

The Rest

Relationship Statistics

Vol. 57 – April 2006

COHABITATION

- The proportion of Australians who cohabit prior to marriage has grown rapidly from around 5% in the 1960s to over 70% currently.
- Based on the 2003 HILDA interviews, approximately 10% of the Australian population aged 18 and over is cohabiting at any one time.
- Of the 111,000 couples who registered a marriage in 2004, 76% indicated that they had cohabited prior to registration of the marriage.
- Based on 2004 figures, cohabitation prior to marriage is most common in the Northern Territory (with 85% cohabiting prior to marriage) and least common in NSW (70% cohabiting prior to marriage).
- The extent to which cohabitation has become increasingly common is also demonstrated by the fact that the average number of years spent in cohabitation prior to marriage has increased from just over a year in the 1960s to just over three years in 2003.
- Cohabitation is highest in the 25 to 34 years age group with 20% of both men and women in this age group cohabiting in 2003. However, marriage was still more common than cohabitation in this age group with 42% of men and 51% of women married among 25 to 34 year olds.
- In the 18-24 year age group, the vast majority were single - neither married nor cohabiting with 85% of men and 73% of women falling into this category. Cohabitation is more common than marriage in this cohort with 12% cohabiting as against 3% married for men and 20% cohabiting and 7% married for women.
- Cohabitation becomes less common with age - 11% of men and 10% of women in the 35-44 age group; 8% of men and 7% of women in the 45-54 age group; 5% of men and 4% of women in the 55-64 age group; and 2% of men and 1% of women cohabiting in the over 65 age group.
- Persons born overseas in an English-speaking country were significantly more likely to be cohabiting than Australian-born persons who, in turn, were much more likely to be cohabiting than persons born overseas in a non English-speaking country. For instance, among 18 to 24 year olds, 28% of men born overseas in an English-speaking country (predominantly the UK and New Zealand) were cohabiting compared to 13% of Australian-born and just 1% of men born overseas in a non English-speaking country.
- Based on the HILDA research, there is a positive correlation between cohabitation and income with 12% of those cohabiting falling within the bottom 20% household disposable income quintile and 28% falling within the top 20% household income quintile.
- According to the HILDA interviews from 2003, only 8% of men and 6% of women had cohabited for at least a month two or more times in their lives.
- Of those who decide to marry following cohabitation, 66% choose to do so in a civil ceremony compared to 59% for all couples who marry.

SOURCES:

3306.0.55.001 *Marriages, Australia, 2004*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Headey, B; Warren, D; Harding, G. (2006). *Families, Incomes and Jobs: A statistical report of the HILDA survey*. Commonwealth of Australia.