

New Marriage and Divorce Statistics Released



March 31, 2008

Most Americans get married at some point in their life: just one out of five adults (22%) has never been married.

Among those who have said their wedding vows, one out of three have been divorced at least once, according to a new study from The Barna Group.

Marriage Is the Norm

In addition to finding that four out of every five adults (78%) have been married at least once, the Barna study revealed that an even higher

proportion of born again Christians (84%) tie the knot. That eclipses the proportion among people aligned with non-Christian faiths (74%) and among atheists and agnostics (65%).

Divorce Is Widespread

Among adults who have been married, the study discovered that one-third (33%) have experienced at least one divorce. That means that among all Americans 18 years of age or older, whether they have been married or not, 25% have gone through a marital split.

The study showed that the percentage of adults who have been married and divorced varies from segment to segment. For instance, the groups with the most prolific experience of marriage ending in divorce are downscale adults (39%), Baby Boomers (38%), those aligned with a non-Christian faith (38%), African-Americans (36%), and people who consider themselves to be liberal on social and political matters (37%).

Among the population segments with the lowest likelihood of having been divorced subsequent

to marriage are Catholics (28%), evangelicals (26%), upscale adults (22%), Asians (20%) and those who deem themselves to be conservative on social and political matters (28%).

Born again Christians who are not evangelical were indistinguishable from the national average on the matter of divorce: 33% have been married and divorced. The survey did not determine if the divorce occurred before or after the person had become born again. However, previous research by Barna has shown that less than two out of every ten people who accept Christ as their savior do so after their first marriage.

In fact, when evangelicals and non-evangelical born again Christians are combined into an aggregate class of born again adults, their divorce figure is statistically identical to that of non-born again adults: 32% versus 33%, respectively.

Thirty percent of atheists and agnostics had been married and subsequently divorced. However, the three-point difference from the national average was within the range of sampling error, suggesting that their likelihood

of experiencing a dissolved marriage is the same as that of the population at-large. A representative from Barna also pointed out the atheists and agnostics have lower rates of marriage and a higher likelihood of cohabitation, a combination of behaviors that distort comparisons with other segments.

Divorce Among Adults Who Have Been Married

(Base: 3792 adults)

Population Segment	Have Been Divorced	No. of Interviews
All adults	33%	3792
Evangelical Christians	26%	339
Non-evangelical born again Christians	33%	1373
Notional Christians	33%	1488
Associated with non-Christian faith	38%	197

Atheist or agnostic	30%	269
All born again Christians	32%	1712
All non born again Christians	33%	2080
Protestant	34%	1997
Catholic	28%	875
Upscale	22%	450
Downscale	39%	367
White	32%	2641
African-American	36%	464
Hispanic	31%	458
Asian	20%	128
Conservative	28%	1343
Moderate	33%	1720
Liberal	37%	474

(Source: The Barna Group, Ventura, CA)

Reflections on Marriage and Divorce

George Barna, who directed the study, noted that Americans have grown comfortable with divorce as a natural part of life.

"There no longer seems to be much of a stigma attached to divorce; it is now seen as an unavoidable rite of passage," the researcher indicated. "Interviews with young adults suggest that they want their initial marriage to last, but are not particularly optimistic about that possibility. There is also evidence that many young people are moving toward embracing the idea of serial marriage, in which a person gets married two or three times, seeking a different partner for each phase of their adult life."

For more information on the effect of cohabitation and divorce, and solutions to these issues, see *Living Together*, a new book by **Michael & Harriet McManus**
[**place orders here.**](#)

Barna, who has written more than three dozen books on the intersection between faith and culture, also stated that information about marriage, healthy relationships and divorce does not seem to have as much influence on people's choices. "Government statistics and a wealth of other research data have shown that cohabitation increases the likelihood of divorce, yet cohabiting is growing in popularity. Studies showing the importance and value of preparing for marriage seem to fall on deaf ears. America has become an experimental, experience-driven culture. Rather than learn from objective

information and teaching based on that information, people prefer to follow their instincts and let the chips fall where they may. Given that tendency, we can expect America to retain the highest divorce rate among all developed nations of the world."

About the Research

This report is based upon telephone interviews conducted by The Barna Group with a random sample of 5017 adults selected from across the continental United States, age 18 and older, from January 2007 through January 2008. The maximum margin of sampling error associated with the aggregate sample is ± 1.6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. From the aggregate sample there were a total of 3792 adults who have been married. The maximum margin of sampling error associated with the sample of married people is ± 1.8 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Minimal statistical weighting was used to calibrate the aggregate sample to known population percentages in relation to several key demographic variables.

"Born again Christians" are defined as people

who said they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today and who also indicated they believe that when they die they will go to Heaven because they had confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. Respondents are not asked to describe themselves as "born again."

"Evangelicals" meet the born again criteria (described above) plus seven other conditions. Those include saying their faith is very important in their life today; believing they have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs about Christ with non-Christians; believing that Satan exists; believing that eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works; believing that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; asserting that the Bible is accurate in all that it teaches; and describing God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today. Being classified as an evangelical is not dependent upon church attendance or the denominational affiliation of the church attended. Respondents were not asked to describe themselves as "evangelical."

"Downscale" individuals are those whose annual household income is less than \$20,000 and who have not attended college. "Upscale" people are those whose annual household income is \$75,000 or more and they have graduated from a four-year college.

The Barna Group, Ltd. (which includes its research division, The Barna Research Group) conducts primary research, produces media resources pertaining to spiritual development, and facilitates the healthy spiritual growth of leaders, children, families and Christian ministries. Located in Ventura, California, Barna has been conducting and analyzing primary research to understand cultural trends related to values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors since 1984. If you would like to receive free e-mail notification of the release of each new, bi-monthly update on the latest research findings from The Barna Group, you may subscribe to this free service at the Barna website www.barna.org.

© The Barna Group, Ltd, 2009.

Copyright Disclaimer: All the information contained on the barna.org website is

copyrighted by The Barna Group, Ltd., 2368 Eastman Ave. Unit 12, Ventura, California 93003. No portion of this website (articles, graphs, charts, reviews, pictures, video clips, quotes, statistics, etc.) may be reproduced, retransmitted, disseminated, sold, distributed, published, edited, altered, changed, broadcast, circulated, or commercially exploited without the prior written permission from The Barna Group, Ltd.