

Eight

FAMILY LIFE

Modern prophets and apostles have emphasized that social stability and individual happiness can only thrive within communities where marriage and family are a priority. Modern social science confirms the teachings of the prophets. In their widely acclaimed book *The Case for Marriage*, Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher (2000) reviewed a large quantity of research literature and found compelling scientific evidence that married people have better health, finances, and happiness. Those who are married live longer, suffer less illness, recover faster when sick, have less depression and anxiety, and commit suicide less often. Married people have greater financial security. They also have children who grow up to be physically and emotionally healthier and who are less likely to be delinquent than children who are raised in single-parent homes. In spite of this positive evidence, marriage is on the decline in the United States. Some have suggested that factors such as modernization, changes in divorce laws, and increased educational opportunities for women have contributed to this shift (Gelles, 1995). Consequently, marital

status in the United States over the past several decades has dramatically changed, so that not only are people marrying at a later age, but divorce, which peaked in 1979, continues to affect nearly half of all families (Stark, 2004). Recent data from the U.S. census indicates that the percentage of married-couple households with children under 18, normally referred to as the “traditional family,” is at an all-time low of 24% compared to 45% in the 1960s (Schmitt, 2001).

President Gordon B. Hinckley observed in 1997:

As I look to the future, I see little to feel enthusiastic about concerning the family in America and across the world. Drugs and alcohol are taking a terrible toll, which is not likely to decrease. Harsh language, one to another, indifference to the needs of one another—all seem to be increasing. There is so much of child abuse. There is so much of spouse abuse. There is growing abuse of the elderly. All of this will happen and get worse unless there is an underlying acknowledgment, yes, a strong and fervent conviction, concerning the fact that the family is an instrument of the Almighty. It is His creation. It is also the basic unit of society. (p. 69)

How are Latter-day Saint families doing? Are the trends of the world making their way into the families of the Church? In seeking to answer this, we investigated several familial factors among Latter-day Saints. First, we explored factors relating to marriage among members of the Church and their peers across the United States. Second, we compared data on divorce among Latter-day Saints and those not of our faith. Finally, we looked within Latter-day Saint families to learn more about their characteristics. Overall, we sought to clarify what we know and do not know about the familial health of Latter-day Saints at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

DATA ON FAMILIES

Data from three different random samples was used in this analysis. The first came from a survey in 1999 of 6,000 men and women from the United States who served missions for the Church. The sample was divided between those who had been back from their missions 2, 5, 10, and 17 years, respectively. The age of the respondents ranged from 21 to 45 years old. Sixty-seven percent of the men and 84% of the women responded to the survey, making a combined response rate of 73%. The second survey was conducted in 2000 and collected data from 6,000 LDS men and women in the United States who did *not* serve a mission. The survey was mailed to the same age groups as those of the returned-missionary survey. Only 12% of the men and 31% of the women responded, making a combined response rate of 20%. Further analysis showed that the extremely low response rate for non-returned-missionary men was mainly due to high rates of Church inactivity. Because of their alienation from the Church, they saw little reason to participate in the study. Therefore, any findings reported in this chapter on non-returned-missionary men may be generalized only for those who are more active in the Church. The full details of the methodology of these two studies are presented in Appendix A. The third sample represents the general population of men and women throughout the United States and comes from the 1998 and 2000 General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS is conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago. It collects interviews from a national sample of adult men and women. The response rates for 1998 and 2000 were 76% and 70%, respectively. We selected the men and women in the GSS survey between the ages of 24 to 41, which matches the age range of the LDS samples.

It is important to note that findings in this study often show that on average those who served missions for the Church tend to have greater marital success and happiness than those

Table 1. Marital Status among LDS and National Men and Women, by Percentage

	Men ¹				Women ²			
	Returned Missionary (1999) <i>n</i> = 417	Non-Returned Missionary ³ (2000) <i>n</i> = 96	General Social Survey All ⁴ (1998/2000) <i>n</i> = 121	General Social Survey Whites Only ⁵ (1998/2000) <i>n</i> = 103	Returned Missionary (1999) <i>n</i> = 256	Non-Returned Missionary ⁶ (2000) <i>n</i> = 139	General Social Survey All ⁴ (1998/2000) <i>n</i> = 128	General Social Survey Whites Only ⁸ (1998/ 2000) <i>n</i> = 105
Single, never married	1	12	22	19	11	3	15	11
Married, first marriage	90	63	50	52	76	77	49	52
Remarried	7	18	11	10	7	14	15	15
Divorced/Separated	2	8	16	18	6	6	20	21
Widowed	1	0	3	1	0.4	0	1	1

1. Data is from specific age cohorts who are ages 38 and 39.

2. Data is from specific age cohorts who are ages 40 and 41.

3. Non-RM men's sample is significantly different at the .001 level when compared to the RM men.

4. GSS men's sample (all races) is significantly different at the .001 level when compared to RM men and at the .05 level when compared to non-RM men.

