰⁰
94. Adolescents from intact families are less delinquent and commit fewer violent acts of delinquency.¹⁰¹
95. Adolescents from intact married families engage in fewer antisocial behaviors than those from other family structures.¹⁰²
96. Adolescents from parents with two biological parents or two adoptive parents are less likely to exhibit behavioral problems.¹⁰³
97. A lower fraction of children from intact married families have ever have been in a fight than among children from other family structures.¹⁰⁴
98. Compared to teenagers from intact families, teenagers from divorced families are more verbally aggressive and violent toward their romantic partners.¹⁰⁵
99. Adolescents in grades 7 to 12 who live in an intact married family run away from home less frequently than adolescents in any other family structure.¹⁰⁶

Violence and Domestic Abuse

100. Marriage is associated with lower rates of domestic violence and abuse, compared to cohabitation.¹⁰⁷
101. Married women are murdered by their spouses at a far lower rate than cohabiting women are murdered by their partners,¹⁰⁸ and in Canada, when couples of similar age combinations are compared, murder is rarer among married than cohabiting couples.¹⁰⁹
102. Domestic violence against ever-married mothers is lower than domestic violence against always-single mothers.¹¹⁰
103. In arguments, married couples are less likely to react physically (to hit, shove, or throw items) than cohabiting couples are.¹¹¹
104. Married women are less likely to have been forced to perform a sexual act (9 percent) than unmarried women (46 percent).¹¹²
105. Pregnant non-Hispanic white and black women who are married are less likely to be physically abused than those who are divorced or separated.¹¹³
106. Married parents are less likely to neglect their children than are divorced parents.¹¹⁴
107. Children in intact married families suffer less child abuse than children from any other family structure.¹¹⁵
108. British children were found to be less likely to be injured or killed by abuse in the intact married family than in all other family structures.¹¹⁶

VI. Reasons to Marry: Health

109. Marriage is beneficial for the health of the elderly, particularly for women.¹¹⁷
110. Married women are healthier than never-married, divorced, and separated women.¹¹⁸
111. The probability of good health over time, relative to that of married persons, diminishes for widowed men and women, divorced men and women, separated men and women, and never-married women.¹¹⁹

112. Married women's likelihood of becoming seriously ill decreases the longer they are married.¹²⁰
113. Marriage is associated with better health among the poor and minorities.¹²¹
114. Married persons are less likely to become severely ill than the divorced.¹²²

Health Care

115. Married men and women are more likely to have health insurance.¹²³
116. Married individuals occupy hospitals and health institutions less often than others.¹²⁴
117. Married individuals are released from hospitals sooner, on average, than unmarried individuals,¹²⁵ and spend half as much time in hospitals as single individuals.¹²⁶
118. Married individuals are less likely to go to a nursing home from the hospital.¹²⁷
119. Family intactness has a very precisely determinable, negative influence on an area's fraction of 25- to 54-year-olds and minors receiving public healthcare.¹²⁸
120. Family intactness has a very precisely determinable, positive influence on an area's fraction of 25- to 54-year-olds and minors with private healthcare coverage.¹²⁹

Lifestyle

121. A lower fraction of married than widowed, divorced or separated, never-married, or cohabiting persons have fair to poor health.¹³⁰
122. Married men whose marriages break up engage in increased alcohol consumption and cigarette use, and women who marry engage in diminished alcohol consumption.¹³¹
123. Married individuals smoke and binge drink less frequently than cohabiters.¹³²
124. Married women rate their health better than do divorced, separated, widowed, and never-married women.¹³³

Severe Illness (Cancer, Heart Disease, Etc.)

125. Married men and women have higher survival rates after being diagnosed with cancer, regardless of the stage of the cancer's progression.¹³⁴
126. Married persons' responses to cancer treatment are better and are comparable to those of people 10 years younger.¹³⁵
127. A smaller ratio of married individuals die of cirrhosis of the liver, lung cancer, tuberculosis, and diabetes than never-married, divorced, and widowed individuals, controlling for age.¹³⁶
128. After being diagnosed with prostate cancer, married men live longer.¹³⁷
129. Unmarried women with breast cancer are more likely to be diagnosed later and have higher three-year (breast cancer-specific) morbidity.¹³⁸
130. Married people are less likely to die after being hospitalized for a heart attack.¹³⁹

