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Liberty University

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**Cohabitation Before Marriage**

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Abstract

The primary goal of the practicum is to create compelling educational materials, specifically an infographic or a resource guide, that shed light on the potential effects of cohabitation prior to marriage. The emphasis is on acknowledging the immense effect that interpersonal dynamics can have on people's health. The created resources provided are intended to provide detailed insights into essential issues such as relationships, culture, commitment, conflict, and resolution of conflicts, making them a great resource for people navigating the complexity of living together before marriage. These educational resources are intended to be submitted to a recognized medical health research institute, to be used in future educational initiatives. The practicum aims to contribute to ongoing research by providing nuanced and accessible research materials that address the intricate connection between the relationship dynamics of cohabitating before marriage and general well-being. The capability of these created resources to educate and empower people, encouraging them to make well-informed decisions regarding their relationships, will determine the initiative's success.

# Introduction

It could seem that living with someone you're not married has no major moral consequences. Living together before marriage may appear to be a benign or even progressive family trend at first glance, but a comprehensive examination of the evidence reveals otherwise.

Throughout this introduction, epidemiological, environmental, societal, biological, and/or theological data will be highlighted as it relates to cohabitation before marriage. The project's designated priority population consists of young to middle-aged adults, between the ages of 18 and 55, who are either cohabiting before marriage or are considering it. This age group's online communities, social media outlets, and educational research institutions make up the setting's context. This practicum project requirement includes producing an infographic or a resource guide that discusses the factors/causes of cohabitation before marriage, and the possible consequences that follow with cohabiting before marriage with an emphasis on various relationship dynamics and how they affect people's health. This specific target population is made up of people from a variety of socioeconomic statuses, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and cultural backgrounds. The objective is to offer knowledge that is universally relevant and connects with the issues and experiences of a wide range of people. Considering the age range, the initiative acknowledges the transitional stage that young adults frequently find themselves in, when they make relationship decisions that have a big impact on their future. The demographic summaries include people in a range of relationship stages, from singles considering cohabitation to couples who have lived together before marriage. This research initiative recognizes the diversity of this age group and recognizes that choices and obstacles in relationships might vary depending on a range of circumstances, including cultural influences, work positions, and educational background.

With that being said, between 50 and 65 percent of Americans think that living together prior to marriage will increase the likelihood that a relationship will succeed.1 Younger Americans are particularly inclined to think that living together might be a good way to test a relationship before getting married and to believe in the advantages of cohabitation.1 Contrary to popular opinion, it is shown that cohabitation does not increase the likelihood that a marriage will continue, however living together prior to marriage has been historically linked to an increased chance of divorce.1 The cohabitation effect refers to this correlation between cohabitation before marriage and divorce.1 Given that 70% of couples live together before marriage, it's critical to comprehend the circumstances under which cohabitation lowers the likelihood of a successful marriage and can lead to conflict dissolution.1 According to a recent survey, two out of every five young individuals (40%) believe that marriage has "outlived its usefulness."2 Nothing could be further from the reality, despite the fact that many young adults might think this. Marriage is more significant than it ever has been in many ways, particularly for children. The number of marriages has been dropping for many years, as is widely known, with 2019 averaging the lowest marital rate in American history.2 Just thirty-three people were married in 2019 out of every 1,000 single individuals, as reported by the Institute for Family Studies compared to thirty-five in 2010.2 While 69 adults per 1,000 were married in 1980, it was more than twice as high as in 1970, the year of the post-World War II "marriage boom," when 86 adults were married. In the United States, a stunning 25% of people aged 40 have never married, up from just 6% in 1980 and 20% in 2010. This represents a record proportion of people in this age group.2

In the United States, the relationship landscape is changing dramatically as more and more adults choose to put off or avoid getting married. Notably, a recent Pew Research Center survey confirmed that cohabitation is becoming more common among unmarried couples.3 According to the research, most Americans believe that cohabitation is acceptable in society, even for unmarried couples.3 There is a more nuanced viewpoint, though, as a small majority of people continue to feel that society gains from long-term partnerships ending in marriage. The poll looks at relationship satisfaction and trust levels, separating married and cohabiting adults separately. When compared to cohabiting persons, married people report better levels of contentment and higher confidence in their relationships.3 The percentage of adults who are married is currently reducing, from 58% in 1995 to 53% in the present, indicating a shift in marital trends. In parallel, throughout the same time period, the proportion of adults living alone increased from 3% to 7%.3.

