

Marriage vs cohabitation

[Family](#), [Marriage](#)



Marriage is the foundation of family formation in most contemporary societies. It is a contract arrangement that is binding and legally recognized.

Cohabitation on the other hand, mimics the structure of a marriage with the exception of legal impediments. In some countries common law relationships are recognized, complete with the legal ramifications in the event of dissolution. However, some societies are hesitant to accord due recognition for cohabitation arrangements for fear that it would undermine the institution of marriage.

Studies Conducted

In many social researches conducted on relationships, it was found that more couples are resorting to cohabitation arrangements in recent years. In the United States, an increase from 10 percent to 56 percent was noted favoring cohabitation over marriage. The statistics compared was between 1974 and 1994. (The verdict on Cohabitation vs. marriage, 2001) There are many reasons why couples opt for cohabitation arrangements over marriage. First, it is easier to enter into and dissolve. Second, it proposes a more liberated approach to the partnership. It is perceived to endorse a “freer lifestyle.” (Ambert, 2005, p6) Third, couples cohabiting are not pressured to stay together. Finally, cohabitation is contracted for economic reasons.

Comparison

Comparing marriage and cohabitation, the question of commitment is most malleable in cohabitation. Although the social structure of both appeared to be the same, it is in the philosophical approach where they differ. The “freer lifestyle” of cohabitation arrangements raises the questions of fidelity on

both partners. The couple is less secure compared to married couples. Exclusivity in this case is missing in cohabitation arrangements.

Legality of Marriage

Marriage as a legally recognized institution is a binding contract. Once entered into, the couple is expected to fulfill obligations such as financial, child-rearing responsibilities, commitment to care for each other “ in sickness or in health, till death do us part”. Marriage has a sense of permanency compared to the transient nature of cohabitation. In case a marriage is dissolved, appropriate legal measures are applied. The wife can demand from the husband legally for child support and indemnity when the law finds it appropriate.

While marriage and cohabitation are generally accepted in society, many would still favor that the relationship be legally recognized. In more conservative societies, cohabitation is an aberration and couples are pressured into legalizing the union. Marriage involves formal ceremonies and social recognition while cohabitation does not.

Consequences of Cohabitation

In the aspect of dissolution of unions, cohabiting couples are more likely to separate than married couples. In the event cohabitation progresses into a marriage, the dissolution of the union is attributed to the permissive nature of cohabitation. The same attitude is carried into the legalized relationship thus insecurity, commitment and fidelity affects the relationship. Cohabiting couples favor divorce as a solution to marital conflicts when compared to married couples.

Economic Issues

Economically, married couples are better off compared to non-married ones. The nature of marriage unifies the financial resources of the couple while for cohabiting couple autonomy is still expected. Financial spending and planning decisions in married couples are combined efforts while that provision is missing in cohabiting couples.

Conclusion

In essence, both married and cohabiting couples follow the same social structure except cohabitation does not carry the legal impediments of a marriage. Social acceptability of cohabitation remains mixed as conservative societies still frown on the arrangement for moral and legal grounds. Most would still encourage cohabiting couples to legalize their relationship.

While autonomous and liberal philosophies accentuate cohabitation arrangements, they are not enough to prevent dissolution and solve problems that are outcomes of the arrangement. The legally binding nature of marriage deters couples from ending the union because of selfish and whimsical motives. The legal recognition ensures that the social foundation of family remains intact.

References

1. Ambert, A. (2005). Cohabitation and marriage: How are they related? The Vanier Institute of the Family. Retrieved 30 May 2007
2. The verdict on Cohabitation vs. marriage (2001) Retrieved 30 May 2007
3. Related essay: “ My Ideal Wife”