

First comes love, then comes cohabitation

Common-law couples rewrite the rules

(...) In the 2006 census, Statistics Canada found there were more unmarried Canadians than legally married ones for the first time ever. (...)

Common-law relationships have long been thought of as high-risk, but even that is starting to change. According to a recent study by Steffen Reinhold, a postdoctoral researcher at the Mannheim Research Institute for the Economics of Aging in Germany, the belief that couples who live together before marriage are more likely to divorce no longer holds true, even though it was grounded in statistics in the '80s and '90s.

Using data from various editions of the U.S. National Survey of Family Growth, Reinhold found that Americans who cohabit do not have a higher risk of divorce. "My favourite explanation would be that it used to be the case that cohabitation was something of a fringe phenomenon, that only a few people did it in the United States," Reinhold says. These people, he adds, may have been less attached to the institution of marriage in general. But now that more than 50 per cent of marriages in the U.S. are preceded by a period of living together, the association no longer holds. (...)

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