One may ask, what are the factors that correlate with higher cohabitation rates, and why is the data showing higher divorce rates consequently? What are some of the major influences that can lead to cohabitation before marriage and how does divorce as a result affect relationships?

The extensive poll on cohabitation and marriage conducted by the Pew Research Center reveals complex connections between opinions on these subjects and religious affiliations, offering insightful information on the wide range of viewpoints that are prevalent among the various religious communities in the United States. One important study highlights how different religious communities allow cohabitation to differing degrees. According to the survey, even if marriage is not in the cards for them, 74% of Catholics and 76% of white Protestants who do not identify as born-again or evangelical think it is okay for unmarried couples to live together.3 This is in sharp contrast to the views of white evangelical Protestants (35%), and black Protestants (47%) about acceptance rates, which are far lower.3 A notable trend is that, with an overwhelming 78% of white evangelical Protestants holding this opinion, they are the group most likely to think that society benefits when long-term partners decide to get married.3 One characteristic that stands out is religious affiliation, and the difference is most noticeable in individuals who do not identify with any religion. In stark contrast to more traditional religious beliefs, cohabitation is seen as acceptable by 90% of the religiously unaffiliated. Furthermore, just thirty-one percent of those who do not identify as religious think that society would benefit more if long-term partners finally got married.3 Through the Internet between June 25 and July 8, 2019, 9,834 U.S. adults participated in the nationally representative poll, of which 5,579 were married and 880 were cohabiting.3 Interestingly, the poll includes adults who are married or cohabiting and are in same-sex relationships, providing a broad perspective on a variety of partnerships.3 The information provides insightful understandings of the mechanics of relationships in modern American society.

Among married individuals, one significant finding is that cohabitation is seen as a prelude to marriage. Sixty-six percent of individuals who cohabitated before marriage saw cohabitation as an advancement toward marriage.4 This emphasizes how important they view cohabitation to be as a turning point in their relationship. Based on their level of engagement and educational background, cohabiting adults' complex perspectives are explored in this poll. Remarkably, compared to their counterparts who are not engaged (38%), those who are engaged are more inclined to consider cohabitation as a step toward marriage (63%) than those who are not.4 Perspectives are also shaped by educational background; those with more education are more likely to see living together as a first step toward marriage. This more detailed perspective paints a broader overview of cohabitation dynamics by highlighting the many attitudes shaped by educational backgrounds.4 The information also provided insight into the cohabiting adults' goals for marriage. About 41% say they would like to marry at some point, and 58% of this group say they are very inclined to marry their current spouse. Nonetheless, a sizeable percentage—24%—does not hope to get married, and 35% are unsure of their future plans for marriage.4 This range of objectives challenges stereotypes about the paths of relationships by highlighting the nuanced decision-making and ambitions of cohabiting persons. Furthermore, there is a clear demographic divide: persons under 30 are more likely than those between 30 and 49, 50 and 64, and 65 and over to believe that cohabitation is a good way to have a happy marriage (63%).4 Interestingly, compared to individuals who chose not to cohabit before marriage (24%), persons who stayed with their spouse before marriage are substantially more inclined to believe that cohabitation increases the likelihood of a good marriage (57%).4

Another survey also explores the parental dynamics of cohabiting people. It finds that slightly more than half of cohabiting adults between the ages of 18 and 44 are parents.5 Additionally, this survey reveals a significant difference in the opinions of married and cohabiting adults regarding their capacity for parenting children. Compared to married individuals (52%) cohabiting adults (82%) are more inclined to think that unmarried couples can raise children just as well as married couples.5 The results raise concerns regarding the connection between cohabitation and unfavorable outcomes for both adults and children. The poll recognizes the possibility of a bidirectional causal relationship between cohabitation and unfavorable outcomes, highlighting the significance of differentiating between the causes of cohabitation and unfavorable outcomes, as well as the types of people who are more likely to choose cohabitation.5 The main theme promotes a nuanced perspective, asking if cohabitation is mostly linked to bad outcomes or if it also has causative effects. This knowledge is considered essential for those who are making decisions regarding partnerships and marriages, enabling them to make informed choices based on a thorough comprehension of the dynamics involved.

