



162 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.

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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. Those in always-intact marriages are more likely to report that being married is very important to them, compared to those who are divorced, single, or remarried (although these are also very likely to 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. Those raised in married families have higher expectations of eventually marrying.⁵
4. Those from an intact family are more likely to be happily married.⁶
5. Women raised in stable married families are more likely to marry.⁷
6. Those from intact families are less likely to 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. Married couples enjoy more relationship quality and happiness than cohabiters.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. The infant children of married mothers are more likely to be securely attached than the infant children of cohabiting or single mothers.¹⁵
14. Married people are more likely to exchange emotional or material support with their parents and are more likely to turn to their parents for support in case of an emergency.¹⁶

Parenting

15. Married adults are more likely to value the importance of having their own children than remarried, divorced, separated, or single adults are.¹⁷
16. Marriage enhances an adult's ability to parent.¹⁸
17. Married parents are more encouraging and have higher expectations for their children than always-single parents are, even after adjusting for intelligence and abilities.¹⁹

Sexuality

18. Children from intact married families are least likely to have intercourse before age 14.²⁰
19. Girls from intact married families are the least likely to have intercourse before age 18.²¹

20. Adolescent girls in intact married families have a lower average number of sexual partners than adolescent girls in any other family structure.²²
21. Women raised in intact married families are least likely to cohabit with their eventual first husband.²³
22. 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.²⁴
23. Young adults raised in intact married families are less likely than those who have experienced marital disruption to cohabit before marrying.²⁵
24. Women raised in intact married families are least likely to have had a homosexual partner in the past year.²⁶
25. Couples in intact marriages are least likely to have committed adultery.²⁷
26. Those who are married and have never cohabited are more likely to be faithful than cohabiters.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

II. Reasons to Marry: Church and Religion

30. Those who are married are more likely to worship, and those who attend religious services are more likely to marry.³²
31. Direct marriage (rather than cohabitation prior to marriage) has a positive effect on religious service attendance.³³
32. Young adults raised in happily married families are more religious than young adults raised in stepfamilies.³⁴
33. Adults who grew up in an intact married family are more likely than adults from non-intact family structures to attend religious services at least monthly.³⁵
34. 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.³⁶

III. Reasons to Marry: Education

35. 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.³⁷
36. Fathers in always-intact married families are more involved in their children's homework than are stepfathers.³⁸
37. Children of married parents are more engaged in school than children from all other family structures.³⁹

38. Children from married households have higher cognitive scores and more self-control.⁴⁰
39. Compared with children in stable married families, students whose parents are in the process of divorcing have lower academic expectations and test scores.⁴¹

GPA

40. Children from intact married families are most likely to earn mostly As in school.⁴²
41. Children in intact married families have the highest combined English and math grade point averages (GPAs.)⁴³

Level of Education Attained

42. Married mothers tend to have the most education, and are most likely to have obtained a Bachelor's degree or higher.⁴⁴
43. 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.⁴⁵
44. Children from intact married families have the highest high school graduation rate.⁴⁶
45. Those from married families are more likely to gain more education after graduating from high school than those from other family structures.⁴⁷

Behavioral Problems

46. Children from intact families have fewer behavioral problems in school.⁴⁸
47. 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.⁴⁹
48. Adolescents from intact married families are less likely to be suspended, expelled, delinquent, or experience school problems than children from other family structures.⁵⁰

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

Employment

49. Married men have stronger employment status than cohabiting men.⁵¹
50. Married men work more hours than cohabiting men.⁵²
51. Men's productivity increases by 27 percent as a result of marrying.⁵³

Income

52. Married families have larger incomes.⁵⁴
53. Intact married families have the largest annual income of all family structures with children under 18.⁵⁵
54. Among family structures with dual earners, married households in which both spouses are in the paid workforce have the largest income.⁵⁶
55. Marriage increases the income of African-American men and women.⁵⁷
56. Married households have the highest income-to-needs ratio.⁵⁸

57. Men enjoy a larger “wage premium” (the financial gain men enjoy when they join a female partner) when they marry rather than cohabit.⁵⁹
58. The marriage premium produces an *annual income increase* of approximately .9 percent.⁶⁰
59. Women in intact marriages have a higher income-to-needs ratio than women in any other family structure.⁶¹

Financial Benefits

60. Married individuals often qualify for discounts or family rates on car, health and homeowners insurance.⁶²
61. Married families receive various and significant tax benefits.⁶³
62. Marriage can raise one’s credit score.⁶⁴

