



WHY PEOPLE GET DIVORCED

In the United States, researchers estimate that 40%–50% of all first marriages, and 60% of second marriages, will end in divorce.

There are some well-known factors that put people at higher risk for divorce: marrying at a very early age, less education and income, living together before marriage, a premarital pregnancy, no religious affiliation, coming from a divorced family, and feelings of insecurity. The most common reasons people give for their divorce are lack of commitment, too much arguing, infidelity, marrying too young, unrealistic expectations, lack of equality in the relationship, lack of preparation for marriage, and abuse.

Commitment

Some of these problems can be fixed and divorce prevented. Commitment is having a long-term view of the marriage that helps us not get overwhelmed by the problems and challenges day to day. When there is high commitment in a relationship, we feel safer and are willing to give more for the relationship to succeed. Commitment is clearly a factor in why some couples stay together and others divorce. Divorce is necessary at times, and it may even help to preserve the moral boundaries of marriage. But parents have a responsibility to do all that they reasonably can to preserve and repair a marriage, especially when the reasons for divorce are not the most serious ones. Barriers to leaving a marriage, such as financial worries, can keep marriages together in the short run. However, unless there is improvement in the relationship, eventually the barriers are usually not enough to keep a marriage together in the long run.

Myths about divorce

Divorce is both very personal and all too common. But there are many myths about divorce. Individuals at the crossroads of divorce may benefit by knowing the research facts about divorce rates, factors that are associated with a higher risk of divorce, and common reasons that people give for divorcing.

To say that nearly half of all first marriages end in divorce sounds a lot like saying marriage is just a game of chance. But a lot of research has identified various factors that are associated with a higher risk for divorce. So some people actually have a low risk of divorce while others have a high risk. Understanding these factors may not directly help you improve your marriage or make a decision about divorce, but it may help you understand why you may be facing some challenges. Of course, these factors do not guarantee that you will divorce; they simply increase your risk. Here are some factors that appear to increase the risk of divorce the most. But it is not a complete list of risk factors.

Young age



Marriage at a very young age increases the likelihood of divorce, especially in the early years of marriage. Those who marry in their teens have much higher divorce rates, by about age 21 or 22, however, that risk goes down dramatically. The average age at first marriage for Utah is 22 for women and 23 for men. Those who delay marriage until their 20s are probably more mature and able to make better marriage decisions and handle the challenges of married life better than those who marry in their teens.

Less education

Researchers have estimated that individuals who have some college education (vs. not finishing high school) have a lower chance of divorce. Utahans are more likely to graduate from high school and get some college education than Americans in general. Apparently, investing in education is a good way to build a foundation for a better marriage, not just a better job.

Less income

Closely related to education is income. Researchers have estimated that individuals with annual incomes of more than \$50,000 have a lower chance of divorce (compared to individuals with annual incomes less than \$25,000). Finances can be stressful. Apparently having at least a modest income can help couples avoid stresses that can lead to divorce.

Premarital cohabitation

Couples who live together before marriage appear to have a much higher chance of divorce if they marry. However, this risk is mostly for those who live together with more than one partner. Most only live together with one partner (whom they later marry) and these couples don't seem to be at a lot greater risk for divorce. The idea that living together before marriage increases your risk for divorce goes against a lot of common beliefs that it is a good way to get to know each other better and prepare for marriage. Living together may be a way to get to know each other better, but other things about living together apparently do not help—and even hurt—your chances for a successful marriage, especially if you live together with several people before marrying. Researchers have found that those who live together already have or develop more lenient attitudes about divorce. But some researchers also think that living together may hinder building a strong commitment to each other and the importance of marriage.

Premarital childbearing and pregnancy

Pregnancy and childbearing prior to marriage significantly increase the likelihood of future divorce. In America, more than one-third (37%) of children are born to parents who are not married, and few of these parents eventually marry. Most of those parents will separate before the child begins school, and some will never really get together. Fortunately, Utah's rate of unwed births is one of the lowest in the nation.

No religious affiliation

Researchers have estimated that individuals who report belonging to some religious group have a somewhat lower chance of divorce than those who say they have no religious affiliation. And if couples share the same religious affiliation, their chances of divorce are even lower.

Parents' divorce

Of course, some risk factors for divorce you can't control. If you experienced the divorce of your parents, unfortunately that doubles your risk for divorce. And if your spouse also experienced his or her parents' divorce, then your risk for divorce more than triples. This is scary, but it doesn't doom your marriage to failure. It does suggest that individuals who experienced the divorce of their parents need to work even harder to make good marriage choices and to keep their marriage strong and happy.

Insecurity

Researchers have found that some personality factors put people at more risk for divorce. One of the most important is feeling insecure about yourself and your self-worth. Insecure individuals are more likely to become unhappy in their marriages over time and to divorce. However, even feelings of insecurity and other personality characteristics can be overcome.

What are the most common reasons people give for their divorce?

The previous section explained what factors increase the chances of divorce. Of course, when you ask people why they got divorced they generally don't say things like, "I didn't have enough education," or "My parents were divorced." When asked this question, divorced individuals usually respond with more personal reasons.

Researchers have identified the most common reasons people give for their divorces. A recent national survey found that the most common reason given for divorce was "lack of commitment" (73% said this was a major reason). Other significant reasons included too much arguing (56%), infidelity (55%), marrying too young (46%), unrealistic expectations (45%), lack of equality in the relationship (44%), lack of preparation for marriage (41%), and abuse (29%). (People often give more than one reason, so the percentages add up to more than 100 %.) A recent survey of Utah adults found results similar to this national survey.

Looking at this list, some believe that it is possible to fix many of these problems and prevent some divorces. Couples can learn how to avoid destructive arguments and solve their differences better; they can create more realistic expectations for their marriage; and they can create more equal partnerships. Even such damaging problems as infidelity (affairs) sometimes can be overcome, especially with professional and/or religious help.

It is interesting to note that a significant number of divorced individuals—maybe about half—report to researchers that they wished they or their ex-spouse had tried harder to work through their differences. When Utahans were asked this question, 31% of men who had divorced said they wished that they had worked harder to save their marriage (and 74% said they wished their ex-wife had worked harder to save the marriage); 13% of women who had divorced said they wished that they had worked harder to save their marriage (and 65% said they wished their ex-husband had worked harder to save the marriage).

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