By completing this project, the objective is to increase information and awareness of the rising issues of cohabitation before marriage and the consequences that are shown to follow such as divorce and conflict dissolution.

# Methods

# The process of doing thorough literature research was carried out to acquire an all-encompassing comprehension of the topic matter. Beginning with keyword searches throughout academic search engines such as PubMed, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, and JSTOR, the review covered a wide range of material from a variety of sources within the area. The purpose of this preliminary search was to locate materials, book segments, and research reports that were pertinent to the subject of cohabitation before marriage and increased divorce rates. Each of the sources that were chosen was subjected to a comprehensive review, with a focus on the abstracts and methods sections to evaluate the quality and relevance of the sources. Techniques of citation chaining were utilized to trace important works and monitor the growth of major concepts and ideas in the field where the research was conducted. Furthermore, to guarantee the participation of current and culturally diverse points of view, considerations were made concerning the dates of publication and the geographical locations. To ensure that the work was finished within the required timeframe, special attention was paid to the dates of publication. This was done to ensure that the work included opinions that were both contemporary and culturally diverse on the subject.

# During the review of the literature, a synthesis and critical analysis of the data were carried out. This allowed for the identification of recurrent trends, inconsistencies, and gaps in the previously conducted study. This procedure yielded informative insights that were utilized in the formulation of research questions and hypotheses to conduct additional studies. Providing an array of information and ideas to direct further investigation, the literature evaluation served as a framework for later research initiatives, providing a foundation for further investigation. The phase of data collecting consisted of a methodical approach to the collection of statistical information and empirical evidence from reliable sources. To optimize the collection of pertinent materials from online databases and scholarly sources, advanced search techniques and Boolean operators were applied. As part of this procedure, search phrases were refined, criteria for inclusion and exclusion were applied, and different sources were cross-referenced to guarantee that the data acquired was accurate and comprehensive.

# To supplement the findings, secondary data sources like government publications, surveys, and datasets were explored in addition to the academic literature. When determining the validity and relevance of the findings, great consideration was given to the level of scientific accuracy and population characteristics of each study. A combination of information from several different sources and a consensus among studies that were conducted independently were both sought after in order to improve the accuracy and thoroughness of the data that was obtained. This methodical approach not only produced trustworthy research findings but also offered a deeper comprehension of the complexity that is associated with cohabitation and divorce.

# In order to guarantee the dependability of the data that was gathered, it was necessary to use information from three or more distinct sources, and it was also necessary to seek consistency among independent research over the most important findings. To organize the huge amount of information that was obtained during the process of data collection and literature evaluation, significant research and strategic planning were required. To organize the content, a thematic method was chosen, which involved determining the most crucial ideas, themes, and subtopics that were obtained from the literature.6 To accomplish this, it was necessary to organize the material that was there into meaningful categories, such as the motivations for cohabitation, the repercussions of premarital cohabitation, the elements that influence the stability of the marriage, and the economic, social, and psychological effects of divorce.

# In addition, tools for mind mapping and concept mapping were applied as illustration linkages between various ideas and concepts.7 This played a significant role in the construction of a planned structure for the infographic presentation. It was assured that the material must be laid out in an organized and systematic manner by establishing distinct limits and classifications within the content. This will enhance the audience's ability to comprehend and navigate the content. This organizational technique will not only improve the clarity and coherence of the contents but also stress the most significant findings and ideas from the research that was conducted. As a result, it will help readers navigate the complicated landscape of research on cohabitation and divorce.

# Through the establishment of distinct borders and classifications within the content, the data will be presented in a manner that will not only be comprehensible but also simple for the audience to comprehend and navigate. Not only will this method of organizing the materials appear easier to understand and clearer, but it will also assist in drawing focus on the most significant discoveries and views that were found in the literature.

# It was essential to develop a thorough resource guide to provide the readers with additional information and the opportunity for further in-depth examination of the subject matter that will go beyond the scope of the visual presentation. While doing the research, a collected combination of journal articles, books, websites, and support services that are relevant to the issues of cohabitation, marriage, and divorce was produced. The purpose of this selection process was to provide readers with access to a wide variety of perspectives and understandings, and each resource was carefully chosen based on its relevance, dependability, and availability. For every resource, clear descriptions or overviews were provided, with an emphasis on the most important discoveries, methodologies, and repercussions for real-world use and policy. The resource guide is also structured under thematic categories, which include assistance services, online resources, scholarly papers, and practical guides. This was done to make access and navigation easier for readers who have a wide range of interests and requirements.

