

## SOURCES

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For a full review of the research on cohabitation, see: Pamela J. Smock, "Cohabitation in the United States," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000), David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *Should We Live Together? What Young Adults Need to Know About Cohabitation Before Marriage - A Comprehensive Review of Recent Research*, 2nd Edition (New Brunswick, NJ: The National Marriage project, Rutgers University 2002) and Anne-Marie Ambert, "Cohabitation and Marriage: How Are They Related?" (Ottawa, Ont. The Vanier Institute of the Family, 2005)

For additional information, read *Living Together: Questions and Answers Regarding Cohabitation and the Church's from the Bishops of Pennsylvania* available from:

OFFICE OF MARRIAGE & FAMILY  
 DIOCESE OF SAINT CLOUD  
 305 7TH AVE. N., SUITE 100  
 ST. CLOUD, MN 56303  
 (320) 252-4721  
[omf@gw.stcdio.org](mailto:omf@gw.stcdio.org)



A summary of  
 empirical studies  
 related to  
 marriage & cohabitation



7 Reasons  
 Why...

Living Together is  
 NOT  
 a Good Idea

# THOSE WHO LIVE TOGETHER BEFORE MARRIAGE...

**1** ...TEND NOT TO MARRY. More than 50 percent of couples who live together end their relationships before marriage.<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> While many couples choose to cohabit in an attempt to test the relationship and prevent the pain of divorce, the “premarital divorce” is often just as painful and expensive as divorce itself.

**2** ...HAVE HIGHER SEPARATION AND DIVORCE RATES. The National Marriage Project from the University of Virginia reports, “A substantial body of evidence indicates that those who live together before marriage are more likely to break up after marriage.”<sup>5,6,7</sup> Many steps and stages of courtship and relationship development no longer exist, making it more difficult than ever to make the deliberate decision to commit. One essential truth of commitment is that each person makes the choice to give up other choices

**3** ...EXPERIENCE UNHAPPIER MARRIAGES. Researchers from the University of Denver found that couples who cohabited prior to engagement are “more likely to have marital problems and less likely to be happy in their marriages.”<sup>8</sup> Because cohabitating couples do not have to commit to the same level of permanency as married couples, many who live together before marriage do not invest everything in their lives into the relationship. Without a 100 percent commitment, these couples face more uncertainty and instability as a result.

Those who move in with a mate before engagement or marriage reported significantly lower-quality marriages and greater potential for split-ups than other couples.<sup>9</sup> The study cites that some couples who move in together without a clear commitment to marriage wind up sliding into marriage partly because they are already cohabiting.

**4** ... HAVE MORE FREQUENT DISAGREEMENTS, FIGHTS AND VIOLENCE. Three studies find this to be true. Pennsylvania State University researchers found that those who live together were more negative and less positive when resolving a marital problem and when providing support to their partner.<sup>8,10</sup> They also found that husbands and wives who had lived together before marriage were more verbally aggressive, less supportive of one another and generally more hostile than spouses who had not lived together.<sup>9</sup>

Another study cites that couples who cohabit before marriage have fewer problem-solving skills and poorer communication skills, which results in more negativity when attempting to resolve marital conflicts, as compared to married couples who had never cohabitated.<sup>10</sup>

“Couples who live together also, on average, report relationships of lower quality than do married couples, with cohabitators reporting more conflict, more violence, and lower levels of satisfaction and commitment.”<sup>11</sup>

**5** ... DO NOT EXPERIENCE THE BEST SEX. A national study found that couples who were not intimate before marriage and faithful during marriage were more satisfied with their current sex life than those who were involved sexually before marriage.<sup>12</sup> Couples who sleep together outside of marriage “often struggle with guilt and fear due to the dangers of STDs and unwanted pregnancy. Guilt can lead to frigidity and impotence.”



Another study found that 72 percent of all married “traditionalists” (those who strongly believe out-of-wedlock sex is wrong) reported high sexual satisfaction. This is roughly 31 percent higher than with unmarried “non-traditionalists.” Women with a strong faith life are most satisfied with the frequency of intercourse and are more orgasmic than those with lesser religious practice.<sup>13</sup>

**6** ...EXPERIENCE MORE BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS. Compared with married couples, cohabitators report higher rates of depression rates and assaults against the woman. “Cohabiting mothers are more likely to be depressed because they are much less confident that their relationship will last, compared to married mothers.”<sup>14</sup>

**7** ...SEE NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON THEIR CHILDREN. Children living in cohabitating unions do not fare as well as children living in intact, married families. One recent study reported that teens in this situation were significantly more likely to experience behavioral and emotional difficulties than teenagers in intact, married families.<sup>15</sup>

David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, researchers from the National Marriage Project, found that children living with unmarried cohabiting biological parents are 20 times more likely to be abused and children whose mother lives with a boyfriend who is not the biological father are 33 times more likely to be abused than children with married biological parents.<sup>16</sup> This likelihood is because cohabitation is more common among those of lower educational and income levels. It is also more common among those who are less religious than their peers, those who have been divorced, and those who have experienced parental divorce, fatherlessness, or high levels of marital discord during childhood.

Compared to children in intact families, children in cohabiting households had more behavioral problems and poorer academic scores.<sup>17</sup>

*Numerous empirical studies indicate that living together does not produce healthier, happier marriages, but the contrary. Mature love is built on the security of knowing that your love is exclusive and permanent.*