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Cohabiting Couples Higher Risk for Divorce

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Abstract: *Cohabiting couples have a significantly higher risk for divorce than non-cohabiting couples. Based on a national sample of 2,000 premarital couples, they were classified into one of four couple types. Compared to non-cohabiting couples, cohabiting couples comprised a smaller percentage in the most successful couple type (Vitalized) and a significantly larger percentage in the most problematic couple type (Conflicted).*

Overview of Cohabitation Study:

This national study compared 1,000 cohabiting couples who took PREPARE-CC (Cohabiting Couples) and 1,000 non-cohabiting couples who took PREPARE. The premarital couples were classified into one of four couple types (from most to least happy): Vitalized, Harmonious, Traditional and Conflicted (see Figure).

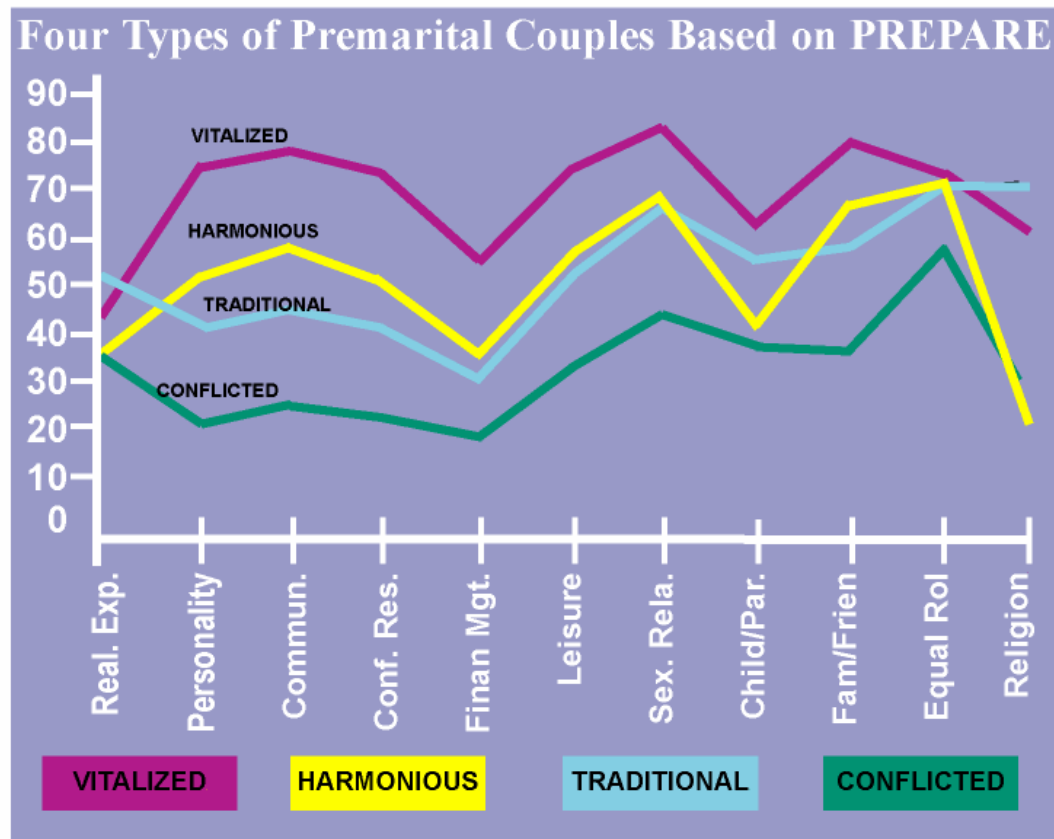
There was significantly more non-cohabiting couples (57.2%) that were **Vitalized** compared to the cohabiting couples (45.7%). Our longitudinal studies have demonstrated that Vitalized couples are happier and have the lowest divorce rate (Fowers, Montel and Olson, 1996).

Couple Type	PREPARE	Percentage	PREPARE-CC Cohabiting Couples	Percentage
VITALIZED	572	57.2 %	457	45.7 %
HARMONIOUS	70	4.0 %	192	19.2 %
TRADITIONAL	286	28.6 %	187	18.7 %
CONFLICTED	72	7.2 %	164	16.4 %
Total	1,000	100.0 %	1,000	100.0 %

As expected, there were significantly more **Traditional** couples that were not cohabiting (28.6%) than were cohabiting (18.7%). Our longitudinal studies demonstrate that Traditional couples have only a 16% separation and divorce rate after 3 years, compared with a 25% for Harmonious and 53% for Conflicted couple types.

There were significantly more **Conflicted** couples in cohabiting couples (16.4%) than the non-cohabiting couples (7.2%). Our previous longitudinal studies have demonstrated that only 17% of the Conflicted have a happy marriage 3 years after marriage. Further, over half (53 %) of the Conflicted couples are separated or divorced after three years.

In summary, this study clearly demonstrates that cohabiting couples have a much higher risk of divorce than non-cohabiting couples. Cohabiting couples have a smaller percentage of the more successful couple types (Vitalized and Traditional) and a larger percentage in the most problematic couple type (Conflicted).



Counseling Can Help Cohabiting Couples Improve Their Success Rate:

The good news is that cohabiting couples can improve their type of couple relationship and, thereby, increase their chances of a successful marriage.

A study by Luke Knutson and David Olson (2003) on the impact of the PREPARE Program for premarital couples clearly demonstrated that couples can improve their couple type (move one to two types better) by taking the PREPARE Couple inventory and receiving 6-8 hours of feedback and premarital education.

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