Longevity

131. Married people have lower mortality rates,¹⁴⁰ including lower risk of death from accidents, disease, and self-inflicted injuries and suicide.¹⁴¹
132. The longer a person's marriage, the lower is their mortality risk, relative to that of the unmarried.¹⁴²

STDs and Pregnancy

133. A smaller percentage of individuals in intact marriages than always single, divorced and remarried, or divorced and separated persons have ever had a sexually transmitted disease.¹⁴³
134. Married mothers practice better prenatal care and more consistently avoid harmful substances than unmarried mothers do.¹⁴⁴
135. Married mothers are less likely to have low birth weight children than stably cohabiting mothers or mothers involved in a romantic relationship with their baby's father.¹⁴⁵

Abortion

136. Married women have significantly fewer abortions than unmarried women.¹⁴⁶

Children's Well-Being

137. Girls raised in intact married families have a later onset of puberty and thus are less likely to experience teenaged pregnancy.¹⁴⁷

VII. Reasons to Marry: Mental Health

138. Married people are least likely to have mental disorders.¹⁴⁸
139. Marriage protects against feelings of loneliness.¹⁴⁹
140. Married persons have higher levels of emotional and psychological well-being than those who are single, divorced, or cohabiting.¹⁵⁰
141. Married mothers enjoy greater psychological well-being and greater love and intimacy than cohabiting or single mothers.¹⁵¹
142. Children and adolescents from intact married families enjoy more emotional and behavioral well-being than children in cohabiting or step families.¹⁵²

Anxiety and Stress

143. Both adults and children in married families suffer less psychological distress than their counterparts in divorced families.¹⁵³
144. Married men have lower levels of stress hormones.¹⁵⁴
145. Married women experience less psychological distress.¹⁵⁵
146. Married mothers feel less ambivalence and experience less conflict with their husbands than do cohabiting and single women with their partners, as well as more love and intimacy.¹⁵⁶

Depression

147. Those who are married report less depression¹⁵⁷ than cohabiting couples.¹⁵⁸
148. Married mothers report less depression, more support from their partners, and more stable relationships than cohabiting mothers.¹⁵⁹
149. 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).¹⁶⁰

Suicide

150. Married people are least likely to commit suicide.¹⁶¹
151. Adolescents in divorced families are more likely to commit suicide.¹⁶²

Happiness

152. A larger fraction of those raised in an intact family consider themselves “very happy” than those raised in non-intact families.¹⁶³
153. Married people are much more likely to report being happy than cohabiters.¹⁶⁴
154. Married people (those in intact marriages and those who have divorced and remarried) most frequently report being proud of their work.¹⁶⁵
155. Married mothers of infants have the most positive attitudes and report forming better home environments than single and cohabiting mothers.¹⁶⁶

Drug and Alcohol Use

156. Teenagers from intact families are less likely to begin smoking than those with never-married or divorced single parents.¹⁶⁷
157. Continuously married adults less frequently report that they sometimes drink too much.¹⁶⁸
158. Married women have fewer alcohol problems.¹⁶⁹
159. Married individuals are more likely to cease using marijuana, due in part to improvements in self-control.¹⁷⁰
160. Adolescents from intact married families are less likely to use cocaine than those from divorced families.¹⁷¹

Community

161. Older married couples enjoy more social support than older cohabiters.¹⁷²
162. Married mothers enjoy more social support than cohabiting or single mothers.¹⁷³
163. Those in intact marriages less often report believing that most people would try to take advantage of others.¹⁷⁴
164. Married parents spend more on education and less on alcohol and tobacco as compared to cohabiting parents.¹⁷⁵

Appendix Research Note

While most researchers agree on the benefits of marriage, some discrepancies exist among the way they believe the research should be interpreted.

The first is the difference between selection and protection—that is, the difference between the idea that specific kinds of people (healthier people, more affluent people, more religious people) tend to get married and the idea that marriage itself is protective and offers specific benefits (health, economic stability, greater religiosity). Some research controls for the effects of selection, but not all studies implement these controls. Although most of these benefits are actually the effect of marriage itself, some research shows the impact of self-selection.

The second pertains to marital quality. Some researchers say that a happy and healthy marriage is fundamentally different from one filled with conflict. This thinking has empirical backing, but there is also evidence to suggest that even a very difficult marriage retains some of the benefits associated with marriage for both the parents and the children.

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