# Additionally, hyperlinks and information regarding citations are incorporated to provide readers with the information they need to explore the sources to do additional research. By providing a collection of resources that had been carefully selected, the intention was to make it possible for readers to improve their understanding of issues about cohabitation and divorce, as well as to acquire relevant knowledge and aid in dealing with these intricate issues. The resource guide serves as an essential supplemental material that is utilized in conjunction with the infographic presentation. For this practicum assignment, each article used a different research methodology to delve into the complex aspects of these phenomena.

# A variety of methodologies, such as qualitative, quantitative, and synthesis approaches, were utilized in these publications, which collectively provided one-of-a-kind insights into the complex dynamics that were analyzed. Quantitative studies made up a significant amount of the body of research that was conducted. These studies utilized research methods such as surveys, longitudinal methods, and statistical analyses to study various aspects of cohabitation and divorce. The National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) and the General Social Survey (GSS) were two examples of large-scale surveys that were frequently utilized in this research to gather information regarding incidence rates, demographic trends, and factors that influence the stability of relationships.1,6 Researchers were able to identify correlations between variables, evaluate the effects of cohabitation on marriage-related outcomes, and identify trends over time through the use of quantitative analyses.1,2,6,7 As a result, they were able to provide empirical information that shed light on prevalent patterns across civilizations.

# In addition to quantitative investigations, qualitative research approaches were employed to explore the subjective experiences, perspectives, and understandings related to cohabitation and divorce.9,10,11 Qualitative studies utilized methodologies such as focus group discussions, interviews, and ethnographic approaches to capture the intricate narratives and subjective interpretations of persons regarding their relationships.1,3,6,12 Researchers may perform comprehensive interviews with couples who are cohabiting to uncover their motives, experiences, and perspectives regarding marriage and divorce. By doing qualitative studies, researchers obtained a more profound understanding of the intricacies of intimate relationships, such as how commitment is negotiated, the dynamics of communication, and the impact of sociocultural norms.

# In addition, systematic reviews and literature reviews were crucial in consolidating available evidence and offering complete evaluations of the research field. Meta-analyses combined data from several research to measure the total size of the impact of relationships or strategies related to cohabitation and separation.13 Meta-analyses provide strong estimates of relationships by combining findings from several research. They also identify potential factors that may influence the effects and reveal whether the results are consistent or vary in different situations. On the other hand, literature reviews methodically condensed and examined current studies on cohabitation and separation, revealing overall patterns, areas where research is lacking, and opportunities for future investigation. By doing systematic reviews and reviews of literature, researchers placed their observations within the larger academic conversation, identifying areas of agreement or disagreement and providing direction for future research efforts. The practical application of various research techniques has important consequences for influencing policies, practices, and interventions regarding cohabitation and divorce. Quantitative studies offer factual knowledge that can guide the creation of laws and initiatives designed to assist individuals and families, identify characteristics that increase the likelihood of relationship breakdown, and encourage positive relationship behaviors. Qualitative research provides a valuable understanding of individuals' personal experiences and subjective perceptions, highlighting the significance of culturally relevant and contextually appropriate methods in partnership education and counseling.14

# Meta-analyses and literature reviews offer consolidated data that can assist in decision-making, pinpoint knowledge gaps, and shape future research priorities.14 By gathering results from various research methodologies, professionals and decision-makers can formulate more complete and empirically driven strategies to tackle the intricate issues linked to cohabitation and divorce.

Results

This section presents the findings from an examination of 40 papers gathered from various sources, including Google Scholar, EBSCO Host, and government databases like Census.gov. These publications underwent a systematic evaluation and were classified according to their relevance to the issues of cohabitation before marriage and its effects on marital dissolution. Out of the initial pool of 40 publications, 25 were found to be relevant to the research objectives, while 15 were removed for lack of relevance or low quality. The relevant articles were further divided into two groups: Google Scholar (35 articles) and EBSCO Host (10 articles). The distribution of papers across different platforms demonstrates the abundance of scholarly literature on cohabitation and divorce, with Google Scholar appearing as the primary resource for accessing a diverse range of academic publications.

