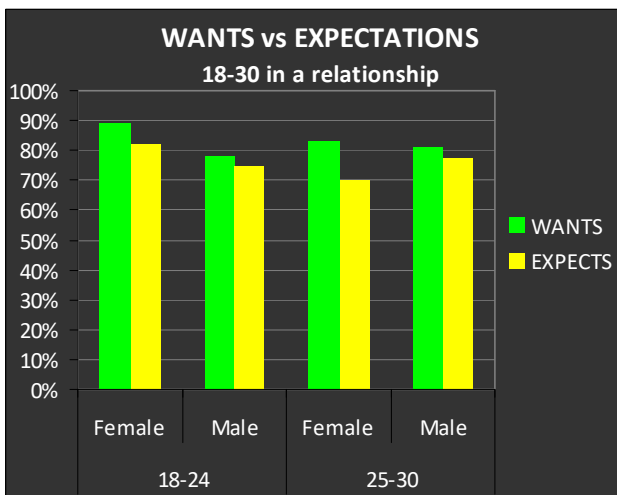




TikTok generation say “I want to get married”

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Marriage Week : UK 10-16 May 2021

- More than eight out of 10 young unmarried women and men want to get married, according to our OnePoll survey of 2,000 adults aged 18-30, of whom 941 were in a relationship.
- 86% of unmarried women and 80% of unmarried men under 30 in a relationship say they would “like to get married at some point” in their life, while 76% of women and 77% of men under 30 say they “expect to get married at some point”.
- Age does not dull the desire to marry appreciably, with slightly fewer women wanting to marry, falling from 89% of 18-24s to 83% of 25-30s, whereas slightly more men want to marry, rising from 78% of 18-24s to 81% of 25-30s.
- Nor does social class, with 91% of women and 83% of men in the top tercile wanting to marry compared to 81% of women and 82% of men in the bottom tercile.
- We invite government – of whose cabinet 85% are married – to affirm this strong desire to marry among young adults by backing Marriage Week, and to motivate development of a fearless policy that promotes and distinguishes marriage in line with the evidence.



Marriage matters

FOR at least two decades, I have been a strong advocate for marriage, not out of some sense of loyalty to outdated traditions, but because the psychology of marriage and the evidence about the effects of marriage go so strongly with the grain of human nature.

Study after study suggests that marriage works more than it doesn't for most people, despite what many people assume about divorce rates.

Marriage encapsulates important aspects of commitment.

We all want reliable love. We all want people to stick around with us for the foreseeable future.

If we want to make a success of our love and life together, there are certain prerequisites for success and for getting the reliable love we want:

- A mutual decision for a life together
- A clear signal about this commitment to one another
- The removal of any lingering doubt or ambiguity about this.
- The support and acknowledgment of family and friends

While cohabiting may or may not include these ingredients, marriage has them all by definition.

Our studies are among many that show how those who marry and more likely to stay together (Benson 2015) and their children are less likely to experience problems with their well-being (Benson & James 2016, Benson & McKay 2017).

Yet as rates of marriage have declined, politicians and policy makers have been strangely reluctant to distinguish or prefer marriage, so that in government fiscal policy and on many government forms, couples are often invited to say whether they are married or living together ‘as if married’ (Benson 2020).

This policy silence comes despite the popularity of marriage among the top income groups, including politicians themselves.

My review of the current cabinet shows that 85% of ministers (23 out of 27) are married for the first time. Only the Prime Minister has been married more than once. The marital status of the other three ministers is not publicly apparent.

Although previous surveys found 93% of teenage young men expect to marry at some point (CSJ 2018), the last major survey of young adults in their 20s was over a decade ago (De Waal 2008).

A new survey of young adults is overdue.

Survey of 18-30s

Our new survey of 2,000 young unmarried UK adults aged 18-30, commissioned by Marriage Foundation for Marriage Week 10-16 May 2021 and conducted by OnePoll, reveal that the desire to get married among young adults at some point is remarkably strong across age groups up to age 30, as well as being independent of social classes, time spent in a relationship, and where couples met.

- **Among the 941 young adults aged 18-30 in a relationship, 86% of women and 80% of men want to get married at some point in their life.**
- **Across age groups, 89% of women and 78% of men aged 18-24 want to marry compared to 83% of women and 81% of men aged 25-30 who want to marry.**
- **Across social groups, 91% of women and 83% of men in the top tercile want to marry compared to 81% of women and 82% of men in the bottom tercile.**
- **In terms of length of relationship, 90% of women and 79% of men who have been together less than two years want to marry compared to 85% of women and 80% of men who have been together more than two years.**
- **In terms of where people met, 88% of women who met online want to marry compared to 82% who met socially in a bar or elsewhere and 86% who met in school, family or work settings. Sample sizes for men in our survey were small but suggested slightly lower rates.**
- **In terms of who expects to marry, rates were typically 5-10% lower, ranging from 83% of women in the top tercile down to 70% of women aged 25-30.**

A full table of data for men and women aged 18-30 in a relationship is attached below.

Note that some of the sample sizes for men were too small to allow reasonable conclusions to be reached. However, aside from a low figure for men who met in a work setting, there were no obvious outliers.

WHO WANTS OR EXPECTS TO MARRY

	WANTS		EXPECTS		n=	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
All	86%	80%	76%	77%	756	185
18-24	89%	78%	82%	75%	398	87
25-30	83%	81%	70%	77%	362	106
Top 2	91%	83%	83%	80%	261	75
Middle 2	85%	79%	74%	74%	325	80
Bottom 2	81%	82%	71%	79%	150	28
<2 years	90%	79%	81%	73%	195	48
>2 years	85%	80%	75%	78%	561	137
Online	88%	79%	75%	79%	231	48
Education	86%	90%	80%	86%	147	51
Domestic	86%	76%	77%	73%	181	49
Work	86%	64%	77%	57%	93	14
Social	82%	78%	73%	74%	104	23

Note: Data in italics are unreliable due to small samples

Conclusion

I – and Marriage Foundation – have long pointed out the evidence that marriage is good for society.

It's good for couples because it improves their chances of staying together.

It's good for children because their well-being generally benefits from couples staying together.

And it reduces the cost to society of supporting lone parents financially.

Marriage Week is a chance to remind ourselves of the central stabilising role marriage plays in society.

While government policy has been reluctant to recognise the primacy of marriage, the British public still do.

Despite only half of parents being married when their children are born, the greater stability that comes within marriage means that, among couples with children of all ages, eight out of ten are married.

Our new survey shows that even if just over half of young adults are likely to marry, based on current marriage rates (*Benson 2019*), at least 80% of 18-30 year olds aspire to marriage.

This desire to marry holds true throughout their 20s, across social groups, and independent of where couples met or how long they have been in their relationship.

We therefore invite government to send a message of affirmation for this desire among young adults by backing Marriage Week.

Better still, we invite government to begin the process of building a serious policy that promotes, encourages and distinguishes marriage from 'living together as if married', in order to help young adults translate their aspiration for marriage into achievement.

This is a social justice issue.

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