The Attorney General's Department in its submission cited a recent research report *Partners in any language: Meeting the Access and Equity needs of consumers from non-English speaking background in Commonwealth-funded marriage and relationship counselling services.* The report includes some community views on factors contributing to marriage and relationship breakdown. Participants from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds identified factors such as adjustment of the family post-migration; changes in the rights and independence of women; overly optimistic expectations of life in Australia prior to migration; cross cultural conflict; inter-generational conflict; infidelity; and domestic violence.[56] These were all considered to be risk factors that could affect the stability of marriages and relationships of people of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Research and academic studies

Many of the factors identified in submissions to the inquiry as contributing to marriage and relationship breakdown have also been recognised in research studies and academic writings. The following section draws upon this work.

Cultural values

In 1988, the then Director of the Australian Institute for Family Studies, Dr Don Edgar, identified several major factors shaping what he described as the 'new marriage':[57]

> First is the certainty of contraception, the careful planning of births and the changing place of children in the marriage;
> Second is the new preparation pathway to marriage via multiple relationships, prolonged autonomy as an individual earner, de facto living and the resultant confusion about intimacy and commitment;
> Third is the growing realisation on the part of women that they cannot and ought not rely upon or be dependants of men. Thus we see improved education, retention of women's career and labour force participation, with consequent changes in the way marriage and family ,life function;
> Fourth is the legal framework progressively enacting equal opportunity, human rights, joint responsibility for men and women fulfilling the obligations of marriage and parenthood. It is a de facto 'backward' redefinition of marriage, starting from the end point of divorce, and from combined changes in family law and social security provisions.

In both submissions to this inquiry and in academic and other writings, a series of cultural changes effecting marriage have been noted.

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56   Attorney-General's Department, *Submissions,* p. S954.

58   D Edgar (1988) 'The new marriage: Changing rules for changing times' *Threshold* 22: 9.

Individualism

A culture of rights, combined with increasing materialism, has dominated western thought since the end of World War II. Rights became the dominant language of western culture. This culture was reflected in subsequent changes to our laws. Hence the restrictions on divorce were eased, the right to financial assistance from the State for sole parents enhanced, and the taxation system in many nations gradually skewed against married couples with children.[58] Writing in the American context. the social researcher Daniel Yankelovich observes:

> The quest for greater individual choice clashed directly with the obligations and social norms that held families and communities together in earlier years. People came to feel that questions of how to live and with whom to live were a matter of individual choice not to be governed by restrictive norms. As a nation, we came to experience the bonds to marriage, family, children, job, community, and country as constraints that were no longer necessary. Commitments were loosened.[59]

Hugh McKay has traced similar trends in Australia. In his recent book *Generations: Baby boomers their parents & their children*, he refers to 'the emerging boomer philosophy of "Look after Number One" and "Do your own thing" ' which 'appeared to offer a conceptual or even intellectual framework for an ethical system devoid of the notion of restraint, or the practice of self-denial.'[60] McKay reflects on the impact of this culture on relationships: 'Though it was not always recognised as an antisocial movement which carried the potential to destroy relationships, it often turned out in practice to feed self-centerdness and to enshrine the idea that personal growth was the way to nirvana (where "personal growth" often meant not much more than "feeling good")'. A strong sense of individuality is also a feature of the generation born in the 1970s, according to McKay.[61]

A culture of divorce?

Dr Edgar has written that in the past two decades marriage has been redefined backwards by reference to divorce. Other commentators have reached similar conclusions. The leading academics and social scientists who comprise the Council on Families in America referred to the divorce revolution in their report *Marriage in America*, by which they meant 'the steady displacement of a marriage culture by a

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58   A Tapper (1990) *The Family in the Welfare State* Sydney: Allen & Unwin; A Carlson (1988) *The Family Wage* Rockford: The Rockford Institute.

59   D Yankelovich (1994) 'How changes in the economy are reshaping American values' in HJ Aaron, TE Mann & T Taylor (eds) *Values and Public Policy* Washington DC: The Brookings Institution.

61   H McKay (1997) *Generations–Baby boomers, their parents & their children* Sydney: McMillan 118–119.

61   ibid. 136.

culture of divorce and unwed parenthood.'[62] There is some evidence to suggest that no-fault divorce legislation has contributed 'directly to more divorce and sooner divorces than would have happened otherwise.'[63] Most discussion about family relations in Australia has related to the *Family Law Act 1975*, the Commonwealth legislation regulating divorce in the nation. Numerous inquiries have been held into aspects of the Family Law Act. This is the first parliamentary inquiry into aspects of marriage.

Marital instability

Professor Norval Glenn, former editor of *Demography* and a leading sociologist, has suggested that the increasing rates of separation and divorce possibly compound marital instability:

> There are strong theoretical reasons for thinking that a decline in the ideal of marital permanence will tend to makes marriages less satisfactory, not just less stable. For instance, the person who enters marriage with the notion that he or she may remain in it only for a few years will not be inclined to fully commit or make the kinds of investments that would be lost if the marriage should end. And if a person constantly compares the existing marriage with real or imagined alternatives to it, the existing marriage will inevitably compare unfavourably in some respects. People are hardly aware of needs that are currently being well served, but they tend to be keenly aware of the needs that are not being satisfied. And since attention tends to centre on needs that are not being especially well met in one's marriage (and there are always some), the grass will always tend to look greener on the other side of the marital fence. Therefore, merely contemplating alternatives to one's marriage may engender marital discontent.
>
> Furthermore, persons who still strongly adhere to the ideal of marital permanence may be afraid to commit strongly to their marriages if they perceive a general weakening of the ideal.[64]

Research by Glenn and others has indicated a tendency of many couples to hold back on marital commitments because of the perceived probability of marital disintegration in our society. A second, equally strong tendency, found among couples with stable and long-lasting relationships, is to state that the daily stresses

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62   Council on Families in America (1995) *Marriage in America* New York: Council on Families in America 3.

63   JL Rogers, PA Nakonezny & RD Shull (1997) 'The effect of no-fault divorce legislation on divorce: A response to a reconsideration' *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 59: 1026–1030.

64   N Glenn (1990) 'The social and cultural meaning of contemporary marriage' in BJ Christensen (ed) *The retreat from marriage* Lanham: University Press of America 50.

and strains of marriage would probably have led to divorce had the ideal of marital permanence not been such an important part of their relationship.
Recent studies have suggested a decline in marital happiness. In a 1991 study, Professor Glenn reported on a study of data gathered over a 15 year period from 1973 to 1977 in the US.[65] The evidence 'consistently indicates that the probability of attaining marital success, in a first marriage *or* at all, has declined in recent years.'[66]

The findings ran counter to the expected outcome. As Stacy Rogers and Paul Amato comment in a more recent study:

> This is the opposite of what one would expect if the rise in divorce were due only to the increased ending of unhappy marriages. If divorce removes poor marriages from the pool of married couples, then remaining marriages should be happier now, on average, than in the past.[67]

After discussing possible reasons, including increased expectations of marriage, and the impact of workforce participation, Glenn concluded:

> I suspect, however, that underlying any decline in the probability of marital success is a more fundamental change, namely, a decline in the ideal of marital permanence and, perhaps more importantly, in the expectation that marriages will last until one of the spouses dies.[68]

A subsequent study by Rogers and Amato compared groups in 1980 and 1992 that were identical in terms of age and at similar stages of their marriages. They found that members of the younger cohort report less marital interaction, more marital conflict, and more problems in their marriages.[69]

Improvements in education and increases in age at marriage in the younger cohort partially offset the rise in marital problems. The researchers found that marital quality is related to four factors: family economic resource; work/family conflict; gender role attitudes; and premarital cohabitation.

Despite the fall in marital quality, Rogers and Amato found that commitment to the idea of life-long marriage appears to be stronger in the younger cohort:

> Such a pattern suggests that young married people may be committed to salvaging marriage, and that reports of increased marital tensions and

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65 ND Glenn (1991) 'The recent trend in marital success in the United States' *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53: 261–270.

66 ibid. 268.

