

# Changes in marriage equality laws



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**Compare and contrast how your views of a traditional nuclear family, cohabitation and sexuality might differ from those of your parents.**

The ever changing world as we know it has led to differences in lifestyles and contemporary views towards how families should be run in modern society but the core values of family life still remain the same. Families are still mediums whereby people can enjoy security, companionship and a refuge from an often harsh and uncaring world. Structures of families have changed along with society in general but the traditional nuclear family of mother, father and children still remains an ideal. Many variations of the traditional nuclear family have arisen in the years since world war 2 that have changed the current generations views to that of our parents and grandparents generations.

In previous generations the mother was expected to look after the household and not partake in paid employment while the father was considered the bread winner and sole source of income for the family. This perception of the nuclear family has changed vastly due to major changes in social structure, education, the feminist movement etc. These forces have changed how we view the modern family along with the increase in cohabitation, decline in marriage, rise in divorce rates and the prolonged postponement of union formation. Single-sex marriages, single-parent families, cohabitation and single living have increased in regularity.

Increases in the rate of divorce has lead to a growth in the popularity of cohabitation whereby more couples live with each other before marriage, somewhat as a testing period, and couples are marrying later in life.

Marriage has become less relevant in our generation compared to the ‘

golden age of marriage' during the 50s and 60s where marriage was an important institution in society. Changes in laws such as those concerning same-sex marriage have led to this attitude. In the last two decades there has been a dramatic increase in cohabitation in the US. Between 1970 and 1994, the number of unmarried couples living together rose from about 500,000 to almost 3.7 million. Between 1965-74 just 11% of marriages were preceded by cohabitation whereas between 1980-84 44% of all marriages involved at least one spouse who had cohabited (1). Cohabitation has been prevalent in previous generations where couples were unable to marry due to the fact that they weren't able to afford marriage or were not lawfully able to marry. Couples also believe that it is easier to end a cohabiting relationship than it is to end a marriage. For one tenth of cohabiters, cohabitation is a long term relationship which does not lead to marriage (1).

In the space of a couple of decades cohabitation has nearly replaced marriage as the regular choice of a first union. In France, a massive rise in cohabitation occurred between 1965 and 1995 when the proportion of couples starting their union by cohabitation increased from 10% to 90% (2). During the 1990s marriage was still the superior marker for first union entry in the south of Europe whereas in juxtaposition most western and northern European countries and the United States cohabitation had surpassed marriage as the preamble for first partnership.

The mean age for which people enter marriage has increased for many reasons. The prolonging of many transitions to adult life (finishing education, leaving the parental household, starting a first job) along with the rise in young adults entering unions without marriage has added to the mean age.

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Nowadays marriage is no longer seen as the singularly appropriate avenue for childbearing. People who decide to have a child do not feel rushed into marriage and being pregnant is not seen as a determinant for marriage. This attitude can be compared to those of prior generations where pregnancy before marriage was frowned upon and unmarried cohabitation did not last very long due to social pressure.

In our parents generations the normal route of marriage followed by childbearing has been steadily replaced by a number of different pathways: in some countries, the sequence of cohabitation followed by marriage and then childbearing has become the most common path, while in other societies, cohabitation first followed by first or second birth and then marriage has become the most popular pattern and an increasing number of couples with children opt to not marry at all (3). In the United States the number of children born to parents who cohabit nearly doubled between 1984 and 1994, growing from 6% to 11% (4).

In recent times marriage instability has increased, this along with less-stable living arrangements have led to an increase in the numbers of single parent families and a high frequency of single motherhood across Europe. In Europe a substantial percentage of children are exposed to living with a single parent before reaching the age of 15. The total exposure ranged from 11-18 percent in Southern Europe (Italy and Spain), Belgium, Poland, and Slovenia; to 39-41 percent in Austria, Germany, and Latvia; and, outside of Europe, to a very high level of 52 percent in the United States (these figures are period life table estimates based on the FFS data). In agreement with the evidence provided by the census data in Table 6 above, the authors argue that, while <https://assignbuster.com/changes-in-marriage-equality-laws/>

the pace of family change has varied across countries, the shift of childrearing from married parents to single mothers is universal in Western societies, and has been proceeding faster than the shift to cohabiting parents and stepfamilies (5).

In our parents and grandparents generations there was a fundamental belief that marital union should be between a man and a woman. Same sex couples were shunned and granted none of the rights that were enjoyed by heterosexual couples. Throughout the world same sex couples and those in support of equal rights for same sex couples have campaigned for what they feel are basic human rights that should apply to everyone; the right to have their relationship recognised lawfully and the right to marry. Homosexuality has gradually become decriminalised since the 60s in most countries but is still criminal in some countries run by religious laws. Pressure from these groups seeking equality for same sex couples and recognition of their union along with the increase in cohabitation has led to law reforms that allow these couples to achieve a specific legal status when they register their partnerships.

Although same sex couples are gaining momentum in their continuous battles to secure recognition there are still pockets of resistance and intolerance. The introduction of civil partnership to the United Kingdom has granted same sex couples more rights including employment, pension and inheritance related rights. This increase in rights is a stark contrast compared to the limited rights allocated to same sex couples in our parents and grandparents times.

## References

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3. Children born outside marriage in France and their parents: recognitions and legitimations since 1965 by Munoz-Pérez, F., and F. Prioux, 2000
4. Larry Bumpass, 2002
5. Shifting childrearing to single mothers. Results from 17 Western countries by Heuveline, P., J. M. Timberlake, and F. F. Furstenberg, Jr., 2003