5. GSS men's sample (whites only) is significantly different at the .001 level when compared to RM men and is not significantly different compared to non-RM men.

6. Non-RM women's sample is significantly different at the .001 level when compared to the RM women.

7. GSS women's sample (all races) is significantly different at the .001 level when compared to either the RM women or non-RM women.

8. GSS women's sample (whites only) is significantly different at the .001 level when compared to either the RM women or non-RM women.

who did not serve. Recognizing this, we believe it would be a mistake to assume that missionary service alone is the sole cause of greater success in marriage and successful avoidance of divorce. Other stabilizing factors in the individual's adolescence likely led that person to choose to go on a mission in the first place. So, on the one hand, we in no way want to minimize the real changes that may result from missionary service, yet we must acknowledge that successful marriages may also be attributed to earlier adolescent factors that were not measured.

MARRIAGE

Over the past three decades, marital status in the United States has changed dramatically, and the divorce rate continues to remain relatively high. How do Latter-day Saint marriages compare to these national trends? Table 1 compares the current marital status of men and women by about age 40. Significantly more Latter-day Saint men, both returned missionaries and non-returned missionaries, are married, compared to men across the United States. Ninety percent of the returned-missionary men and 63% of the non-returned-missionary men are currently in their first marriage, with 7% and 18% who are remarried, respectively. Fifty percent of men nationally are in their first marriage and 11% are remarried.

Relatively few returned-missionary men are single (1%) or are currently divorced or separated (2%). Twelve percent of the non-returned-missionary men are single, and 8% are divorced or separated. By contrast, almost one-fourth (22%) of the men from the GSS sample have never married, 11% are remarried, and 16% are currently divorced.

By age 40, returned-missionary and non-returned-missionary women are also significantly different in their marital status than women across the nation. Seventy-six percent of returned-missionary women and 77% of non-returned-missionary women are in their first marriage. According to the GSS, 49% of the women in the national sample are in their first marriage.

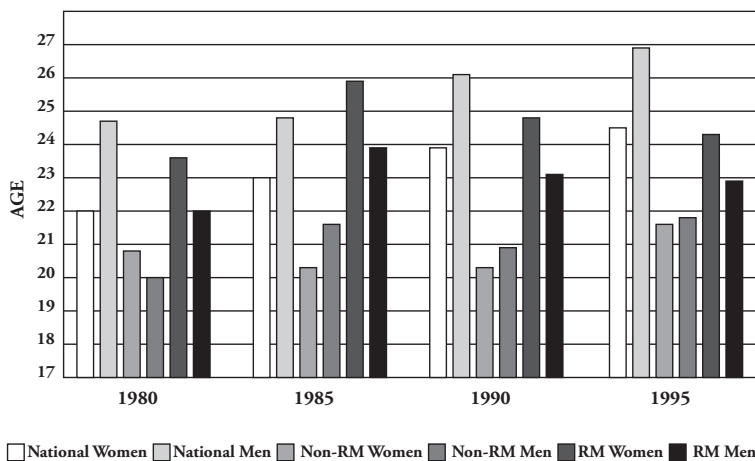
Only about 11% of returned-missionary women and 3% of non-returned-missionary women are still single as compared to 15% of women nationally (11%—whites only). Twice as many non-returned-missionary women (14%) have remarried compared to returned-missionary women (7%). The rate of divorce for both groups is the same (6%). The data in Table 1 demonstrates that members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are significantly more likely to be in their first marriage and less likely to be single, remarried, or divorced.

Single-parent households. The increase of divorce since the 1970s has brought with it a rise in single-parent families. The U.S. Bureau of the Census (1990) reported that the percentage of children under age 18 living in a one-parent home in the United States (whites only) was around 19%. Most of these children are being raised by their mothers. This percentage is much smaller for Latter-day Saints. Heaton (1992) reported that the percentage of LDS children being raised in single-parent families in the United States was around 5%. These figures have probably increased by about 1% to 2% over the past 15 years.

Age at first marriage. A significant trend in marriage patterns in the United States, which also affects Latter-day Saints, is the age at which couples marry. The median age at first marriage in the United States has fluctuated during the past century. For example, in 1900, the median age at which a man married was about 26; a woman married around age 22. These ages steadily dropped until the 1950s, when the median age for men was 22 and for women, age 20. Since then, the median age at first marriage has dramatically increased. In 2003, the median age for men was almost 27 and for women, around 25 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003).