67 SJ Rogers & PR Amato (1997) *Social Forces* 75: 1089–1100.

68 Glenn supra 268.

69 Rogers and Amato supra 1098.

difficulties reflect not the struggles of an outdated social institution, but the inherent difficulties in adapting marriage to a rapidly changing social climate.[70]

Avoidance of 'marriage'

Part of the cultural change has been a reluctance to use the word 'marriage' in discussions about relationships and in policy formation. A number of reasons for the avoidance of the 'M' word were advanced by the Family Impact Seminar (FIS) in preparing a 'Future of Marriage' project:

- The 'M' word brings with it many different kinds of baggage. For feminists, it appears as a smokescreen for re-instituting patriarchy. For single people, gays and lesbians, it raises concerns about discrimination. For conservatives, it can stir up fears of legitimisation of same-sex marriage. For many front line social workers and low-income advocates, it evokes images of domestic violence and abuse.
- Promoting marriage is believed to stigmatise and blame single parents, many of whom are doing a good job under very difficult circumstances.
- The idea of government intruding into marriage makes some people very uncomfortable. For the religious, marriage is a matter between individuals, their god, and faith-based organisations. For the secular, marriage represents a private contract between individuals which they can enter or leave as they please, with minimal interference.
- Many consider marriage a natural, voluntary relationship based on the ideal of romantic love. Love is the cement that binds the couple together and is either present or it isn't. The notion that programs and policies might have anything to do with improving the quality of a couple's relationship or their decision to divorce is viewed with scepticism.
- Many demographers and sociologists have argued that attempts to strengthen marriage are futile since these trends are a result of overwhelming social and world-wide forces that are irreversible. They point out that nothing is permanent any more. Jobs, houses, careers, lifestyles, community residence and education all change constantly throughout our lives. Thus changing partners through 'serial' marriages and creating 'alternative' family forms may be appropriate norms for the future.
- Finally, marriage, divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing are very personal and often very painful subjects. The overwhelming majority of people have had some direct experience with divorce, either in their own families or in those of their friends. Many have had some acquaintance with unwed pregnancy and/or out-of-wedlock childbearing. Although the stigma attached to these events has lessened, the experience typically remains fraught with pain, disappointment, guilt and feelings of failure.[71]

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70   ibid. 1099.

71   Family Impact Seminar (1997) 'Reasons for avoiding the 'M' word' *Threshold* 57: 8.

'Such fears and sensitivities, however real, must not be permitted to stifle debate on a topic of such importance to the vast majority of people and that has such widespread ramifications for society' concluded the FIS Board.

Changes in gender roles and the workforce

One of the most profound changes affecting families has been in the relationship between families and work over the past three decades. These changes reflect the participation of women in the paid workforce and the changing face of work, as well as new understandings of gender roles.

The proportion of married women in the paid workforce has increased throughout the industrialised world. In Australia, for example, it jumped from 29 per cent in 1966 to 53 per cent this decade. Just under half of mothers with children aged four years or under are in the paid labour force. In the UK only 57 per cent of employed people are in traditional employment working full-time for an employer. Twenty-five per cent work part-time, 13 per cent are self-employed, and five per cent are contract and casual workers. Sixty per cent of couples with children have both partners in the workforce. In the US, labour force participation by married women with children under six years of age increased from 18.6 per cent in 1960 to 59.6 per cent in 1993.[72]

The entry of women into the workforce is facilitated by demographic factors, urbanisation, labour-saving domestic appliances, the availability of suitable employment, particularly part-time jobs, education and economic incentives such as higher wages and favourable taxation for two-income couples, the availability of childcare, and a change in attitudes making it acceptable for women to work outside the home.

The long term determinants of female labour supply tend to explain why it was possible for women to enter the workforce this century in increasingly large numbers. Short term determinants explain why women availed themselves of the opportunities provided to work. These include economic pressures to work due to falls in real wages for middle and lower income workers, the loss of employment at middle level for adult males due to economic recession and industrial restructuring, new standards of conspicuous consumption, and increasing costs of housing. The decision by women to enter the labour market is more sensitive to economic incentives than the decision taken by men.

Not only has the participation rate of women in the workforce grown while that of men has declined relatively, the areas of work in which women have been employed

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72   US Bureau of Statistics (1994) *Statistical Abstract of the United States.*

are in the fields upon which modern economies are increasingly reliant.[73] While much still needs to be done to ensure equal opportunities for women in the workplace and to provide the flexibility required by women to pursue careers to the same level as men, there is a growing body of blue collar workers for whom employment is becoming increasingly uncertain.

These changes have also created new tensions for family life and marriages. Many women have to work the double shift, juggling their paid work with family duties.[74] For an increasing number of families, there is no choice about one parent staying at home. Many women enter the paid workforce for career reasons. But Australian social researcher Jeannie Strachan has identified three other groups of working mothers: Firstly, 'I was once a full-time mother,' usually over 40, who had been home most of the school years and has gone back into the workforce 'for financial reasons to provide the family with extras, but not for the family's survival.' Secondly, 'the home at 4.00 p.m. workers'. The third group Strachan called 'the victim workers – the women who, for whatever reason, have no choice as to whether to work or not, and yet have pre-school age children.'[75]

These categories are not mutually exclusive. Women who have turned to outside work through financial necessity often also value the sense of identity and purpose and the break from unpaid work it brings. Paid work outside the home became the symbol for women of changing cultural attitudes. But part of the price is tiredness, concern about insufficient time for children, and anger that men have not recognised or appreciated the costs involved. The consequence is a new tension between the essential family tasks of loving and working.

These changes are placing new pressures on marriage and family life. They have an impact on young couples contemplating marriage and family life. Speaking in 1995 about the findings of much focus group research, Jeanne Starchan commented:

> Young couples today are the first generation since the war to face the reality that they often can't obtain, even with two full-time workers in the house, what their own parents saw as fair and reasonable reward for their hard work.[76]

A second consequence is the possible devaluing of marital relationships in favour of relationships in the workplace. Writing in *The Time Bind,* Arlie Russell Hochschild, concluded that 'work has become a form of "home" and home has become

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73   'Tomorrow's second sex' *The Economist* 28 September 1996: 23–24.

74   See AR Hochschild (1989) *The Second Shift* New York: Viking.

75   J Strachan (1992) 'Women and changing attitudes' National Women's Convention Sydney.

76   J Strachan (1995) 'What young couples want in the nineties' *Threshold* 49: 13–15.

"work".'[77] Professor Hochschild studied the lives of workers in the modern corporation. She reported:

> The worlds of home and work have not begun to blur, as conventional wisdom goes, but to reverse places. We are used to thinking that home is where most people feel the most appreciated, the most truly 'themselves', the most secure, the most relaxed. We are used to thinking that work is where most people feel like 'just a number' or a 'cog in a machine.' It is where they have to be 'on', have to 'act', where they are least secure and most harried.
>
> But new management techniques so pervasive is corporate life have helped transform the workplace into a more appreciative, personal, social sort of world. Meanwhile, at home the divorce rate has risen and emotional demands have become more baffling and complex. In addition to teething, tantrums and the normal developments of growing children, the needs of elderly parents are creating more tasks for the modern family – as are the blending, unblending and reblending of new stepparents, stepchildren, exes and former in-laws.

These changes flow through to support for relationships. As Professor Hochschild observes:

> The modern corporation also tries to take in the role of a helpful relative with regard to employee problems at work and at home. The education and training division offers employees free courses (on company time) in 'Dealing with anger', 'How to give and accept criticism' and 'How to cope with difficult people'.
>
> At home of course, people seldom receive anything like this much help on issues basic to family life. There, no course are being offered on 'Dealing with your child's disappointment in you; or 'How to treat your spouse like an internal customer'.

Australian Professor Denis Ladbrook has reflected on a similar development:

> Given the importance to human well-being of both occupations and relationships, it is somewhat incongruous that entry to them is treated so differently by our society. Much preparation and all sorts of protective regulations set parameters on who can do what, in the public domain of occupations, but little preparation and few safeguards are put in place for the private domain of personal and family relationships.[78]

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77 AR Hochschild (1997) *The Time Bind: When work becomes home and home becomes work* New York: Metropolitan Books. See also, *New York Times Magazine* 20 April 1997; and *Threshold* (1998) 'Resource Notes' 85.

78 D Ladbrook (1991) 'Building our relationship assets' *Threshold* 46: 6.

Gender relations

One view of marriage was posited by the sociologist Jessie Bernard in her 1972 book *The Future of Marriage*. Bernard argued that the modern marriage is best understood, not in the conventional sense as a union between man and woman, but as separate and unequal 'his' and 'hers' marriages, which confer health on men and the opposite on women:

> We do not clip wings or bind feet but we do make girls sick. For to be happy in a relationship which imposes so many impediments upon her, as traditional marriage does, a woman must be slightly ill mentally.[79]

Bernard proposed a new order consisting of a range of options about relationships and founded on two bases: The contemporary feminist critique of marriage;[80] and an optimism that human beings can accept any kind of relationship if they are properly socialised into it.[81] Bernard asserted:

> There is no Ideal Marriage fixed in the nature of things, that we will one day discover. ... Every age has to find its own. ... any form of marriage is transitional between an old one and a new one.[82]

The role of women and the notion of transition remain strong in the critiques of marriage and family.[83] As James Wilson has written, 'to defend the two parent family is to defend, the critics worry, an institution in which the woman is subordinated to her husband, confined to domestic chores with no opportunity to pursue a career, and taught to indoctrinate her children with a belief in the rightness of the arrangement.'[84] However, to identify the advantages to children of being raised in two-parent families is not to defend oppression.