Furthermore, government sources such as Census.gov provided useful demographic information and statistics on marriage, cohabitation, and divorce, which enriched the research with context. These sources helped to contextualize academic results within broader sociodemographic patterns, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of the themes under inquiry. It is critical to recognize the limitations of the research conducted, which include the exclusion of some publications according to preset standards and the possibility of publication bias in the chosen literature. Additionally, even though a variety of publications from various sources were sought out, the results might not accurately reflect all the research on cohabitation before marriage.

The examination of the relevant publications showed numerous major themes and findings related to cohabitation before marriage. These themes included various components of relationship dynamics, marriage results, and sociocultural influences that influence people's decisions about cohabitation and divorce. The rising acceptance of cohabitation as a social norm in modern culture and its widespread adoption as a practice before marriage were the subjects of numerous studies. The demographic traits of cohabiting couples and the increasing rates of cohabitation were brought to light by studies that used data from national surveys like the NSFG and Add Health.

For example, **Figure 1** is a graph that outlines the changes in cohabitation over 50 years and how women specifically are increasingly cohabiting before marriage.15 The prevalence of cohabitation among unmarried partners has been on the rise in the United States in recent decades, with approximately 20.1 million unmarried cohabitors recorded in 2022.16 In recent years, there has been an increase in the percentage of older individuals who are not married but live together. Living together is an often-seen step that many young individuals take before getting married and starting a family.16 The levels of cohabitation differ according to sociodemographic criteria such as age, gender, level of education, and ethnic background. This Family Profile utilizes data from the 2022 Current Population Survey (CPS) to analyze the prevalence of cohabitation among unmarried adults at different stages of life.17

The purpose of the study was to examine the rates of cohabitation between people of various ages. For in-depth analysis, the study divided participants into four age groups: 18–29, 30-39, 40–49, and 50+.17 The rates of cohabitation among persons in every age group were examined and contrasted to detect any noteworthy trends or patterns. **Figure 2** provided the study's findings in the form of a pie chart showing the frequencies of cohabitation for each age group. The results were simple to interpret because the pie chart gave the data a clear visual representation. The study's conclusions offer insightful information about how people of different ages cohabitate, which helps comprehend the complexities of relationships between people of different ages.

**Figure 1. Evolution of Pre-Marriage Cohabitation Trends from 1965 to 2019**

**Figure 2. Gender Percentages in Cohabitation Across Age Groups**

Several publications have explored the factors that influence people to live together before getting married. These factors include demographic characteristics such as education level, age, and financial status, as well as relationship-specific variables such as commitment levels, prior marriage experiences, and cultural norms.18 YouGov conducted a survey among 1,621 unmarried cohabiting individuals between July 28 and August 29, 2022, asking them about the primary reason for moving in together.18 The top answers to this question are depicted in **Figure 3**.

**Figure 3. Why Couples Cohabitate**

The study of both longitudinal and qualitative studies revealed a range of outcomes related to cohabitation before marriage. While some publications indicated favorable results such as greater satisfaction with relationships and stability, others focused on the increased risk of divorce and marital dissolution among couples who live together. Approximately 50-65% of the population believe that living together before marriage improves their chances of relationship success.3 Younger Americans see cohabitation as a helpful way to test a relationship before marriage. Living together pre-marriage has been linked to a higher chance of divorce, contradicting the prevalent idea that cohabitation increases the likelihood of a successful marriage.18 The relationship between premarital cohabitation and divorce is sometimes referred to as the cohabitation effect.18 Given that 70% of couples live together before marriage, it's crucial to understand the correlation between cohabitation and marital success.18

Around five decades ago, cohabitation before marriage became more common in the United States. This is one of the significant developments in marriage and family since the 1960s.18 In the 1970s, researchers studied the impact of living together before marriage on a couple's likelihood of marriage or divorce.18 Cohabitation was thought to be a strategy to reduce the possibility of divorce, perhaps due to the increasing divorce rates since the late 1960s.19 In the late 1990s, a majority of high school students in the US believed that couples should live together before marriage to determine compatibility.20

