

The Benefits of Marriage

Summary

Marriage is linked to health and economic benefits. Married individuals tend to have better physical health, psychological well-being, and a lower mortality risk. Financially, married men tend to earn more, and married women are less likely to fall into poverty. Marriage is also linked to greater wealth accumulation.

- **Married couples report greater sexual satisfaction.** The highest levels of sexual satisfaction were reported by individuals who were in married, monogamous relationships, while those who were single or cohabiting reported slightly lower levels of sexual satisfaction.¹
- **Married women report higher levels of physical and psychological health.** Formerly married women reported the worst health while never-married women fell between these two groups. Compared with unmarried women, married women had less job stress, environment stress, child stress, financial stress, and relationship stress. Health measures included self-rated health, distress level, chronic illness, and a number of stress types, ranging from social life stress to job strain.²
- **Married people are more likely to volunteer.** Compared to unmarried peers, married adults were 1.3 times more likely to have volunteered for social services and averaged 1.4 times more volunteer hours.³
- **Being married increases the likelihood of affluence.** This association applied to all age groups.⁴
- **Married people tend to experience less depression and fewer problems with alcohol.** Men who married and stayed married tended to be less depressed than those who remained single. Among women, marriage was associated with fewer alcohol problems.⁵
- **Getting married increases the probability of moving out of a poor neighborhood.** Marriage nearly doubled the probability that a person would move from a poor to a non-poor neighborhood. Likewise, the dissolution of a marriage more than doubled the probability that a person would move from a non-poor to poor neighborhood. Among blacks, marital dissolution increased the likelihood of moving from a non-poor to a poor neighborhood almost six-fold.⁶
- **Married men make more money.** Taking into consideration a number of factors including educational attainment, compared with unmarried peers, married men earned, on average, 20 percent more in wages.⁷
- **Ever-married women are less likely to experience poverty.** Compared to never-married peers, women who had ever been married were substantially less likely to be poor—regardless of race, family background, non-marital births, or education. Ever-married women have a poverty rate that was roughly one-third lower than the poverty rate of never-married women. Currently married women had an even lower probability

of living in poverty—about two-thirds lower than other women.⁸

- **Marriage is associated with a lower mortality risk.** Compared to married individuals, those who have never been married had nearly twice the mortality risk. Divorced or separated individuals ran a mortality risk more than 50 percent higher than those who were married. The black-white mortality gap narrowed when marital status was taken into account.⁹

Endnotes

- 1 Christopher F. Scott and Susan Sprecher, "Sexuality in Marriage, Dating, and Other Relationships: A Decade Review," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (November 2000), pp. 999–1017.
- 2 Peggy McDonugh, Vivienne Walters, and Lisa Stroschein, "Chronic Stress and the Social Patterning of Women's Health in Canada," *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 54 (2002), pp. 767–782.
- 3 Corey L. M. Keyes, "Social Civility in the United States," *Sociological Inquiry*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (2002), pp. 393–408.
- 4 Thomas A. Hirschl, Joyce Altobelli, and Mark R. Rank, "Does Marriage Increase the Odds of Affluence? Exploring the Life Course Probabilities," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (November 2003), pp. 927–938.
- 5 Allan V. Horwitz, Helene R. White, and Sandra Howell-White, "Becoming Married and Mental Health: A Longitudinal Study of a Cohort of Young Adults," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 58 (November 1996), pp. 895–907.
- 6 Scott J. South and Kyle D. Crowder, "Escaping Distressed Neighborhoods: Individual, Community, and Metropolitan Influences," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 102, No. 4 (January 1997), pp. 1040–1084.
- 7 Kate Antonovics and Robert Town, "Are All the Good Men Married? Uncovering the Sources of the Marital Wage Premium," *American Economic Review*, Vol. 94 (May 2004), pp. 317–321.
- 8 Daniel T. Lichter, Deborah Roempke, and Brian J. Brown, "Is Marriage a Panacea? Union Formation Among Economically Disadvantaged Unwed Mothers," *Social Problems*, Vol. 50 (2003), pp. 60–86.
- 9 Stephanie A. Bond Huie, Robert A. Hummer, and Richard G. Rogers, "Individual and Contextual Risks of Death among Race and Ethnic Groups in the United States," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, Vol. 43 (2002), pp. 359–381.



Family & Religion

This product is part of the Family and Religion Initiative, one of 10 Transformational Initiatives making up The Heritage Foundation's Leadership for America campaign. Family and religion are foundational to American freedom and the common good.