In her recent survey of health data, the Australian researcher, Dr Moira Eastman, who gave evidence to the Committee, rejected Bernard's thesis:

> Despite Bernard's claims, research in a number of countries finds that being married is correlated with markedly better mental and physical health and

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79   J Bernard (1972) *The Future of Marriage* New York: World Publishing 51.

80   ibid. 294.

81   ibid. 272–273.

82   ibid. 288.

83   B Daefoe Whitehead (1992) *The Experts' Story of Marriage* New York: Council on Families.

84   JQ Wilson (1993) 'The Family Values Debate' *Commentary* April: 24–25.

> higher levels of happiness than being never married, separated or divorced and that this is true for both men *and* women.[85] [original emphasis]

While the welcome changes in gender relations of the past two decades have enabled women more equality, especially in the ability to pursue paid work and other interests other significant changes of the past few decades have had an impact on families and children. Writing in her book *It Takes a Village*, Hilary Clifton observes: 'The instability of American households poses great risks to the healthy development of children. ... More than anyone else, children bear the brunt of such massive social transitions.'[86]The Australian commentator Michael Duffy notes: 'It is possible that children have been the great losers of social changes of the past 30 years, as women were oppressed by patriarchal society, children are oppressed by the new order.'[87]

Marriage in transition

Another notion prevalent in some discussions about family and marriage is one of transition. As the National Commission on America's Urban Families wrote:

> This opinion is rooted in, and illustrated by, a number of claims that are familiar to many who follow or participate in our public debate on these issues. For example, the family is not getting weaker, it's just 'changing' to something more diverse, and perhaps to something better; we must never fall victim to nostalgia about the good old days of stronger families because family problems always have existed and family change always has been occurring. The real problem facing the society, they say, is not weak families but the forces outside the family that have failed to adjust to the changing realities of contemporary family life. The challenge, they claim, is not to strengthen families; the challenge is merely to adapt the larger society.[88]

Similar sentiments have been voiced in this nation.[89] But, as the Commission concluded, they miss or evade the main point: 'the dimensions and social consequences of the family trend of our time simply are too damaging, obvious, and alarming to be explained away as harmless transition or wished away by warning against nostalgia.'

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85   M Eastman (1996) 'Myths of Marriage and Family' in D Popenoe, JB Elshtain and D Blankenhorn (eds) *Promises to Keep* Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

86   HR Clinton (1996) *It Takes a Village* New York: Simon & Schuster 39.

87   Michael Duffy (1995) 'Is childcare bad for kids?' *The Independent Monthly* October: 36–42.

88   National Commission on America's Urban Families (1993) *Families First* Washington DC 31.

89   See for example, Anthony Elliott (1998) *Families evolve from the ashes* Sunday Age 15 March.

This is not to deny the trends outlined earlier in this report. The Committee is of the opinion, however, that the passive acceptance of all change involving families is an overly sanguine response to factors that expose many men, women and children to serious emotional trauma, and the nation to an enormous cost. Programs of prevention and education are a necessary response to this change.

The value of marriage and family

A happy marriage and family life remain the aspiration of many Australians. Each year, tens of thousands marry with this aspiration in mind. Even where a marriage has ended in separation and divorce, many re-enter relationships and marriage in the hope that it will work a second or subsequent time.

Simply defined, marriage is a relationship within which a community socially approves and encourages sexual intercourse and the birth of children.[90] The demographer, Kingsley Davis, writes:

> The genius of [marriage] is that, through it, the society normally holds the biological parents responsible for each other and for their offspring. By identifying children with their parents, and by penalising people who do not have stable relationships, the social system powerfully motivates individuals to settle into a sexual union and take care of ensuing offspring.[91]

In western societies, marriage has evolved as a complex institution, containing at least five dimensions: natural, religious, economic, social and legal.[92]

Although the pathways into marriage have changed substantially in recent decades, more people remain unmarried, divorce has increased markedly, and attitudes to other forms of relationship liberalised, a committed marriage remains important for many people. For example, the Australian Family Values Survey(1995), and the earlier National Social Science Surveys(1989–90 & 1993), found:

- 61 per cent of people thought that husband and wife should do most things as a couple;
- 80 per cent of people agreed that ones really important relationships are in the home;
- 78 per cent agreed that marriage is for life;
- 87 per cent disapprove of marrying thinking that divorce is an option if it does not work out; and
- 70 per cent thought it is too easy to get a divorce.[93]

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90   Council on Families in America (1995) *Marriage in America* New York: Council on Families 10.

91   K Davis (1985) 'The meaning and significance of marriage in contemporary society' in K Davis (ed) *Contemporary Marriage* New York: Russell Sage Foundation 7–8.

92   Council on Families supra 10.

93   D de Vaus (1997) 'Family values in the nineties' *Family Matters* 48: 4–10.

The surveys also revealed that:
- only 19 per cent of people thought a couple should stay together for the children;
- 53 per cent said it was not acceptable to have children without being married; and
- 32 per cent disapproved of a man and a woman living together without planning marriage.[94]

According to AIFS researcher, David de Vaus, 'the majority of people in the three surveys . . . held many traditional family values.'[95]

Asked about what is important for a successful marriage, the respondents answered as follows.[96]

Aspects of marriage	Mean score on a scale of 0–10
Faithfulness	9.6
Good communication	9.5
Mutual respect	9.5
Understanding and tolerance	9.1
Happy sexual relationship	8.4
Sharing household chores	7.6
Interests in common	7.2
Adequate income	7.1
Independence	6.6
Having children	6.0
Putting partner's wishes first	5.8
Similar social backgrounds	5.5
Shared religious beliefs	4.6
Agreement on politics	2.7

The emphasis on faithfulness and commitment was also reflected in the attitudes of couples participating in the national survey of pre-marriage education in Australia. 'The predominant paradigm is very clearly one of relationship caring and sharing' reported the researchers about the participants' attitudes to marriage.

> Couples continually used such concepts as growing together, love, trust, caring, understanding, togetherness, supporting each other, friendship, intimacy, affection and living for each other. Very few responses explicitly referred to the economic, political or sexual dimensions of marriage. Noticeably lacking in frequency were words like stability, security, sex, power, responsibility, roles, protection and money. Running through the hundreds of responses are five very common though not discrete themes centred on

94   id.

95   id.

96   D de Vaus and I Wolcott (eds) (1997) *Australian Family Profiles* Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies 16.

commitment, companionship in sharing life together, family/children, love between best friends and union under God.[97]

Determinants of marital instability

In a recent survey of the determinants of marital instability, AIFS researcher, Helen Glezer, found that the premarital experiences contributing most to the risk of marital breakdown are:
- having an ex-nuptial child;
- pre-marital cohabitation; and
- leaving home at an early age. [98]

According to Glezer:

> Characteristics of those who experienced marital breakdown compared with those who have not, indicate that like those who have cohabited, they tend to have less traditional family values, are more egalitarian about sex roles, value children less and are more individualistic in their family orientation than those who remain married.

> . . . family background factors such as growing up in a non religious family, being unhappy at home, leaving home at an early age and coming from a context of non traditional family values are associated with both cohabiting prior to marriage and marital dissolution.

A series of studies have identified other demographic and social characteristics that have been shown to contribute to marital instability. These include:
- exposure to divorce as a child;[99]
- having pre-marital sex;[100] and
- marrying as a teenager.[101]

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97   R Harris et al (1992) *Love, Sex and Waterskiing* Adelaide: University of South Australia 84.

98   H Glezer (1994) 'Family backgrounds and marital breakdown' *Threshold* 43: 16–19.

99   E Masur (1993) 'Developmental differences in children's understanding of marriage, divorce and remarriage' *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 14: 191–212; P Amato (1988) 'Parental divorce and attitudes toward marriage and family life' *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 50: 453–461; P Amato (1997) 'Explaining the intergenerational transmission of divorce' *Threshold* 54: 15–27; and DB Larson et al (1996) *The Costly Consequences of Divorce* Rockville MD: National Institute for Healthcare Research and the studies cited therein.

