



A Comparison of Relationship Satisfaction Between Married and Cohabiting Couples

Yyona Ho, MSW

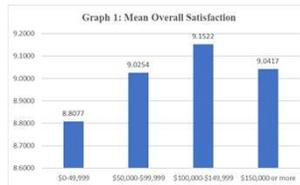


Abstract

- This study took some factors including children, financial stability, and family responsibilities into consideration to see if there is a correlation between these three elements and relationship satisfaction or if there is one factor that more significantly affects partnerships' quality.
- The survey was conducted by The Married and Cohabiting Couples (2010) consisted of a total of 2,150 participants with 646 cohabiting individuals and 1504 married individuals.
- Statistical analysis used to examine the relationship between couples' satisfaction based on income, having children, and perspectives on marriage.
- Married couples have been determined to be happier and more satisfied with their relationship across a variety of reasons compared to cohabiting couples.

Introduction

- Modern society is shifting its focus from forming a family to different types of lifestyles that promote more freedom and flexibility of choices such as cohabitation.
- In 2011, it recorded an all-time low for marriage rate in the US
- A comparison between the years 1995 and 2018 showed that cohabitation has increased from 3% to 7% while marriage has declined from 58% to 53%
- However, cohabitation is considered a short-lived concept that is more desirable than just dating but not as much as getting married.
- Cohabiting couples reported lower relationship satisfaction than their married counterparts at all aspects including how well they communicate, sex life, agreement in parenting, dividing household chores, etc. with an average of 36% of cohabiting adults saying that they are satisfied with their relationship compared to 44% of married adults.
- When asked if they have a plan to get married, more than 59% of cohabiting couples reported that they are not sure or do not have any plan while only 41% reported having a plan to marry.
- Cohabiting women are more likely to be a victim of domestic violence than married women
- The risk of child abuse and neglect also increases and may involve child protective services.



Graph 1: Relationship Satisfaction and Income

	B	SE	Beta	p
Marital Status	.243	.059	.095	<.001
Children living in the home	-.040	.024	-.038	.089
Income				
\$0-\$99,999	-.139	.108	-.056	.040
\$100,000-\$99,999	.028	.104	.012	.041
\$100,000-\$149,999	.136	.113	.045	.011

Table 1: Results of Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Relationship Satisfaction Among Participants

Literature Review

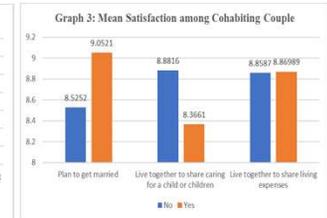
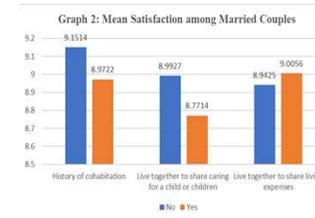
- As the family has more children, the U-shaped graph of happiness repeats itself multiples which prolongs the dissatisfaction period and reduces the relationship of the couple.
- Furthermore, the data showed that cohabiting couples who lived together to share caring for a child or children have a lower satisfaction level than married couples who lived together for the same reason.
- Couples who have higher income are more independent and experience less stress compared to those with lower income.
- Cohabiting couples suffer a greater decrease in their satisfaction level due to not having a mentality of shared financial responsibility and support both within the couples and from society.
- Relationship satisfaction levels increase when couples share positive perceptions of marriage, and that cohabitation is just a step toward their marriage plan
- Married couples who have official titles such as fiancé, or husband and wife, which confirm the couples' status and increase their relationship satisfaction compared to the regular dating status in cohabiting couples

Methods

- Research Design: Survey data design and quantitative research
- Data Collection: survey and data collection process were administered by the NCFMR through a web-based platform.
- Sample Size: N=2,150 participants, which came out to 1,075 couples (50% male, 50% female) aged 18-65. Among these participants, 1,505 were married adults and 646 were cohabiting individuals.
- Operational Definition:
 - Relationship Quality: explored relationship satisfaction between couples and how different relationship dynamics affect the overall quality of their intimate connection. Measured by 2 items combined and computed score.
 - Relationship Formation: identified as plan to get married, history of cohabitation, and whether the couples have children living in the house. Measured by using 4 items to composite score.
 - Financial Stability: examined the relationship between income and couples' satisfaction level. Measured by 3 items to composite score.

Results

- Financial Stability and Relationship Satisfaction: Kruskal-Wallis H test was used. A significant result was found ($H(2) = 23.928, p = <.001$)
- Relationship Quality: A multiple linear regression was conducted. Participants' marital status, number of children in the household, and income significantly and positively predicted the overall satisfaction of the participants. ($b = 8.843, p < .001$).
- Relationship Formation: Mann-Whitney U test was conducted separated married and cohabiting couples.
 - Married couples: a significant result was found when examining relationship satisfaction and history of cohabitation (Mean rank = 71; $U = 302754, p = <.001$)
 - Cohabiting couples: a significant result was found when examining relationship satisfaction and plan to get married



Discussion

- Among all participants, couples who had a child or children living in the home had lower satisfaction levels. The higher the number of children living in the household, the lower couples' satisfaction levels drop.
- Cohabiting couples who lived together to share caring for a child or children have a lower satisfaction level than married couples who lived together for the same reason.
- The higher the household income, the higher satisfaction levels the couples experienced.
- Married couples who lived together before getting married were less satisfied with their current relationship compared to those who did not cohabit before marriage.
- When it comes to cohabiting couples, those who did not have a plan to get married also had a lower satisfaction level compared to those with a clear plan for marriage

Limitation

- Definition of satisfaction became too broad to be analyzed in detail.
- The unbalance in sample size.
- Lack of factors' details.

Implication

- Understanding the family dynamics and their effects.
- Providing effective services and programs.

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