

Marriage In America

When Marriage Disappears is the title of a study on the status of marriage in America. According to the study, marriage is "stable" in only one segment of our society -- the highly-educated -- which comprises about 30% of the population. In the rest of society, marriage is on life support. There are five areas that demonstrate the rockiness of marriage.

- **Divorce:** Over the past 50 years, the rate of divorce has nearly doubled. In 1960, the number of divorces per 1,000 married women was 9.2; today it is 16.4. In 1960, the percentage of divorced men in society was 1.8; today it is 8.5. In 1960, the percentage of divorced women in society was 2.5; today it is 10.8. Those who marry today for the first time face a probability of divorce or separation around 40-50%.
- **Unwed Mothers:** Since 1982, taking race into account, the percentage of births to never-married least-educated white women increased from 21% to 43% and the percentage of births to never-married least-educated black women increased from 77% to 96%.
- **Cohabitation:** In 1960, less than half a million unmarried couples cohabited; today around seven million couples do. Also, 40% of these cohabiting couples today are raising one or more children. Since 1988, the percentage of unmarried couples who cohabit has gone from 51% to 75% among the least-educated; from 39% to 68% among the moderately-educated; and from 35% to 50% among the highly-educated.
- **One Parent Households:** Over the past half century, the percentage of children living with a single parent has risen 17%. Today, 20% of white children and 51% of black children live with a single parent.
- **Declining Satisfaction:** In a recent survey, in response to the statement, "Marriage hasn't worked out for most people that I know," 53% of the least-educated, 43% of the moderately-educated, and 17% of the highly-educated, agreed. Also, since 1976, approval by high school seniors of childbearing outside of marriage and cohabitation before marriage has increased significantly.

As if to add insult to injury for supporters of traditional marriage, the study concludes on a pessimistic note, saying that there are no signs yet of a cultural shift that could lead to a "reversal of the nation's recent retreat from marriage."

Adapted From Morris Bowers