100   DB Larson (1996) supra and the studies cited therein.

101   TC Martin & LL Bumpass (1989) 'Recent trends in marital disruption' *Demography* 26: 37–51; AJ Norton & PC Glick (1979) 'Marital instability in America: Past, present and future' in G Levinger & OC Moles (eds) *Divorce and Separation: Context, Causes, and Consequences* New York: Basic Books; and SL Nock (1987) *The Sociology of the Family* Englwood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall.

These factors are significant in light of the trends about marriage and family formation outlined above in Chapter 2. The trends reveal a number of factors that have been linked to marital instability, notably:

- a marked increase in ex-nuptial births;
- a decline in teenage marriage, including pregnant teenage brides; and
- the increase in pre-marital cohabitation.

Given the trends outlined above in this report about the prevalence of cohabitation as a pathway to marriage, the following case study reviews the research on the issue and examines the implications for marriage and relationship education programs.

A case study: Cohabitation

There has been a substantial increase in the number of couples living together, both before and as a substitute for marriage in recent decades. A 1994 study by the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicated that some nine per cent of all couples were living in a de facto relationship, an increase from the six per cent found in the 1986 Census.

Types of cohabitation

The reasons that couples choose to live together can vary greatly. Macklin has identified at least five different patterns:

- a temporary, casual convenience with minimum emotional or physical involvement and limited commitment. The motivation may be more economic or protective than romantic.
- an extension of an affectionate, steady relationship, which generally includes being sexually intimate. It is likely to continue as long as the couple enjoy being together.
- a trial marriage for couples who are contemplating making their relationship permanent and want to test it out. In this sense, living together becomes part of courtship.
- a temporary alternative to marriage for people who determined to marry. They simply live together until it is professionally or economically feasible to marry.
- a permanent or semipermanent alternative to marriage. For some people, such as elderly persons, living together permanently is determined by economic factors. For others, this decision may include negative views on the institution of marriage or the desire to keep love alive by avoiding the security of marriage.[102]

While it is true that there has been an increase in the number of couples in the last category, studies increasingly indicate that cohabitation is a pathway to marriage, either with the same partner or another. A 1993 survey by the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that almost 60 per cent of couples enter a de facto relationship before marriage, up from 15 per cent of married couples surveyed in 1975.[103]

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102   ED Macklin 1983 'Nonmarital Heterosexual Cohabitation: An Overview' in *Contemporary Families and Alternative Lifestyles* ED Macklin and RH Rubin (eds) Beverley Hills, California: Sage Publications cited in H Anderson & R Cotton Fite 1993 *Becoming Married* Louisville Kentucky: John Knox Westminster Press. See also, Sotirios Sarantakos *Living Together in Australia* Melbourne: Longman Cheshire 1984.

103   R Hawes & J Cribb 'Two-parent families rule the roost' *The Australian* 24 November 1993.

Similar developments have occurred elsewhere. In the United States, for example, the proportion of couples living together before marriage increased from 11 per cent in the years 1965–74 to 44 per cent in 1980–84 and has continued to increase since.[104]

In reviewing the findings of his ten year longitudinal survey of cohabitants, Professor Sotirios Sarantakos from Charles Sturt University, found that the vast majority of cohabitants marry, either their partner or anther person.[105] Sarantakos discovered:

> The vast majority of the cohabitants abandon cohabitation with its liberal ideology and join matrimony, with the same or another partner. Even those who do stay for some time in cohabitation (i) for not practise fully the liberalistic ideology of cohabitation (for example with regard to freedom, stability, commitment, responsibility, security, and so on); and (ii) establish a relationship that is in structural and organisation terms not different form marriage. In most cases cohabitation is, by no means an alternative to marriage, but rather a normative step leading to marriage. Consciously or unconsciously many cohabitants . . . by joining cohabitation, seem to reject the wedding, rather than marriage.[106]

Sarantakos has concluded that cohabitation is an extremely unstable system: 'This study leaves no doubt about the fact that life is easier in marriage, and that de facto unions are more likely to encounter problems than marriages are' he wrote in his seminal work *Living Together in Australia*.[107]

It would appear that many couples commence cohabiting after knowing each other for only a short period of time. According to the *Australian Family Formation Study* (1991) a fifth of those in existing de facto relationships had been involved in their relationship three months or less before moving in together; a further quarter had known each other four to six months; and an additional seven per cent had known each other for more than two years before they started living together. The same study found that 25 per cent of relationships lasted 12 months, around half ended after two years, and three-quarters ended by four years.[108] Reflecting on the evidence of relationship instability, Sarantakos recently commented:

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104   LL Bumpass 1994 'The Declining Significance of Marriage: Changing Family Life in the United States' Working Paper No 66 *A National Survey of Families and Households* Centre for Demography and Ecology: University of Wisconsin.

105   S Sarantakos (1991) 'Cohabitation Revisited: Paths of Change Along Cohabiting and Non-cohabiting Couples' *Australian Journal of Marriages & Family* 12: 3 144–155.

106   S Sarantakos (1991) 'Unmarried Cohabitation: Perceptions of a Lifestyle' *Australian Social Work* 44: 4 23–32.

107   S Sarantakos (1984) *Living Together in Australia* Melbourne: Longman Cheshire 142.

108   H Glezer (1991) 'Cohabitation' *Family Matters* 30: 24–27.

More recent findings, for instance, relating to the effectiveness of cohabitation as a dyadic relationship and as a socialising agency show clearly that this lifestyle cannot be compared to marriage. Particularly with regard to its role as a child-rearing agency, cohabitation demonstrates serious shortcomings which deserve further consideration.[109]

Public opinion

There is a widespread belief that cohabitation before marriage is to the advantage of the couple concerned. About half the respondents to the 1988–89 *National Social Science Survey* reported that they would recommend that couples live together and then marry.[110] In a 1995 survey for *A Current Affair*, 55 per cent of respondents said that 'trial' marriage was an appropriate preparation for a life-long relationship.[111] Only 18 per cent of respondents to the 1991 *Australian Family Formation Study*[112] and 32 per cent of respondents to the 1995 *Australian Family Values survey*[113] disagreed with the statement 'It is alright for a couple to live together without planning to marry.'

These views reflect some of the expert opinion of the past two decades. Montgomery, for example, stated in 1973 that 'Couples who live together during courtship will probably make fewer mistakes in selecting marriage partners. Their marriage, in all probability, will be more reasoned and there will be fewer illusions about the person with whom marriage is to take place.'[114]

More recent social science research points to connections between cohabitation and marital breakdown.

Cohabitation and marital permanence

The Australian Institute of Family Studies *Family Formation Project* found that after five years of marriage, 13 per cent of those who had cohabited would divorce, compared to six per cent of those who had not cohabited. Ten years later, the

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109   S Sarantakos (1996) 'The virtues of liberation: A sequel to Kevin Andrews' *Threshold* 53: 9–11.

110   M Evans (1991) 'Alternative to Marriage' *National Social Survey Report* Vol. 2 No. 5 7–8.

111   AGB McNair Anderson survey 'Love, Sex and Marriage in Australia' *A Current Affair* Sydney: Channel 9 13 February 1995.

112   H Glezer (1991) 'Cohabitation' *Family Matters* 30: 24–27.

113   D de Vaus (1997) 'Family values in the nineties' *Family Matters* 48: 4–10.

114   JP Montgomery 'Towards an understanding of cohabitation' quoted in C Danziger 1978 *Unmarried Heterosexual Cohabitation* San Francisco: RE. See also, J Trost 1975 'Married and unmarried cohabitation: The case of Sweden, with some comparisons' *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 37: 677–682.

proportions were 26 per cent for those who had cohabited and 14 per cent for those who had not. After 20 years: 56 per cent compared to 27 per cent.[115]

Divorce rates for Non-Cohabitors and Cohabitors
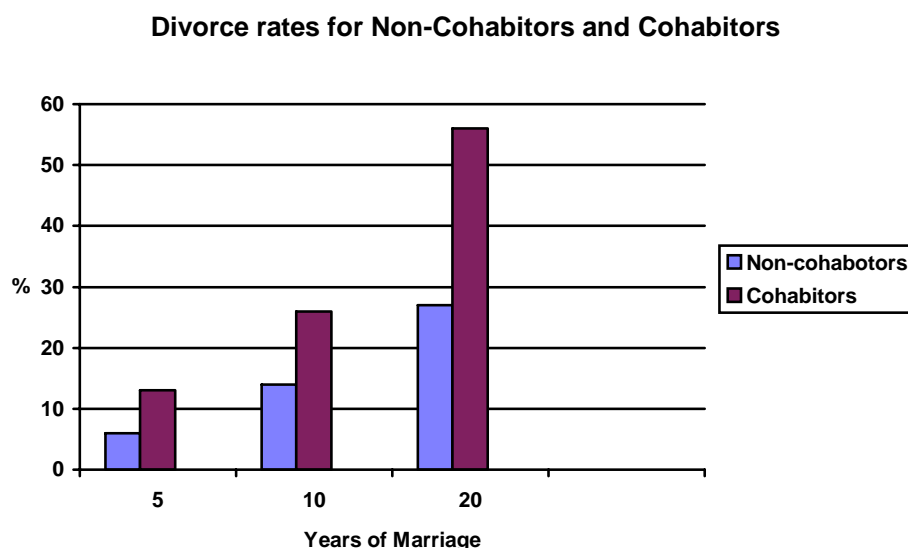
Source: AIFS *Family Formation Study* 1991.

