

Cohabitation

It is very common today, to find couples who favor cohabitation over marriage as their first living together experience. Cohabitation is a living arrangement where an unmarried couple live mutually in a long-lasting relationship which can resemble marriage. Couples who decide to cohabit were very often stigmatized by some as “living in sin”, because they share a sexual relationship out of wedlock. As a result, parents in the past tried hard to raise their children under the moral code that connects exchanging vows with living together. However, the high number of couples that choose to live together has transformed cohabitation into a present mainstream.

Unlike other societies, cohabitation in the Middle East is still acknowledged as a taboo. Countries in the Middle East are considered conservative in nature since they tend to follow laws which are set in parallel to a religious model. The major religions in the Middle East are: Christianity, Sunni Islam and Shia Islam. All three religions consider cohabitation as a “sin against God”. Consequently, the laws in the Middle Eastern countries, called “family law”, forbid couples to live together without being officially married because it is considered as “disrupting public decency”. Despite its limited social and legal acceptance, cohabitation in the Middle East has become an increasing trend for younger generations. Moreover, unmarried couples who live together are usually found in the urban parts of the area such as Beirut in Lebanon.

The reasons behind why couples cohabit are various and relative in their conveniences. Some partners choose to cohabit for financial purposes such as: sharing the rent, dividing the living expenses, and splitting the bills and taxes. Thus, it seems both financially and economically reasonable for them to live together. On the other hand, couples might cohabit because the law does not permit them to be legally married. These cases mostly include homosexual couples, or individuals who are already married to another person.

In addition to the financial and legal reasons of cohabitation, some partners live together for emotional purposes. Often, individuals need the long-term presence of someone because they feel emotionally dependent on others. Hence, they prefer to cohabit in order to increase emotional and sexual intimacy without the obligations of being wed.

On the other hand, cohabitation can be considered as a test of the couple’s compatibility before they commit to the legal union of marriage in the future. Partners view living together as an opportunity that enables them to learn about each other’s habits and character. They will also be able to observe and practice how to operate as a couple on a day-to-day basis. Nonetheless if the “trial” marriage wasn’t successful, the couple believes that their break up will be a less complicated dissolution.

The thought that the breakup of a cohabitating relationship is easier than divorce is not entirely true. The breakup of cohabiters involves splitting up a household which mostly leads to

various conflicts over property ownership, responsibility for debts and general belongings. Unlike marriage, the law does not provide any rights and privileges to cohabiters in the case of a breakup. Hence, the division of assets between the ex-couple often becomes a controversial issue.

Even though some people regard cohabitation as a chance to build an intimate relationship which lacks divorce and an unhappy marriage, however it often does not make a positive contribution to future marital stability. In the majority of cases, cohabitation does not lead to marriage. Moreover, the chances of divorce increase amongst the cohabiters who get wed.

The reasons why cohabiters have increased chances of divorce is because they are more unconventional than others and tend to be less committed to the institution of marriage. Moreover, they are mostly either not settled or fear the permanent relationship offered by the vows of wedlock. As a result, leaving a marriage which is unsatisfactory is easier for them considering their attraction to cohabitation which is an easy exit with little responsibilities.

Furthermore, the weak and non-permanent bond between cohabiters increases the chances of unfaithfulness because it lacks the long term contract that encourages sacrifice and authenticity. The idea that the couple might breakup brings forth a less committed sexual fidelity that creates insecurity within the relationship. In addition to infidelity, the lack of a marital contract also increases the risk of abuse. Cohabiting women are physically and sexually more abused than married women. This could be traced back to the absence of laws and rights that protect them.

Cohabitation has revealed various negative aspects that are often over-looked by some individuals. As a result, it is significant to consider the different facets of cohabiting if one is seeking a long-lasting relationship or a future marriage. Couples should communicate and have a common understanding about the meaning behind living together. For example, in the cases where partners have different philosophies about marriage, clashes arise later on since one partner is for getting wed and the other is against.

In addition to communicating, couples should reevaluate whether their cohabitation is working for the both of them at least annually. This evaluation can help them decide whether they are satisfied with their arrangement, whether they would rather get married, or whether it is more convenient if they separate and simply move on.

Cohabitation has proved to be more than simply a positive try-out for marriage, because it sometimes turns out to be rather harmful for the couple. Nonetheless, the cohabitation which is considered the least harmful is when partners are definitely planning to get married. As a result, cohabitation is advised to be limited to the shortest possible period of time in order to avoid making it a habit. Since, the living a long period with a partner might bring forth a risk of low-commitment which is opposite of what is necessary for a successful marriage.

Despite cohabitation's extensive acceptance by young adults today, it has not completely helped them avoid painful losses in their love lives. Similar to marriage, it does not guarantee them a satisfactory long-term relationship which is successful. As a result, couples who decide to cohabit should be aware of all the responsibilities and facets of their living arrangements in order to avoid empty promises that can disappear and leave unfulfilled hopes of a "happily ever after" with their love ones.

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