*The Journal of Marriage and Family* article “Does Premarital Cohabitation Predict Subsequent Marital Stability and Marital Quality?” examines numerous articles and surveys about the effects of cohabitation on marital quality and marital stability in couples who did and did not cohabit before marriage. This article is a meta-analysis; therefore, a hypothesis is formed by analyzing several other studies written on the effects of cohabitation. The question in this study was: does premarital cohabitation predict subsequent marital stability and marital quality. Cohabitation (living with a romantic partner, but not being married) rates have skyrocketed in the last few decades and it has become more commonly accepted. Trying to discover the effects of cohabitation on marital quality and marital stability, the researchers scrutinized articles looking for answers. “Marital stability refers to whether the marriage has or has not dissolved at a specific point in time or after a certain time period has elapsed. Dissolution may be indicated by physical separation, legal separation, or divorce” (Jose, O’Leary and Moyer 106). Previous studies have shown different findings associated with cohabitation, including marital stability being greater in noncohabitating couples, marital stability being greater in cohabitating couples, and no difference in marital stability between cohabitating and noncohabitating couples. The article defines marital quality: “Individuals’ perceptions of a relationship’s progression are measured in a variety of ways, including self-reported levels of satisfaction, adjustment, or the global level of ‘happiness’” (Jose, O’Leary and Moyer 106). Most studies show lower rates of marriage quality in cohabitating couples compared to noncohabitating couples, but there are some studies showing the opposite, too. The researchers wanted to see if cohabitation before marriage affected couples in helpful or harmful ways or if there was any effect at all on the couple.

The researchers’ hypothesized that cohabitation affects marital quality and marital stability in extremely negative ways, even though cohabitation is viewed as commonplace today. In previous decades, the thought of cohabitation was indecent and not accepted. Statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau show that in 1970, 500,000 people were cohabitating, and in 2000, 4.9 million people were cohabitating. Between 1965 and 1974, 10% of marriages began with cohabitation, compared to 1990, when 55% of marriages began with cohabitation. Even more current studies show that 50% of women ever married between the ages of 15 and 44 have cohabited.

Because it is a meta-analysis, the data used in this research included research articles on this topic. The researchers first found 973 articles from PsycINFO and SocIndex referring to their topic. The search was narrowed by the following qualifications: articles including only empirical research that could be translated into odds ratio, articles including only studies performed on heterosexual relationships, articles comparing people who cohabit before marriage opposed to people who do not cohabitate before marriage, articles including longitudinal or cross-sectional components, articles including the outcome of the research being either marital stability or marital quality, and articles including evaluations between cohabitating and noncohabitiating couples’ marital stability and marital quality who plan to marry in the research question. After sifting through the articles while keeping the qualifications in mind, 17 studies comprised the final sample size and were used for analysis in this article. Quantitative methods were used in this analysis because the authors were statistically comparing the results of 17 different studies and forming one overall outcome.

The results included findings on both marital stability and marital quality. First, marital stability was analyzed by 16 studies stating marital stability was an outcome. The amount of people surveyed ranged from 77 to 10,472 and the research articles were published between the years of 1980 and 2006. Of these 16 studies, 9 were performed in the United States, 2 in Canada, 1 in Australia, 1 in Finland, 1 in Greece, 1 in Sweden, and 1 in the United Kingdom. In these studies, 82% of the people were females, 80% of the people were White/Caucasian, and the average age of the people who were studied was 30 years old. According to the researchers’ findings, couples who cohabitate before marriage are not as likely to stay married than those couples who did not cohabitate before marriage. The general conclusion was that premarital cohabitation has negative effects on marital stability. The only exception to this finding is when cohabitation occurred with an eventual marital partner. The researchers found no significant effects between premarital cohabitation and marital stability. Second, marital quality was analyzed by 12 studies stating marital quality was an outcome. The amount of people surveyed ranged from 31 to 2,493 and the research articles were published between the years of 1979 and 2006. Of these 12 studies, 10 were performed in the United States and 2 were performed in Canada. In these studies, 77% of the people were females, 82% of the people were White/Caucasian, and the average age of the people who were studied was 28 years old. According to the researchers’ findings, cohabitation before marriage is negatively associated with marital quality. The results also included when first marriage partners cohabitated or when people married their cohabitation partner, these factors were also negatively associated with marital quality. Both of the findings on marital quality and marital stability supported the researchers’ hypotheses, predicting that premarital cohabitation leads to negative effects on marital quality and marital stability.

This research on cohabitation before marriage is extremely vital to life today. Cohabitation among couples is increasing and people do not realize all the problems living with a partner may entail. Proven research has shown cohabitation before marriage is directly and negatively associated with low levels of marital stability and marital quality. If people see cohabitation as a step in the mate selection process or as a casual choice in their relationship, this will negatively affect the relationship; however, if a couple cohabitates, but eventually marries, then they do not experience any change within their relationship. The most important implication of this research is to inform people that, even though cohabitation is becoming more common, it has many negative factors associated with cohabitation. Researchers also believe cohabitation acceptance is dependent on people’s culture. For example, in the United States, cohabitation greatly affects marital stability and marital quality, but in Finland and Sweden, cohabitation is associated with high levels of marital stability and marital quality. Another pressing issue relevant to cohabitation includes cohabitating with your partner and having children in the house, too. Research proves cohabitating with children is extremely detrimental to the children’s well-being. Couples should talk about cohabitating and everything it entails before taking action. It is an important issue for today’s families.

This research article relayed extremely important information about cohabitating and noncohabitating couples, but I think it could be improved in a few areas. First, instead of a quantitative method, the researchers could have performed qualitative research. The researchers could have surveyed a few couples in great detail to find more in-depth information about the differences in the relationships of cohabitating and noncohabitating couples. Second, the research could have included homosexual couples too, instead of solely heterosexual couples. Then, we could see if there is still a difference in cohabitating and noncohabitating couples’ relationships when the partners are homosexual. Third, I think there could be a more specific definition of the word cohabitation. This word is used casually to mean a partner spending one night to seven nights a week with another person. With all this in mind, the research would be more precise to a specific group of people.

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