Cohabitation has evolved from a practice done before marriage to a normal type of relationship for all partners, regardless of their marital status. In the past, it served as a precursor to marriage. However, over time, cohabiting couples are more likely to break up than get married, creating a distance between them.18 As cohabitation becomes more widespread, having previous experiences of cohabitation with multiple partners is linked to lower chances of marriage and higher chances of divorce, as illustrated in **Figure 4** and **Figure 5**.18

Some of the sources looked at how divorce affected people's health, family relationships, and financial situations. The articles in this collection examine the psychological, financial, and societal effects of divorce using information gathered from qualitative interviews and longitudinal investigations. Researchers have shown that those going through a divorce are more likely to experience mental health problems such as anxiety, despair, and stress. Disruptions to family rituals, changes in living situations, or the end of a marriage can all lead to emotional misery.8 For many families, the financial ramifications of a divorce are substantial. Divorce can harm family income for both parents, however, research shows that women may see a drop in income and men may see an increase in spousal and support payments for children.8 Additional sources of financial hardship include alimony, legal bills, and the partition of assets.8

**Figure 4. The study data (N = 1,621) was collected by YouGov between July 28 and August 29, 2022.**

**Figure 5. Timing of Cohabitation Among those Marrying from 2010 to 2019.**

Results of the literature review were combined and visually displayed in an infographic handout. The infographic sought to present essential research findings in a clear, simple, and entertaining style. The infographic was made with an easy layout so that it would be easier for people to access and read. It uses graphs, charts, and icons to show information *(to review handout, see Appendix A)*. The infographic's readability was carefully evaluated to make certain that it was understandable to a wide range of audiences. The wording in the infographic remained simple and free of jargon, and words or ideas that were hard to understand were explained information *(see Appendix A)*. The use of graphics assisted in breaking down data into digestible bits of information allowing readers to better absorb and retain crucial points.

The infographic was created with an 8th-grade target reading level in mind, ensuring that it was understandable to people of all literacy levels *(see Appendix A)*. The infographic sought to address a wide range of audiences, including policymakers, professionals, academics, and the public, by keeping the content simple and brief. The use of graphics also contributed to the information's engagement and memorability, pushing readers to go further and examine the ramifications for their personal lives and relationships *(see Appendix A)*. In conclusion, the findings of the study on cohabitation before marriage and the impacts provided significant insights into this complicated phenomenon.

Discussion

The findings of this practicum study have revealed the intricate dynamics of premarital cohabitation and its significant impacts on individuals, families, and communities. A comprehensive understanding of the subject was achieved through a meticulous process of analyzing and categorizing 35 articles from various sources. These results offer valuable contributions to the extensive literature on relationship dynamics and marriage outcomes, uncovering previously unknown aspects of cohabitation and divorce. This project has found important patterns, trends, and correlations about living together before marriage by carefully looking at a lot of academic literature. These new ideas have challenged what most people think and given us more complex views on how living together affects relationship security, personal health, and family relationships. These findings call into question long-held assumptions regarding cohabitation and its function in relationship formation.

Contrary to popular opinion, data reveals that cohabitation may not be the perfect "trial run" for marriage and may instead increase the likelihood of divorce. This insight emphasizes the significance of offering thorough education and support to people navigating the complications of premarital cohabitation. Adding government sources like Census.gov has also added valuable demographic information to the study, allowing a more in-depth look at the societal factors that affect trends in cohabitation and marriage outcomes.

First, several studies emphasize the need for customized relationship education initiatives and therapies that deal with the difficulties encountered by couples who decide to live together before being married. Understanding the possible hazards of cohabitation, educators, and professionals can create plans to assist couples in successfully navigating these difficulties. This can entail imparting knowledge about financial management strategies, dispute resolution techniques, and communication skills that are especially suited to cohabitation.21 Second, the results emphasize the need to de-stigmatize conversations about divorce and cohabitation. By dispelling popular myths and preconceptions, people and couples might feel more confident to turn to help and direction when having problems in their relationships. More communication and openness in relationships may result from this, which would eventually promote stronger and healthier partnerships.21 The study also implies that a better knowledge of the sociocultural elements influencing cohabitation patterns and marriage results is necessary. Recognition of the wide spectrum of reasons and experiences related to cohabitation allows practitioners and policymakers to create more diverse and culturally aware methods of support for relationships and intervention. Engaging with religious institutions, community leaders, and various other cultural organizations can help guarantee that their partnerships and education programs are relevant and accessible to all sections of society.21