These findings have been supported by research elsewhere. In a recent national study of 8,177 ever-married men and women, sociologists David Hall and John Zhao found that 'premarital cohabiters in Canada have over twice the risk of divorce in any year of marriage when compared to noncohabiters.'[116] A UK Government survey reached similar conclusions. According to research by the UK Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, couples marrying in 1970–74 were 30 per cent more likely to have divorced after five years' marriage if they had cohabited, those marrying in 1975–79 were 40 per cent more likely, and those marrying in 1980–84 were 50 per cent more likely. Allowing for cohabitees' extra years of living together, they are still 20 per cent more likely to be divorced after 15 years of marriage.[117]

US researchers Larry Bumpass and James Sweet have concluded from their survey of the US data that 'marriages that are preceded by living together have 50 per cent

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115   A Crawford 'Living together: a key to unhappy marriage' *The Sunday Age* Melbourne: 21 June 1992 reporting the Family Formation Survey.

116   DR Hall and J Zhao (1995) 'Cohabitation and Divorce in Canada' *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 57: 421–427.

117   J Hadkey (1992)'Pre-Marital Cohabitation and the Probability of Subsequent Divorce, Office of Population Censuses and Surveys *Population Trends* 68 Summer.

higher disruption rates than marriages without premarital cohabitation.'[118] A series of other studies have found a link between cohabitation and marital dissolution.[119]

In Sweden, it has been found that cohabiters have a higher risk of divorce even if the period of marriage is counted from the beginning of cohabitation.[120] In their 1990 US study, Teachman and Polonko found that couples who cohabited prior to marriage had a greater chance of marital dissolution. But they also found that for those couples who had only cohabited with their future spouse, the odds of dissolution were no greater than for non-cohabiters.[121]

A subsequent study by DeMaris and Rao found that cohabiting prior to marriage, regardless of the nature of that cohabitation, is associated with an enhanced risk of later marital disruption.

> It appears that this association is beginning to take on the status of an empirical generalisation. Contrary to the expectations of many couples who envision that prior cohabitation is a hedge against marital 'failure', those who live together before marrying stand a higher chance of ending their marriage. It only remains to detail the mechanism which makes this association possible.[122]

Professionals have pondered the reasons for the greater chance of marital dissolution amongst couples who cohabited prior to marriage. Kerry James, a Sydney marriage counsellor, has noted that 'people who do decide not to get married and live together may be unsure of their commitment in the first place, and then they may decide to get married. The lack of certainty about the commitment continues and that's why marriages break down.'[123]

118　L Bumpass and J Sweet (1994) *National Survey of Families and Households* University of Wisconsin.

119　TR Balakrishnan, KV Rao, E Lapierre-Adamcyk & KJ Krotki (1987) 'A hazard model analysis of the covariates of marital dissolution in Canada' *Demography* 24: 395–406; NG Bennett, AK Blanc & DE Bloom 'Commitment and the modern union: Assessing the link between premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital stability' *American Sociological Review* 53: 127–138; and A Booth & D Johnson (1988) 'Premarital cohabitation and marital success' *Journal of Family Issues* 9: 255–272. See also, S Browder 'Living Together: Is it a good idea?' *Cleo* July 1989, 78–83 which summarises some of the research findings about cohabitation.

120　NG Bennett, AK Blane & DE Bloom (1988) 'Commitment and the modern union: Assessing the link between premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital stability' *American Sociological Review* 53: 127–138.

121　JD Teachman & KA Polonko (1990) 'Cohabitation and Marital Stability in the United States' *Social Forces* 69: 20; 7–220.

122　A DeMaris & KV Rao (1992) 'Premarital Cohabitation and Subsequent Marital Stability in the United States: A Reassessment' *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 54: 178–190.

123　K James *The Midday Show* Sydney: Channel 9 14 June 1994.

Helen Glezer, a senior research fellow at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, has observed that 'men are more likely than women to believe cohabiting allows them to keep their independence. They perceive it as having economic advantages. It is seen as involving less commitment than marriage and men are more likely to view cohabiting as trial marriage. This suggests that women will be either more romantic or emotionally dependent in de facto relationships than men.'[124]

Rev Jim Pilmer, former Director of Anglican Marriage Education and Counselling Services, Melbourne, has said that:

> It's amazing how many people can hide their real identity until they're married. People living together slide into relationships fairly easily without evaluating whether they are right for each other. I don't think most couples realise have bonded they'll be living together. Unfortunately many couples get married to make poor relationships work, thinking that when they marry everything will be right – it isn't, it gets worse.[125]

Other research also indicates that background factors involving a distrust of commitment are relevant in marital breakdown.[126]

Cohabitation and marital happiness

Studies have also found that couples who cohabit prior to marriage to be significantly lower on measures of marital quality.[127] DeMaris and Leslie hypothesised that cohabiters would score higher on communication and couple adjustment in their study. However, they found a negative relationship between cohabitation and satisfaction:

> . . . compared with noncohabiters, cohabiters scored significantly lower in both perceived quality of marital communication and marital satisfaction. These differences were significant for wives in the are of communication and for both spouses in the area of marital satisfaction. Part of this effect is accounted for by differences between cohabiters and noncohabiters on sex-role traditionalism, church attendance, and other sociocultural variables. However, even after controlling for such differences, having cohabited is

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124   H Glezer (1991) 'Cohabitation' *Family Matters* 30: 24–27.

125   Quoted in A Crawford supra.

126   H Glezer (1994) 'Family backgrounds and marital breakdown' *Threshold* 43: 16–19.

127   A Booth & D Johnson (1988) 'Premarital cohabitation and marital success' *Journal of Family Issues* 9: 255–272; A DeMaris & GR Leslie (1984) 'Cohabitation with the Future Spouse: Its influence upon Marital Satisfaction and Communication' *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 46: 77–84; and REL Watson (1983) 'Premarital cohabitation vs. traditional courtship' *Family Relations* 32: 139–147. See also, P Yelsma (1986) 'Marriage vs Cohabitation: Couples' Communication Practices and Satisfaction' *Journal of Communication* Autumn 94–107.

associated with slightly lower marital satisfaction for both husbands and wives, although for husbands the effect is not quite significant. the effect persists even after considering the greater amount of time in which cohabiters have been intimately involved and controlling for differences between cohabiters and noncohabiters on commitment to marital permanence.

DeMaris and Leslie concluded:

> Rather than acting as a filter that effectively screens out the less-compatible couples, cohabitation appears to select couples from the outset who are somewhat less likely to report high satisfaction once they are married. This may be due to the fact that these individuals expect more out of marriage from the beginning. Alternatively, these may be individuals who adapt less readily to the role expectations of conventional marriage than do more traditional respondents.

Watson and DeMeo concluded their study saying:

> The results of this research cast doubts upon the high hopes which have been held for premarital cohabitation as a means of ensuring the compatibility of prospective spouses, of testing their relationship and, as individuals, of building the interpersonal skills important to successful marriage.

It has also been found that the rate of violence is appreciably higher for cohabiting couples who have lived together for one to ten years than for married couples.[128]

Cohabitation and children

Where couples who cohabit have children, research indicates that the children perform at lower levels than children of married couples. In his recent commentary Professor Sarantakos summarised the findings in four areas: [129]

1. *Scholastic achievement*: In all measures related to aptitude in language, mathematics, sport, attitudes to school and learning, parent-school relationships, support with homework. sociability, household tasks and educational aspirations of the parents, children of cohabiting couples performed less well than children of married couples. Overall, in the majority of cases, children of married couples do significantly better at school and in the community than children of cohabiting couples.[130]

2. *Achievement*: There are significantly more children of married couples than of cohabiting couples reporting to have achieved an educational status that is as

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128   K Yllo & MA Straus (1981) 'Interpersonal Violence Among Married and Cohabiting Couples' *Family Relations* 30: 339–347.