Savings and Net Worth

63. Married couples save more than unmarried couples.⁶⁵
64. Married households have larger average net worth than other family structures.⁶⁶
65. Intact married families have the highest net worth of all families with children under 18.⁶⁷
66. Married households enjoyed net worth growth \$3,000-17,000 higher (over two years) than did other family structures, according to 1992-2006 data.⁶⁸
67. Married people in their fifties have more assets than single, never-married, divorced, or separated individuals.⁶⁹
68. Married African-Americans and Latinos hold higher levels of home equity than their unmarried peers.⁷⁰

Poverty

69. The married family is less likely to be poor than any other family structure.⁷¹
70. Marriage between the biological single parents of impoverished children would move 70 percent of them immediately above the poverty line.⁷²
71. Marriage decreases a child’s chances of living in a low-income condition.⁷³
72. Marriage among the poor nearly doubles their probability of moving from a poor neighborhood to a non-poor neighborhood.⁷⁴
73. Children from married families are less likely to experience poverty than children from any other family structure.⁷⁵
74. The children of married mothers experience more upward economic mobility than children of divorced mothers.⁷⁶
75. Married couples are less likely to receive welfare.⁷⁷
76. Five percent of children from married families receive public assistance, compared to 25 percent of children from cohabiting families.⁷⁸
77. Intact married families are less likely to have participated in the Food Stamp Program (now SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program).⁷⁹

V. Reasons to Marry: Government and Crime

78. Marriage reduces crime rates.⁸⁰
79. Married men are less likely to commit crimes.⁸¹

80. Living in an intact married family decreases one's likelihood of becoming a criminal.⁸²
81. Adults and youths raised in intact families are less likely to be picked up by police than those from non-intact families.⁸³
82. Those from married families are less likely to commit major property crimes than those from single-parent families.⁸⁴
83. Adolescents living in an intact married family are less likely to steal than adolescents living in any other family structure.⁸⁵
84. Adolescents from intact families are less delinquent and commit fewer violent acts of delinquency.⁸⁶
85. Adolescents in an intact married family are less likely to fight than adolescents in any other family structure.⁸⁷
86. Adolescents from intact married families engage in fewer antisocial behaviors than those from other family structures.⁸⁸
87. Adolescents from parents with two biological parents or two adoptive parents are less likely to exhibit behavioral problems.⁸⁹
88. Children from intact married families are least likely to ever have been in a fight.⁹⁰
89. Compared to teenagers from intact families, teenagers from divorced families are more verbally aggressive and violent toward their romantic partners.⁹¹
90. Adolescents in grades 7-12 who live in an intact married family are less likely than adolescents in any other family structure to run away from home.⁹²

Violence and Domestic Abuse

91. Marriage leads to lower rates of domestic violence and abuse.⁹³
92. Married men are less likely to murder their partner than cohabiting men are,⁹⁴ and married women are less likely to be killed by their spouse than cohabiting women are to be killed by their partner.⁹⁵
93. Married women are less likely to be abused by their husband than cohabiting women are to be abused by their partner.⁹⁶
94. Domestic violence against ever-married mothers is lower than domestic violence against always-single mothers.⁹⁷
95. In arguments, married couples are less likely to react physically (to hit, shove, or throw items) than cohabiting couples are.⁹⁸
96. Married women are less likely to have been forced to perform a sexual act (9 percent) than unmarried women (46 percent).⁹⁹
97. Pregnant non-Hispanic white and black women who are married are less likely to be physically abused than those who are divorced or separated.¹⁰⁰
98. Married parents are less likely to neglect or abuse their children than are divorced or separated parents.¹⁰¹
99. Children in intact married families suffer less child abuse than children from any other family structure.¹⁰²

100. Children are less likely to be injured or killed by abuse in the intact married family than in all other family structures.¹⁰³

VI. Reasons to Marry: Health

101. Marriage is especially beneficial for the health of the elderly.¹⁰⁴
102. Married parents have better health than single parents.¹⁰⁵
103. Married women are healthier than never-married, divorced, and separated women.¹⁰⁶
104. Married people are more likely to report better health,¹⁰⁷ a difference that holds for the poor and for minorities.¹⁰⁸
105. Married women are less stressed.¹⁰⁹
106. Married mothers are less likely to become severely ill.¹¹⁰
107. Married women's likelihood of becoming ill decreases the longer they are married.¹¹¹
108. It seems that marriage, as a sort of social support, strengthens the immune system and makes married persons less likely to catch the common cold.¹¹²

Health Care

109. Married men and women are more likely to have health insurance.¹¹³
110. Married individuals occupy hospitals and health institutions less often than others.¹¹⁴
111. Married individuals are released from hospitals sooner, on average,¹¹⁵ and spend half as much time in hospitals as single individuals.¹¹⁶
112. Married individuals are less likely to go to a nursing home from the hospital.¹¹⁷

Lifestyle

113. Married individuals tend to live more healthfully.¹¹⁸
114. Married people maintain healthier weight and engage in more physical activity.¹¹⁹
115. Married individuals smoke and binge drink less frequently than cohabiters.¹²⁰
116. Married women rate their health better than do divorced, separated, widowed, and never-married women.¹²¹
117. Married women are at decreased risk of obesity, are more physically active, and use preventative care measures more often, independent of income differences.¹²²
118. Staying married results in men and women looking younger.¹²³

Severe Illness (Cancer, Heart Disease, Etc.)