The studies also emphasize how laws and policies might influence the patterns of cohabitation and the results of marriages.21,22 Governments may make the world more encouraging for couples, despite their marital status, by putting into place laws that promote stable and healthy partnerships, such as giving access to reasonably priced housing, healthcare, and childcare.22 To guarantee that partners have access to just and equal mechanisms for resolving marital breakdowns, legislators can also think about changing divorce laws and procedures.22 All things considered, the consequences of this research go much beyond the personal level and affect practitioners, politicians, and society at large. Acknowledging the complexity of cohabitation before marriage and its consequences for both individuals and families, interested parties can collaborate to create evidence-based programs and laws that support strong, healthy partnerships in modern society.22

Qualitative research approaches offer great potential to uncover the complex reasons, realities, and viewpoints of couples who choose to live together before getting married. By utilizing comprehensive interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic techniques, researchers can explore the subjective meanings associated with cohabitation and shed light on the various factors that influence people's decision to live together, as well as the dynamics of their relationships that ensue.23 Qualitative research methods can provide quantitative results with important context and depth, while also revealing a deeper understanding of the intricate interactions between sociocultural, interpersonal, and individual elements that shape cohabitation experiences.23 Multidisciplinary methods are increasingly valued for studying cohabitation phenomena, in addition to observational and qualitative research. By combining ideas from other fields such as psychology, sociology, and economics, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex processes at work.

By combining various disciplinary perspectives, researchers have been able to understand the factors that influence people's decisions to cohabit, the dynamics of cohabiting relationships, and the long-term effects of cohabitation. This multidisciplinary approach has the potential to uncover new research areas, enhance theoretical knowledge, and shape the development of evidence-based programs and policies aimed at promoting healthy and thriving relationships today.23

It is imperative to acknowledge the inherent limits of this research, even with the greatest efforts to carry out a comprehensive literature assessment. One significant drawback is the article selection procedure, which unavoidably resulted in the exclusion of some publications due to defined standards like publication dates. Although these standards were set to guarantee the quality and applicability of the papers included, the analysis may become biased because of some publications being left out. There could have been gaps in the literature review. Furthermore, restricting the study's scope, articles that were not available through the selected search engines or databases would not have been considered. It's important to keep in mind that the results of the study may not represent the entire scope of research conducted on the subject. This is because the articles used as sources were gathered from a variety of databases and repositories, to present different perspectives. Due to the predetermined search terms and inclusion criteria, it is possible that certain viewpoints or voices that were already present in the literature were overlooked or disregarded.

Moreover, because relationships are intricate and multifaceted, it is crucial to exercise caution when interpreting and applying the findings of the study to other scenarios. Relationships are naturally complex and are influenced by several factors, such as cultural norms, personal preferences, and socioeconomic status. Therefore, the results of the study may not be universally applicable to all situations or groups of people. It is important to exercise care when extrapolating the data to larger groups of people as human relationships are inherently variable and unique.

In future studies, researchers should strive to overcome these obstacles by adopting broader search strategies, increasing their sources, and using a range of research methods that fully elucidate the variety and intricacies of how relationships function. By doing so, researchers can gain a more nuanced understanding of cohabitation before marriage, including what it means for individuals, families, and society. Beyond the academic world, the study's findings could help shape policies and practices in the real world that deal with teaching people how to be good relationships and helping families. Once policymakers, practitioners, and academics have a deeper understanding of how cohabitation works, they can work together to create better ways for couples to build healthy, long-lasting relationships. The study's findings may also help shape larger social policies that aim to assist families and boost community unity. By understanding how living together affects marriage, policymakers can create targeted programs that hope to lower the number of divorces and improve family stability. For instance, community-level programs can be used to help couples learn more about relationships and improve their speaking skills. This will make families healthier and more resilient. Policymakers may also examine how financial support or tax breaks might help encourage people to get married and keep their families together.

The study results are crucial for lawmakers and professionals as they reveal the impact of cohabitation on individuals, families, and society. Collaborative efforts between individuals with diverse interests can improve the well-being of couples and families in all communities. To achieve this, it is recommended that comprehensive educational programs and support services be developed to assist individuals contemplating cohabitation. These programs should aim to dispel common myths about cohabitation while emphasizing on the importance of communication, commitment, and conflict-resolution skills in maintaining healthy relationships. Furthermore, it may be necessary to implement specific interventions to address particular risk factors associated with cohabitation. Thus, an infographic was created to highlight these parameters and suggested to be used as an educational resource for future reference by the appointed practicum site.