129   S Sarantakos (1996) 'The virtues of liberation' *Threshold* 53: 9–11.

130   S Sarantakos (1996) 'Children in three contexts' *Children Australia* 21(3) 23–31.

high or even higher than the expected level. There are also significantly more children of cohabiting couples than of married couples who report to have been less successful in the area of employment or who have been unemployed or could only obtain part-time employment.

3. *Drug use*: Children of cohabiting couples appear in larger proportions than children of married couples among those who (a) are smoking or have been smoking; (b) have been smoking earlier in life; (c) have been drinking in larger proportions; (d) had begun drinking earlier in life; and (e) are using or have used illicit drugs.[131]

4 *Crime and delinquency*: There are significantly more children of cohabiting couples than children of married couples who commit criminal offences, or who commit two or more offences. The findings on delinquency follow the trend identified in the context of drug use.[132]

Conclusion

Recent research supports earlier studies. In a recent article in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Brown and Booth show that marriages preceded by cohabitation show 'lower levels of marital interaction, higher levels of disagreement and instability . . . lower levels of commitment to marriage' and higher levels of divorce than marriages without previous cohabitation experience.[133] Similarly Nock and others have noted that in many instances, cohabitation is not a relationship with a future, but one that lasts for a period of time and then ends, either through marriage or dissolution; and that cohabitation and marriage differ not only in quantity but also in quality. [134]

Sarantakos has concluded that:
• Premarital cohabitation does not improve the choice of marital partners; does not offer an enriched courtship where partners get to know each other and gain experience with matters related to marriage; and does not offer an opportunity to test the compatibility of the partners; if cohabiting partners had a chance to live their life over again, almost one-half would not have chosen the same partner; and
• There are more couples with than without premarital cohabitation experience demonstrating a low marital satisfaction and low marital happiness, lack of freedom, interpersonal dependence, domestic violence, marital conflicts and instability.[135]

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131   S Sarantakos (forthcoming) 'Children of cohabiting couples'.

132   S Sarantakos (1997) 'Cohabitation, marriage & delinquency: The significance of family environment' *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 30(2): 187–199.

133   SL Brown & A Booth (1996) 'Cohabitation versus marriage: A comparison of relationship quality' *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58(3): 668–678.

134   SL Nock (1995) 'A comparison of marriages and cohabiting relationships' *Journal of Family Issues* 16: 53–76.

135   S Sarantakos (1994) 'Trial cohabitation on trial' *Australian Social Work* 47(3): 13–25.

Professor Sarantakos posits four reasons why cohabitation is inferior to marriage as a dyadic relationship and as a socialising relationship:[136] First, cohabitation often attracts people with little if any resources, skills and attributes required for a successful relationship.[137] Secondly, in cohabitation, mate selection is geared towards finding a 'partner' or a 'friend' rather than a 'spouse'. Consequently, screening mechanisms employed by people looking for a suitable partner are less vigorous in cohabitation than in marriage, and therefore cannot guarantee compatibility, commitment and stability of the relationship. Thirdly, cohabiters are by definition less committed to stable and enduring relationships, and especially to marriage; many also entertain non-traditional beliefs regarding marriage;[138] and fourthly, cohabitation experiences expose couples to liberal attitudes and environments, to modernism and tolerance to alternative beliefs and practices. Drugs, drinking, sexual freedom and social deviance are often tolerated more in a cohabitation environment than a marriage environment.

Consequences for marriage education

These findings have consequences for couples entering into cohabitation and for marriage educators. As Sarantakos concludes:

> Australians need to know more about the advantages and limitations of the alternative lifestyle so commonly used in our community. They need to learn what makes a relationship strong, happy and lasting, and what to expect from the unit they establish. They need to know more about marriage; and they need to know more about cohabitation. For this reason, the role of marriage education and of pre-marital counselling is most significant and the need for constant support in this area is beyond contention.[139]

These issues are being addressed by marriage educators. In a series of recent articles and workshops at conferences, marriage educators have been exploring an appropriate response to the findings of the social science research.[140] In his book *Marriage and the Family*, PREPARE author Dr David Olson, outlines a checklist that can be used with cohabiting couples.[141] Through this questionnaire, Olson poses

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136 S Sarantakos (1996) 'The virtues of liberation' *Threshold* 53: 9–11.

137 A Booth & DR Johnson (1988) 'Premarital cohabitation and marital success' *Journal of Family Issues* 9: 255–272.

138 WG Axinn & A Thornton (1992) 'The relationship between cohabitation and divorce: Selectivity or casual influence?' *Demography* 29: 357–374.

139 S Sarantakos (1996) 'The virtues of liberation' *Threshold* 53: 9–11.

140 For example, C Wallis(1998) 'The challenge of cohabitation' *Threshold* 58: 6–7; and T Kerin (1998) 'Commitment: Marriage versus cohabitation' *Threshold* 53: 8–9.

141 D Olson (1994) *Marriage and the Family: Diversity and strengths* Mayfield: CA. The checklist is reprinted in 'Is cohabitation the right choice for you?' *Threshold* 49: 24.

issues for cohabiting couples to address when considering their relationship and marriage. A special section of the FOCCUS pre-marital inventory for cohabiting couples has been prepared by the authors and is in use in Australia.[142]

The trends in relation to cohabitation and the research findings also suggest other fields of useful study. For example: Are couples who cohabit more prone to marital dissatisfaction and breakdown? or, is marital dissatisfaction a function of cohabitation?

Determinants of marital stability

The various factors implicated in marital instability and marital dissolution provide the background to understanding the issue. They point to heightened risks for some couples. But they do not explain why particular couples succeed in their marriages, and others fail. While more research is required, the studies undertaken to date identify a series of factors that have a positive influence on the success or otherwise of marriage. These factors include:
- effective communication and conflict resolution;
- realistic expectations of marriage;
- equitable division of labor within families;
- fertility within marriage;
- length of marital duration; and
- religious commitment.

Effective communication

'A lasting marriage results from a couple's ability to resolve the conflicts that are inevitable in any relationships' writes Dr John Gottman, Professor of Psychology at the University of Washington, and one of the leading researchers into marital function.[143] In his Seattle laboratory, Gottman's team conducts something akin to an X-ray or a catscan of living relationships. The teams have compared, microsecond by microsecond, how couples talk to one another. They have examined their facial expressions, monitored how they fidget, and how they gesture. Even breathing patterns and heart rates of couples have been followed as they converse in the laboratory.[144]

Contrary to popular belief, successful marriage seems to depend less on how compatible couples are, but how well they communicate about issues in their lives.

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142   'New cohabitation section of FOCCUS available soon' (1996) *Threshold* 52: 4.

143   J Gottman (1997) *Why marriages succeed or fail* London: Bloomsbury 28.

144   KJ Walters (1998) 'Does active listening prevent marital distress?' *Threshold* 58: 10–12.

[145] Research indicates that nearly all divorcing people trace their problems to ineffective communication.[146] Gottman has found that there are three different styles of problem solving into which healthy marriages tend to settle:

> In a validating marriage couples compromise often and calmly work out their problems to mutual satisfaction as they arise. In a conflict-avoiding marriage couples agree to disagree, rarely confronting their differences head-on. And finally, in a volatile marriage conflicts erupt often, resulting in passionate disputes.[147]

Gottman says that previously, many psychologists considered conflict-avoiding and volatile marriages to be pathological: 'But our current research suggests that all three styles are equally stable and bode equally well for the marriage's future.'[148]

The crucial determinant, according to Gottman, is the balance between positive and negative interactions in a relationship: whether the good moments of mutual pleasure, passion, humour, support, kindness, and generosity outweigh the bad moments of complaint, criticism, anger, disgust, contempt, defensiveness and coldness. According to Gottman's research, healthy marriages have a ratio of positive moments to negative moments of 5:1. Good moments can be simple: a hug, a smile, and a walk in the park.

Conversely, certain negative behaviours damage a relationship, says Gottman. He describes these behaviours as 'The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse'. In order of least to most dangerous, these disastrous ways of interacting are criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. 'What makes the four horsemen so deadly to a marriage is not so much their unpleasantness but the intensive way they interfere with a couple's communication' says Gottman. 'They create a continuing cycle of discord and negativity that's hard to break through if you don't understand what is happening.'[149] Gottman has researched not only the causes of marital discord. He has also been vitally interested in strategies to invigorate marriages.[150] Increasingly, researchers and marriage educators point to effective communication patterns as a key determinant in marital success.[151]

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145   HJ Markman et al (1988) *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 56(2): 117–127.