119. Married men and women have higher survival rates after being diagnosed with cancer.¹²⁴
120. Married persons' responses to cancer treatment are better and are comparable to those of people 10 years younger.¹²⁵
121. Married men are less likely to die of cirrhosis of the liver than never-married, divorced, and widowed men.¹²⁶
122. After being diagnosed with prostate cancer, married men live longer.¹²⁷

123. Married women with breast cancer are diagnosed earlier and have higher survival rates.¹²⁸
124. Married people are less likely to die after being hospitalized for a heart attack.¹²⁹
125. Continuously married women aged 50 to 60 develop heart disease at a rate 60 percent lower than divorced women, 58 percent lower than remarried women, and 34 percent lower than widows.¹³⁰

Longevity

126. Married people have lower mortality rates,¹³¹ including lower risk of death from accidents, disease, and self-inflicted injuries.¹³²
127. The longer a person's marriage, the lower is their mortality risk.¹³³
128. Children, teenagers, and adults from married households have lower mortality rates.¹³⁴

Pregnancy

129. Married mothers practice better prenatal care and more consistently avoid harmful substances than unmarried mothers do.¹³⁵
130. 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.¹³⁶
131. Married African-American women who were themselves born to married mothers are less likely to have low birth weight children.¹³⁷

Abortion

132. Married women have significantly fewer abortions than unmarried women.¹³⁸

Children's Well-Being

133. Children of married parents are less likely to be diagnosed with asthma.¹³⁹
134. Girls raised in intact married families have a later onset of puberty.¹⁴⁰

VII. Reasons to Marry: Mental Health

135. Married people are least likely to have mental disorders.¹⁴¹
136. Marriage protects against feelings of loneliness.¹⁴²
137. Married persons have higher levels of emotional and psychological well-being than those who are single, divorced, or cohabiting.¹⁴³
138. Married mothers enjoy greater psychological well-being than cohabiting or single mothers.¹⁴⁴
139. Children of married parents enjoy a higher quality of life than those whose parents are cohabiting.¹⁴⁵
140. Children in intact married families enjoy more emotional and behavioral well-being than children in cohabiting or single-mother families.¹⁴⁶

Anxiety and Stress

141. Marriage is protective against psychological stressors because marriage increases perceived relationship commitment.¹⁴⁷

142. Both adults and children in married families suffer less psychological distress than their counterparts in divorced families.¹⁴⁸
143. Married men have lower levels of stress hormones.¹⁴⁹
144. Married women experience less psychological distress.¹⁵⁰
145. Married mothers feel less ambivalence and experience less conflict with their husbands than do cohabiting and single women with their partners.¹⁵¹

Depression

146. Those who are married report less depression¹⁵² than cohabiting couples.¹⁵³
147. Married mothers report less depression, more support from their partners, and more stable relationships than cohabiting mothers.¹⁵⁴
148. 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).¹⁵⁵

Suicide

149. Married people are least likely to commit suicide.¹⁵⁶
150. Adolescents in divorced families are more likely to commit suicide.¹⁵⁷

Happiness

151. Those raised in an intact family are more likely to consider themselves “very happy” than those raised in non-intact families.¹⁵⁸
152. Married people are much more likely to report being happy than cohabiters.¹⁵⁹
153. Married people (those in intact marriages and those who have divorced and remarried) are most likely to report being proud of their work.¹⁶⁰
154. Married mothers of infants have the most positive attitudes and report forming better home environments than single and cohabiting mothers.¹⁶¹

Drug and Alcohol Use

155. Teenagers from intact families are less likely to begin smoking than those with never-married or divorced single parents.¹⁶²
156. Continuously married adults are least likely to report that they sometimes drink too much.¹⁶³
157. Married women have fewer alcohol problems.¹⁶⁴
158. Married individuals are more likely to cease using marijuana, due in part to improvements in self-control.¹⁶⁵
159. Adolescents from intact married families are less likely to use cocaine than those from divorced families.¹⁶⁶

Community

160. Older married couples enjoy more social support than older cohabiters.¹⁶⁷
161. Married mothers enjoy more social support than cohabiting or single mothers.¹⁶⁸
162. Those in intact marriages are least likely to believe that most people would try to take advantage of others.¹⁶⁹

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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