This infographic examines this tendency from several angles. First off, it lists the increasing numbers of people living together in recent decades—more than half of partners in many Western nations now decide to live together before getting married. The causes of this tendency are then explored, covering compatibility testing, financial factors, and the ease of easing into marriage. Furthermore, it emphasizes the advantages of cohabitation, such as better communication abilities, financial security from resource sharing, and increased relationship preparedness. Cohabitation does come with drawbacks, too, including trouble defining commitment, relationship pressure from sharing living quarters, and residual societal stigma in some societies. The infographic addresses the contradicting research on the effects of cohabitation on marriage; some studies indicate that cohabiting couples have greater divorce rates than non-cohabiting couples, while others show no discernible difference. It highlights in conclusion that cohabitation before marriage is a complex phenomenon with benefits and disadvantages, stressing the need to comprehend its dynamics for couples making wise choices about their relationships. I received very positive and informative feedback from my practicum preceptor. Some of their comments included a thorough explanation of the subject and an insightful analysis of the patterns, causes, advantages, difficulties, and effects associated with this phenomenon. The design of the presentation was well-organized, and the descriptions were succinct, making it easy for readers to understand the main ideas quickly. The inclusion of various elements that led to the increase in cohabitation, such as financial concerns and relationship compatibility testing, helped to deepen the analysis and improve comprehension. Additionally, highlighting the potential benefits of cohabitation, such as better communication skills and financial security, provided a fair perspective on the topic. Overall, they felt the infographic successfully informs viewers about the challenges of living together before marriage and encourages a careful examination of its effects on relationships.

Several recommendations were made on how to improve the infographic. It was suggested that adding more data points and visual components such as graphs and icons could increase interaction. For instance, providing information on regional differences in cohabitation statistics and cultural factors influencing views on cohabitation would provide a more comprehensive picture of the subject. Additionally, including information on the long-term results such as stability and satisfaction of relationships for cohabiting couples compared to those who are married could shed important light on how cohabitation affects relationships. Readers may find the infographic more relatable if it includes professional statements or endorsements from people who have experience with cohabitation. Enlarging the range of data and including multiple viewpoints could have made the infographic more interesting and educational.

# Conclusion

The ability to write, analyze data, do literature reviews, and use research methods have all improved because of working on this project. My knowledge of the topic and my skill in conveying important results have both been greatly improved by the process of carefully evaluating and synthesizing the obtained material. Thanks to this opportunity, I have been able to hone my academic and professional skills in areas such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and multidisciplinary teamwork, all of which are necessary for success in any industry. The results of this practicum study have shed light on the complex dynamics of premarital cohabitation and how it affects marital outcomes. Thanks to this study's systematic review and categorization of a vast variety of literature from multiple sources, including academic databases and government repositories, relationship dynamics and the variables impacting marital success have been better understood. Through this experience, I have gained a deeper understanding of the nuances of cohabitation decisions and their far-reaching consequences for people, families, and communities.

This research has significant implications for relationship education and family support programs beyond academia. The findings can inform more effective techniques for promoting healthy and lasting relationships, providing practitioners, policymakers, and researchers with a better understanding of cohabitation dynamics. Additionally, this study may prompt a reevaluation of current legal frameworks for marriage and cohabitation to better reflect the needs and realities of modern partnerships. To better understand the relationship between cohabitation and successful marriages, future studies must focus on deciphering its intricate nature. The long-term effects of cohabitation on relationship paths can be better understood using longitudinal studies. Additionally, qualitative research methodologies can help us to better understand the personal stories and goals of people in these relationships. Cohabitation is a complex and multi-faceted topic, therefore, an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates ideas from various disciplines such as psychology, economics, sociology, and others, can help shed light on all its facets.

This practicum project has been a valuable experience for professional and personal growth. It has added to the existing knowledge about the impact of cohabitation on marriage and has provided a deeper understanding of the subject. The project has enabled evidence-based interventions that can help people today develop positive and resilient relationships.

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**Appendix A**

Exploring Cohabitation Before Marriage Infographic Handout