146   GC Kitson & M Sussman (1982) 'Marital complaints, demographic characteristics, and symptoms of mental distress in divorce' *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 44: 87–101.

147   J Gottman supra 28.

148   KJ Walters supra 10.

149   KJ Walters supra 10.

150   J Gottman (1998) 'Predicting marital happiness and stability from newlywed interactions' *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60: 5–22.

151   See for example, H Hendrix (1988) *Getting the love you want* Melbourne: Schwartz & Wilkinson; D Tannen (1990) *You just don't understand* Sydney: Random House; D Jansen & M Newman (1989) *Really Relating* Sydney: Random House; D & V Mace (1977) *How to have a happy marriage* Nashville: Abington Press; SM Campbell (1980) *The couple's journey* San Luis Obispo CA: Impact; and J Gray (1989) *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* New York: Harper Collins.

Realistic expectations of marriage

An Australian study by AIFS researcher Ilene Wolcott identified realistic expectations and congruent marital expectations as an important factor in determining the future of a marriage.[152] Many of the divorcees in the study had unrealistic expectations of their marriage, hoping for example, that it would solve loneliness or psychological problems. Only a third of her sample had discussed their expectations of marriage and each other prior to the wedding.

Equally, there is evidence that marriage succeed where couples approach their relationship as something requiring continuing work and commitment. Judith Wallerstein, author of the groundbreaking study of the effect of divorce on children *Second Chances*, says in her latest book, *The Good Marriage*:

> As I compared the happily married couples with the thousands of divorcing couples I have seen in the past twenty-five years, it was clear that these man and women had early on created a firm basis for their relationship and had continued to build it together. Many of the couples that divorced failed to lay such a foundation and did not understand the need to reinforce it over the years. Many marriages broke because the structure was too weak to hold in the face of life's vicissitudes. The happy couples regarded their marriages as a work in progress that need continued attention lest it fall into disrepair. Even in retirement they did not take each other for granted. Far too many divorcing couples fail to understand that a marriage does not just spring into being after the ceremony. Neither the legal nor the religious ceremony makes the marriage. *People* do, throughout their lives.[153]

Over the past decade, marriage educators have almost universally included segments on expectations of marriage in their programs.[154] More recently, Dr Scott Stanley from the University of Denver, and co-author of the PREP pre-marital marriage education program, indicated that new research increasingly points to old values. 'As you watch what marital researchers are now gravitating toward, you could say they are "rediscovering" the stuff that's been close to the hearts of couples all along: commitment, forgiveness, acceptance, friendship and the like. It's not that any of these things are very new. But the field is increasingly turning the lens on these issues. As researchers continue to do this, we'll keep finding that matters like

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152 I Wolcott (1984) *From courtship to divorce: Unrealised or unrealistic expectations* Australian Family Research Conference.

153 J Wallerstein and S Blakeslee (1995) *The Good Marriage* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

154 M Andrews (1994) 'A national strategy to enhance marriage and family' *Threshold* 44: 14–20. This was also reflected in the survey of programs undertaken by the Committee.

basic respect, trust, commitment have been there all along – providing great fuel of great marriages.'[155]

The division of labor

In *The Second Shift*, Arlie Russell Hochschild reported that the happiest marriages are those in which husbands share the work at home, believe in doing so, and value doing so.[156] Professor Hochschild also noted that among working couples, the inability to share the household work frequently leads to marital conflict. These observations are supported by other studies.[157]
A 1983 study by Huber and Spritze of 1,360 husbands and wives found that for each daily household task that the husband performs at least half of the time, the wife is about three per cent less likely to have thoughts of divorce.[158] More recent research has found that 'a wife's happiness to be affected indirectly by the division of household labour through the degree to which she perceives her husband as providing her with emotional and instrumental support.'[159] For wives with more egalitarian beliefs about marital roles and those employed full-time in the labour force, a more equal division of household work was associated with greater feelings of support from husbands. Greater feelings of support were, in turn, associated with the wives assigning a higher 'quality' to their marriage and expressing a 'more positive' assessment of their own well-being.

While some researchers conclude that 'it does appear that the more equitable sharing of household labour and childrearing duties increases marital satisfaction, at least in the short term'.[160] Booth and Amato caution that there is as yet no strong evidence that it enhances marital stability.[161]

Childbearing within marriage

The birth of a child often adds additional strains to the marital bond. In recent years, a considerable body of research has been amassing about the impact on the marital

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155 KJ Walters supra 12.

156 AR Hochschild (1989) *The Second Shift* New York: Viking.

157 GC Kitson & M Sussman (1982) 'Marital complaints, demographic characteristics, and symptoms of mental distress in divorce' *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 44: 87–101.

158 J Huber & G Spritze (1983) *Sex stratification: Children, housework, and jobs* New York: Academic Press.

159 DL Pina & VL Bengston (1993) 'The division of household labor and wives' happiness: Ideology, employment, and perceptions of support' *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 55: 901–912.

160 DB Larson, JP Swyers & SS Larson (1996) *The Costly Consequences of Divorce: Assessing   the clinical, economic and public health impact of marital disruption in the United States* Rockville MD: National Institute for Healthcare Research 240.

161 A Booth and PR Amato (1994) 'Parental gender role and nontraditionalism and offspring outcomes *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 56: 865–876.

relationship of the transition to parenthood.[162] A series of studies have shown that the transition to parenthood can involve decreased marital satisfaction and/or increased marital conflict,[163] a shift to a traditional division of labour,[164] insufficient roles models, especially for fathers,[165] and increased paternal participation in family life, especially in more recent times.[166]

Despite increased paternal participation in family life following the birth of the first child, Carolyn and Philip Copwan reported from their ten year study of parents, *When Partners Become Parents*, that there remain a number of obstacles to involving fathers in parenting young children.[167] These include: It is hard to shake the idea that childrearing is women's work; men clearly expect their wives to be competent with babies right from the start; the 'marital dance' tends to discourage men's active involvement in childcare; the more men attempt to take an active role in the care of their children, the more mixed or negative feedback they report from their own parents; and the economics of the workplace and the lack of quality care encourages fathers to work and mothers to stay home while the children are young.[168]

The Cowans identified several areas of conflict. First, both husbands and wives report a negative change in their sexual relationship after having a baby: 'The frequency of lovemaking declines for almost all couples in the early months of parenthood.'[169] Secondly, 'from the reports of men and women in both one-job and two-job families the division of the workload in the family wins, hands down, as the issue most likely to cause conflict in the first two years of family making'.[170] Thirdly, 'balancing family and work life after the baby comes is one of the major tasks that couples face when they come up for air and turn their attention to the outside world. A second task to be accomplished, whether or not women return to their jobs, is finding acceptable, affordable care givers when neither parent is available to look after the child.'[171]

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162   The following discussion draws upon the work of E Bader and M MacMillan (1994) *Fathers – Partners in Parenting* Toronto: New York Inter-Agency and Community Council 522.

163   K Entwistle & L Doering (1981) *The first birth: A family turning point* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; and J Belsky & J Kelly (1994) *The transition to parenthood: How a first child changes a marriage* New York: Delacorte Press.

164   R LaRossa & M LaRossa (1981) *Transition to parenthood: How infants change families* Beverly Hills CA: Sage; and RB Stewart (1990) *The Second Child: Family transitions and adjustment* Beverly Hills CA: Sage.

165   id.

166   K Kreppner, L Paulsen & Y Shuetze (1982) 'Infant and family development: From triads to tetrads' *Human Development* 25: 373–391; and RB Stewart supra.

167   CP Cowan & PA Cowan (1992) *When Partners Become Parents* New York: Basic Books.

168   Cowan & Cowan supra 103–104.

169   ibid. 106.

170   ibid. 108.

171   ibid. 115.

These areas of conflict were further explored by Belsky and Kelly in *The Transition to Parenthood*.[172] New parents disagree about many things, but when they fight, they usually fight over one of five things: division of labour, money, their relationship (feelings of neglect on the part of the father), career and work, and social life (are we getting enough): 'These five issues are so big, important, and all-pervasive, they might be said to constitute the raw material of marital change during the transition.'[173]

These studies point to other conclusions. The role of fathers has changed over time, and they also need skills and social support for their new roles.[174] In Toronto, for example, marriage educators have been developing programs which include not only pre and post-marriage segments, but also segments around the time of the birth of the first child.[175]

While the research outlined above suggest that the birth of a child adds strains to a marriage, other studies have found that childlessness rather than childbearing in marriage is associated with higher divorce rates.[176] Several recent studies have concluded that having a first child significantly reduces the probability of divorce in the year following the birth.[177] Waite and her colleagues examined national longitudinal data to determine the effects of first births on the short-term stability of marriages. The researchers found that parents of both sexes had much lower than expected marital disruption rates throughout the three-year period of the study: virtually none of the fathers and only 1–2 per cent of the mothers were divorced or separated at the time of the birth of their first child. After the birth, the proportion of both mothers and fathers who divorced did increase, but the increases were gradual, suggesting that the birth of a child did not suddenly precipitate a divorce for most of those who did divorce. The divorce rates two years post birth were much lower for those in the study than the generally expected rate. Waite and her colleagues concluded that 'these results provide compelling evidence that children increase marital stability.' The birth of a child following remarriage also tends to lower marital disruption rates.[178]

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172   J Belsky & J Kelly (1994) *The transition to parenthood: How a first child changes a marriage* New York: Delacorte Press.

