



Marriage Foundation

Press Release from Marriage Foundation

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Until prenup do us part – shock survey finds up to 1 in 5 married young people have a prenup

- Huge rise in use of prenups since the 1970s
- Increase among 18-35s year olds mirrors rise in popularity among older couples

Up to one in five young married couples have some form of prenuptial agreement in place, according to the findings of a shock new survey for Marriage Foundation.

The survey carried out by Whitestone Insight a member of the British Polling Council, asked more than 2,000 young adults aged between 18-35, whether they personally “have, or would you get, a ‘prenup’ which is a legal contract signed before you get married to outline how your assets, debts and other financial matters will be handled in the event of divorce?”. Among the 599 married adults, one in five (20 per cent) of the men and one in six (16 per cent) of the women said they had signed one.

This surprising finding mirrors the original groundbreaking study carried out by the Marriage Foundation in 2021, which asked older couples whether or not they had signed some form of prenup. This study found their prevalence was far greater than anyone suggested and had increased dramatically since the 1970s. At the time, some commentators suggested the high level of prenups could be due to couples marrying later in life or second marriages and therefore those tying the knot were more likely to have significant assets to protect.

This new study, however, challenges this notion, as the young couples are less likely to have assets to protect, such as a house or flat.

Perhaps even more surprising was the willingness of young couples to consider a pre-nuptial agreement. Among the 1,396 unmarried adults in the survey, who were either single or in a relationship, fully six in 10 (60 per cent) of men and 58 per cent of women said they “might” get one. These high proportions must be treated with some degree of caution, firstly because ‘might’ may not translate into actual ‘prenup’, and secondly because a significant minority of respondents will never marry.

Harry Benson, Marriage Foundation's Research Director and author of the study, commented: "These surprising results confirm the rapid rise in the popularity of prenups and not just among the asset-rich, but also among those just starting out in life. It seems the young are embracing the idea of a prenup should the worst happen and a marriage breakdown and in very large numbers. But is this another way to confirm that couples who are marrying are fully committing to their relationship and on the same page, as divorce rates are at historic lows, levels not seen since the 1970s? Undoubtedly, this will require further work."

"... these findings replicate and affirm our previous survey results with a new national sample of younger adults. Findings suggest that 'prenups' have become a serious consideration for more than half of couples and are an integral part of the wedding process for one in five," the study says.

It goes on: "Four years ago, we commissioned the first ever national survey to ask about prenups from the polling company Savanta ComRes. We asked 2,027 ever married adults over 30 if they had signed a prenup or even knew anybody who had signed one, for their first marriage.

"Having personally run marriage preparation courses in Bristol for over 500 couples between 2002 and 2012, my expectation was that prenups were only ever a curiosity for the super-rich.

"Like others, I find the idea of prenups deeply unromantic. 'Darling, will you marry me?' 'Oh yes.' 'Could you now sign this prenup so I can keep all my stuff in case it goes wrong?'"

"No thank you.

"The results were a big surprise. Prenups turned out to be far more prevalent than I had imagined.

"The earliest prenup in our sample was signed in 1970, with a further four signed during the 1970s, representing just 1.5% of weddings.

"Their prevalence increased in the 1980s to 5 per cent of weddings and 1990s to 8 per cent of weddings. However, from about the year 2000, they were present among 20 per cent of all weddings except for the year 2019 where 31 per cent of our specific sample of 44 signed a prenup."

Unsurprisingly, those in social classes ABC1 were significantly more likely to sign, or consider signing a prenup than those in social classes C2DE, whether married or unmarried. Among the wealthiest, nearly half (49 per cent) of married respondents and 61 per cent of unmarried would consider a prenup compared to 37 per cent of married and 54 per cent of unmarried poorer respondents.

The study also found wide variation across religious and non-religious groups. “Whereas the proportions of those who were religious and said they would consider signing a prenup varied little between the married and unmarried (both 55 per cent), those who were not married and non-religious were significantly more disposed towards prenups than those already married (62 per cent vs 27 per cent), the report continued.

“This pattern was also seen where 23 per cent of those non-religious and not married ruled out a prenup, compared to 68 per cent of those non-religious and married.

“In other words, it may be that those who are non-religious are most open to the idea of a prenup if they have not committed. But once they have committed, they no longer see the need.”

Mr Benson concluded: “While signing a prenup doesn’t seem the most romantic topic of conversation, their popularity has grown rapidly, and this trend looks set to continue. Therefore, there are serious questions that need answering about both their regulation and the legal framework they sit within. Our previous study also found that while they did not appear to increase the chances of a divorce, their presence was associated with lower levels of commitment. Why then this lower level of commitment was not seen in higher break-up or divorce rates remains unanswered. But prenups are here to stay.”

Sir Paul Coleridge, founder of Marriage Foundation, added: “Back in the day prenups were regarded as almost the work of the devil. Their very nature was thought to be strongly antipathetic to marriage. Divorce law both statutory and also from the divorce courts did not enforce them indeed largely ignored them. But times have changed and, strangely, as divorce rates have fallen over the last ten years, prenups have become increasingly popular across all age groups. There are many theories as to why this change has occurred and in such a short time. Partly it is because they have been an accepted feature of European divorce law for decades and there are many now who marry abroad but end up making their homes in the UK and being divorced here. Why shouldn’t their prenup agreements be enforced here? Another reason is that the courts at the highest level have endorsed them as a perfectly respectable and responsible step to take before you marry as long as everyone behaves fairly. A couple are thus allowed to make their own bespoke financial (and other) arrangements and not rely solely on the one size fits all imposed statutory system in the event of breakdown. *Marriage Foundation* is fully supportive of these legal creatures in the right case; although they are certainly not necessary for all. Especially for couples of more mature years or with significant existing assets, it is a good thing for them to sit down before marriage and confront nagging anxieties about the shape of any possible future financial split. It is easier to have such discussion when in a positive pre-marriage frame of mind. Our latest research shows that they are now a regular part of the modern marriage scene and they have not been shown to undermine marriage. Couples can now design the marriage which suits them. Overall, we welcome these latest findings as being pro-marriage and a healthy part of the process.”

ENDS

Notes to editors

Methodology note: Whitestone Insight surveyed 2008 UK heterosexual adults aged under 35 between 7th and 14th May 2025. Data were weighted to be representative of all adults U35. Whitestone is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.

About Marriage Foundation

Marriage Foundation was founded in 2012 by Sir Paul Coleridge, a High Court judge who was moved by his personal experience in 40 years as a barrister and judge specialising in family law. The think tank seeks to improve public understanding of marriage and to reduce the numbers of people drawn into the family justice system – some 500,000 children and adults each year. It has established itself as a leading voice on marriage issues in the UK.

Sir Paul Coleridge, Harry Benson and Michaela Hyde from the Marriage Foundation are available for comment and for interviews linked to these new findings.

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