Surprising facts on what makes the best relationships!

Includes results from a comprehensive new survey of Australia's love-life
towards a better love-life...

This booklet presents startling new research into Australians and the state of their relationships.

The research in this booklet aims to help people think about how to improve their own love-life by looking at what factors are linked to good or bad relationships.

The love-lives of adult Australians are very complex:

• experienced a de facto relationship: 17.4%
• experienced a divorce: 12.7%
• experienced a single parent family: 17.3%
• experienced a blended family: 12.1%

Since the sexual revolution of the 1960s, Australians have become confused about what factors lead to greater intimacy and wellbeing in their relationships. Our research shows that some trends have had a negative impact. These developments contrast with God’s plan for human wellbeing found in the Bible.
This booklet presents hard evidence that those people who follow God’s plan for human wellbeing are more likely to experience more intimate and less insecure relationships.

Q: *how many people really love and support you?*

A: 3+ 46.3%

0 8.7%

1 20.3%

2 21.9%

Q: *how many partners have you had?*

A: 1 63.7%

0 13.2%

3+ 7.6%

2 13.5%

* Both charts represent the percentage of people surveyed in the 2002-03 Wellbeing and Security Survey (WSS).
security - a love that lasts

Most Australians feel secure with their love, believing their relationship will last for life. Less than 4% think their marriage or de facto relationship will end.

Q how likely is it that your relationship will continue until death?
discord and harmony

About 1 in 10 Australians report serious dissatisfaction with the way their partner treats them. A further quarter wish their partner would treat them better.

Q how well does your partner treat you?
intimacy

Nearly 3 in 10 Australians feel their relationship is lacking in intimacy.

Q how intimate is your relationship?
love heats up for christians

It may seem surprising that Christians* experience greater intimacy with their partner than those who have no Christian belief.

*To determine the committed Christians in the survey we used a scale created from across a range of questions in the Wellbeing and Security Survey (WSS). For example, these people had to very strongly believe in a number of central Christian doctrines such as that Jesus is the Son of God.
Christians feel secure with their spouse

There is a notable connection between Christian belief and a strong sense of security with a spouse or partner.

How likely is it that your relationship will continue until death?
Christians have happier marriages

Christians are even more likely than those people without any Christian faith to feel their partner treats them well, and have lower levels of marital discord.

Q: How well does your partner treat you?

Look at the colour to measure the degree of harmony:
- badly
- not well
- OK
- well
- very well

% of people surveyed:
- low or no belief
- very strong belief
Church-going is also linked to higher levels of security and intimacy in current relationships.
over-work

It is surprising that working long hours appears to have a weaker bearing on the wellbeing of relationships than faith does.
why do christians have better love-lives?

Christians believe God changes them from people who live for themselves, into people who wholeheartedly attend to the needs and concerns of their spouse, enabling their relationships to become more satisfying. The research suggests that the Bible’s teaching against sex before marriage may play a role.

Q: What percent of church-goers have experienced a de facto relationship?

A: Never attend: 23.4%
   Frequently: 3.7%

Q: How many partners have frequent church-goers had?

A: 0: 14.9%
   1: 73.3%
   2: 9.9%
   3+: 1.9%
so how does the bible’s teaching help?

The data shows that Christians are less likely to have experienced a de facto relationship or multiple partners. The Bible says that knowing God through Jesus Christ will have this positive result because:

1. Marriage is designed by God to be humanity’s most enduring expression of relational intimacy.
2. To experience such intimacy, Christian marriage partners model God’s faithfulness in committing to the good of the other for as long as they live.

But Christians, like all people, live in a ‘fallen’ world which pays little attention to God and often actively opposes him (sin). Christians should not be self-congratulatory about these results. As this booklet will show Australian Christians are struggling with home/work conflict in a way that reflects badly on the materialism of Christian communities.
why is marriage so important?

This research suggests that marriage gives people a level of security that people in de facto relationships don’t experience. Experience of de facto relationships is more strongly linked to insecurity with a partner than any other factor, including health, poverty and work stress.

Q how likely is it that your relationship will continue until death?
insecurity harms your future love-life

The lack of security people in a de facto relationship experience in turn impacts other aspects of their relationship. But what is most extraordinary is that if a person has experienced a de facto relationship in the past they are more likely to experience an insecure and cold marriage now.

\[ \text{Q} \] how intimate is your relationship?

look at the colour to measure the degree of intimacy

cold indifferent warm very warm

never had a de facto had a de facto

% of people surveyed
...and what about previous partners?

It also appears that there is a link between having more partners in the past and higher levels of insecurity in a current relationship.

Look at the colour to measure the degree of security

unlikely unsure likely very likely certain

Q how likely is it that your relationship will continue until death?

1 partner
2 partners
3+ partners

% of people surveyed
while serial monogamy chills love

The intimacy of a current relationship is likely to cool the more partners (whether marriages or de facto relationships) a person has had in the past.

(NOTE: This does not mean the marriages of divorcees are doomed).

look at the colour to measure the degree of intimacy

cold  indifferent  warm  very warm

100%
80%
60%
40%
20%

% of people surveyed

Q how intimate is your relationship?
what sparks conflict is more complicated

That’s true. Let’s look at conflict over roles in more detail. This is the most widespread problem for Australian couples. Nearly three quarters of couples have difficulty agreeing about roles with their partner.

Q how easy do you find it to agree on roles in your relationship?
what about christians?

Committed Christians do find it easier than other Australians to agree with their spouse about roles in their marriage. Yet conflict over roles remains a problem for Christians too.

Q  how easy do you find it to agree on roles in your relationship?
conflict - the x factor revealed

The research team did an analysis of those indicators shown to be linked to conflict over roles in relationships. These ranged across many different factors including wealth, health, faith and household type. This analysis showed that the strongest connection was the degree to which a person’s work impacted on their family life.

![Link between conflict over roles and home/work pressure](chart)
conflict between work and home

The impact of work on family life is a major problem for Australians. Nearly half of people report that their work regularly conflicts with their home life.

Q how often does work conflict with your home life?
The deep impact of work on family

In this research, conflict between work and home life was most strongly linked with poor relationships, when looking across all the measures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>harmony (top graph) and intimacy (bottom graph)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>extent couple suffers conflict between work and family life</td>
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<tr>
<td>always conflict</td>
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% of couples

Explanation of colour coding

- How well does your partner treat you?
  - badly
  - not well
  - OK
  - well
  - very well

- How intimate is your relationship?
  - cold
  - indifferent
  - warm
  - very warm
towards a better love life...

The research was written with the hope that all who are struggling in difficult, distant and broken relationships might find the kind of new life for their relationships that many Christians appear to be discovering. Yet a boastful stance by Christians in relation to these findings will entirely betray the God who brings life. Any discussion should occur in the spirit of, “one beggar telling another beggar where they found bread.”

The research in this booklet comes from two papers: *Christian Spirituality and Relational wellbeing* and *Home/work conflict and Relational wellbeing*. These include extra and more detailed statistical information. The booklet *Family: a Christian perpective* presents a fuller framework for understanding God’s plan for marriage and relationships as outlined in the Bible. For more information email socialissues@moore.edu.au

The research is the result of an analysis the 2002-2003 Wellbeing and Security database. This database is a joint project of Edith Cowan University, Anglicare (Sydney) and the NCLS Research. It was compiled from a random survey of 1,500 Australians.
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