173   ibid. 32.

174   Bader and MacMillan supra 13–18.

175   Margaret Andrews (1996) 'Developing a natural strategy of marriage and family education' in B Muehlenberg et al (eds) *The family there is no other way* Melbourne: APA

176   L White, A Booth & J Edwards (1986) 'Children and marital happiness: Why the negative relationship?' *Journal of Family Issues* 7: 131–148; and H Wineberg (1988) 'Duration between marriage and first child and marital stability' *Social Biology* 35: 91–102.

177   LJ Waite, GW Haggstrom & DE Kanouse (1985) 'The consequences of parenthood for the marital stability of young adults' *American Sociological Review* 50: 850–857; and L White & A Booth (1985) 'The transition to parenthood and marital quality' *Journal of Family Issues* 6: 435–449.

178   H Wineberg (1992) 'Childbearing and dissolution of the second marriage' *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 56: 80–88.

According to Larson and colleagues:

> one of the most interesting and disturbing findings to come out of research on this topic is the discovery by Morgan, Lye and Condran[179] that parents of sons are less likely to divorce than parents of daughters. The authors of this study attribute this finding to the father's greater involvement with sons than with daughters, a supposition that is supported by evidence[180] showing that greater father involvement in child care reduces the likelihood of divorce.[181]

Religious commitment

One of the findings of the Australian Family Formation Study was that growing up in a home where parents were religious lessened the risk of marital instability.[182] As Australian Institute of Family Studies researcher, Helen Glezer, indicated, this finding replicated other overseas findings about the factors related to marital stability and instability.[183]

Recent research suggests that 'even simple measures of religious practices, such as the frequency of attendance at religious services, appear to be inversely related to the risk of divorce and separation.'[184] An analysis of the US National Survey of Family Growth found that 17 per cent of couples attending church once a year or less will separate or divorce after five years, compared to seven per cent of those who attend church monthly or more often.[185] The study found that after 10 years, 32 per cent of non-churchgoers were no longer married, compared to 10 per cent of those attending monthly. After 15 years, the divorce and separation rate was 37 per cent for non-churchgoers, compared to 14 per cent for regular attendees. Another US study found that among white men, marital dissolution is three times greater for those who never attend church than for those who attend at least two or three times a month.[186]

179   SP Morgan, D Lye & G Condran (1988) 'Sons, daughters and the risk of marital disruption' *American Journal of Sociology* 94: 110–129.

180   K Seccombe & G Lee (1987) 'Female status, wives' autonomy, and divorce: A cross-cultural study' *Family Perspectives* 20: 241–249.

181   Larson, Swyer & Larson supra 243.

182   H Glezer (1994) 'Family backgrounds and marital breakdown' *Threshold* 43: 16–19.

183   id.

184   DB Larson, JP Swyers & SS Larson supra 244.

185   J McCarthy (1979) 'Religious commitment, affiliation, and marriage dissolution' in R Wuthnow (ed) *The religious dimension: New directions in quantitative research* 179–197.

186   ND Glenn & M Supancis (1984) 'The social and demographic correlates of divorce and separation in the United States: an update and reconsideration' *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 46: 563–576.

While divorce rates in the US differ among adherents to various religious groups, for example Protestants and Catholics have higher divorce rates than Jews,[187] and inter-religious marriages are more likely to divorce than marriages between spouses from the same religious background,[188] religious commitment appears from the research to have a greater effect on marital stability than religious affiliation.[189]

Jernigan and Nock found in their national sample of individuals that attend church weekly, regardless of denomination, are 36 per cent less likely to divorce than those who never attend. They suggest this is because those who actively participate in their church have a wide network of friends and associates to turn to in times of distress. At the same time, they are held accountable by their fellow churchgoers, from who they receive regular support and encouragement in maintaining a stable marriage.[190]

There is also evidence that most religiously committed people have strong sentiments against divorce.[191] A recent study in the Detroit area found that low levels of religious values and participation are related to high rates of cohabitation and low rates of marriage.[192] The study also found that while increased religious commitment decreases cohabitation and increases marital stability, cohabitation was found to reduce religious commitment. Young adults with higher levels of religious commitment, who were less likely to cohabit, were greatly influenced by their parent's religious commitment, thus indicating an intergenerational effect.

Dr Alan Craddock has demonstrated in his research that although there are some differences between Australia and the United States, religious views are important indicators of marital satisfaction in many couple relationships.[193]

Length of marital duration

It is a statistical fact that the longer couples remain married to each other, the less the risk of marital separation. In Australia, half of all separations occur within the first

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187   id.

188   SL Nock (1987) *The sociology of the family* Englwood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall.

189   J Jernigan & S Nock (1984) Religiosity and family stability: Do families that pray together stay together?' cited in DB Larson et al supra 246.

190   id.

191   DB Larson (1985) 'Religious involvement: Its association with marital status, marital well-being, and morality' in G Rekers (ed) *Family building: Six qualities of a strong family* Ventura CA: Regal Books 121–147.

192   A Thirnton, WG Axxin & DH Hill (1992) 'Religiosity, cohabitation and marriage' *American Journal of Sociology* 98: 628–651.

193   A Craddock (1996) 'Identifying and working with different types of premarital couples' *Threshold* 51: 20–25.

eight years of the wedding, and 75 per cent within 15 years of the wedding. This does not mean that couples who have been married longer face no risk of marital separation and divorce, just that the risk for them, as a cohort of the married population, is less.

A number of studies of couples who have been married for lengthy periods suggest key elements of friendship, commitment, consensus and humour in these relationships.[194] Sporakowski and Axelson's analysis of 16 studies of enduring marriages concluded that common characteristics were: enjoyment, fulfilment, endurance, tolerance and perseverance.[195] Another study found that a number of factors not identified in younger couples, were common to longer relationships, including health, sexual relationships, financial management and well-being and personality issues.[196] A more recent study of couples who had been married for more than 30 years reported intimacy, commitment, communication, congruence and religious orientation as common factors.[197] The researchers found that the couples 'described ways in which closeness to their spouse permeated the relationship, encompassing emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects of their relationship. This closeness involved shared interests, activities, thoughts, feelings, values, joys, and pains.'

The couples interviewed typically began their marriage with an expectation that the marriage would endure and a view of marriage as a permanent relationship which is not abandoned just because difficulties emerge. Many participants in the study referred to stressful periods in their marriage as 'opportunities for growth.' Many said that were determined 'to get over the rough spots.' For them, divorce was not an option. Positive communication skills involving sharing of thoughts and feelings, discussing problems together and listening to the other person's point of view with respect were often mentioned. There was also a high degree of congruence in their perceptions of the strengths of their relationship. According to the researchers, shared religious faith was also a prominent feature for many couples in the study.[198]

CONCLUSION TO PART ONE

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194   JC Laurer and RH Lauer (1986) *Till death us do part: A study and guide to long-term marriage* New York: Harington Park.

195   M Sporakowski and L Axelson (1984) 'Long-term marriages: A critical revie*w' Lifestyles: A Journal of Changing Patterns* 7: 76–93.

196   RF Mackinnon, CE Mackinnon & ML Franken (1984) 'Family strengths in long-term marriages' *Lifestyles: A Journal of Changing Patterns* 7: 115–126.

197   LC Robinson and PW Blanton (1993) 'Marital strengths in enduring marriages' *Family Relations* 42: 38–45.

198   See also D Curran (1983) *Traits of a healthy family* New York: Ballantine Books; and M Eastman (1991) *The magical power of family* Melbourne: Collins Dove.

The trends outlined above in Chapter 2 indicate a movement away from marriage in Australia. Conversely, the social science research reviewed in Chapter 3 points to the value of marriage for the health and well-being of both adults and children, and the problematic nature of separation and divorce. In Chapter 4, the research also points to the factors which determine marital stability and instability. It reinforces the value of preventive programs of marriage and relationship education.