

Cohabitation among Older Adults¹

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Most of the time when we think about cohabiting couples, we imagine younger adults who are living together before they get married, or instead of marrying. But, according to the 2000 census, there are more than a million individuals over the age of 50 who are cohabiting, and this number is increasing as baby boomers reach their 50s and 60s.

A recent study conducted by researchers from Bowling Green University used data from the 2000 U.S. Census data and the 1998 Health and Retirement Study to find out more about older cohabiting couples. In contrast with young cohabitators who tend to live together before they marry, about 90% of older cohabitators were previously married.

In addition, this research compared older cohabitators with individuals who were remarried, divorced, and never married. Older cohabitators, especially women, appeared to be more disadvantaged in some ways. They had lower incomes and were less likely to own their own homes when compared to remarried persons. Additionally, cohabiting women's income was only about two-thirds the income of remarried women, and cohabiting women were three times less likely to have health insurance. Cohabitators were more likely than remarrieds to use alcohol.

There are still many unknowns about older cohabitators as this is a relatively new phenomenon affecting large numbers of people. However, researchers are already exploring the strengths and weaknesses of these new families and how men and women choose to share their later years.

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References

Brown SL, GR Lee, and JR Bulanda. 2006. "Cohabitation among Older Adults: A National Portrait." Center for Family and Demographic Research. Bowling Green State University. Working Paper Series 2005-06. <http://www.bgsu.edu/downloads/cas/file35697.pdf> [April 13, 2012].

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