Figure 1 shows the median age at first marriage for both LDS and non-LDS U.S. men and women from 1980 to 1995. Figures from 1995 show that the median age for first marriage among returned-missionary men is about 23, while

Figure 1. Median Age at First Marriage, LDS and National Averages



non-returned-missionary men marry around age 22. The median age of first marriage for returned-missionary women is 24, and non-returned-missionary women are much younger, marrying between 21 and 22. Thus, on average, LDS men in 1995 married about 4.5 years younger than their male peers nationally, and LDS women married 1.5 years younger than their national peers.

LDS data since 1995 is unavailable. However, we do have information on men and women nationally. For example, the median age at marriage for men has not increased since 1995, but the age for women has increased almost a full year. So if a similar pattern is being followed by Latter-day Saints, we would assume that the age at first marriage for LDS women has increased, while age for LDS men has remained the same since 1995.

Marital happiness. Marital happiness in the United States has consistently been found to be extremely high. Since the GSS began surveying in 1973, the percentage of those who say they are either “very happy” or “pretty happy” in their marriages has hovered around 97% (General Social Survey, 2003).

Table 2. Marital Happiness,¹ by Percentage

	Men ²			Women ³		
	Returned Missionary (1999) n = 1376	Non-Returned Missionary (2000) n = 246	General Social Survey All (1998/2000) n = 154	Returned Missionary (1999) n = 948	Non-Returned Missionary (2000) n = 522	General Social Survey All (1998/2000) n = 250
1 = Not too happy	7	10	4	6	10	2
2 = Pretty happy	31	43	42	30	38	35
3 = Very happy	62	47	55	64	53	63
Mean	2.54⁴	2.35⁵	2.51	2.57⁶	2.41⁷	2.59

1. The RM and non-RM scales were collapsed to fit the same categories of the GSS scales. The question for RM and non-RM samples was "All things considered, how happy is your marriage?" Categories are 1 = Very Unhappy, 2 = Unhappy, 3 = Mixed, 4 = Happy, 5 = Very Happy. The question for GSS sample was "Taking things all together, how would you describe your marriage? Would you say that your marriage is very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?"

2. Data is from specific age cohorts who are between 24 and 40.

3. Data is from specific age cohorts who are between 25 and 41.

4. RM men's sample is significantly different at the .001 level when compared to the non-RM men but is not significantly different from each GSS men's sample (all and whites only).

5. Non-RM men's sample is significantly different at the .05 level when compared to each GSS men's sample (all and whites only).

6. RM women's sample is significantly different at the .001 level when compared to the non-RM men, but is not significantly different from each GSS women's sample (all and whites only).

7. Non-RM women's sample is significantly different at the .001 level when compared to each GSS women's sample (all and whites only).

Marital happiness among Latter-day Saints is also very high (see Table 2). Our analysis found that the happiness in returned-missionary marriages was not significantly different than that in the marriages of their U.S. peers. Marital happiness among non-returned-missionary marriages was also very high, although lower when compared to the other two groups for both men and women.

Given prophetic counsel concerning eternal marriage and the principles of the proclamation on the family, we are convinced that religious factors heighten marital happiness among Latter-day Saints. Our research confirmed this by showing that among three of the four LDS groups we studied, religiosity was clearly related to marital happiness. Those who regularly read scriptures; pray privately; and hold family scripture study, family prayer, and family home evening are happier in their marriages. Being temple worthy and holding strong personal religious beliefs are also related to happier marriages. We recognize that there may also be a number of other non-religious factors that lead to marital happiness, but for Latter-day Saints, religiosity appears to be salient.

LDS marital characteristics. Table 3 shows several marital characteristics of LDS couples. These ask if both spouses are members of the Church, if they were married in the temple, and under what circumstances the spouses met. When asked if his or her spouse was LDS, almost every married returned missionary said yes (men—99%; women—98%). Eighty-three percent of the non-returned-missionary men and 92% of the women had an LDS spouse. The vast majority of returned missionaries (97%—men; 96%—women) are currently sealed to their spouses, either through an original temple sealing or a sealing that took place later after a civil marriage. Just over half of the non-returned-missionary men (54%) have been sealed in the temple, as have around three-fourths of the non-returned-missionary women (78%).

Table 3. Marital Characteristics, by Percentage

	Men		Women	
	Returned Missionary <i>n</i> = 1631	Non-Returned Missionary <i>n</i> = 257	Returned Missionary <i>n</i> = 1091	Non-Returned Missionary <i>n</i> = 529
Is your spouse a member of the LDS Church?				
Yes	99	83	98	92
No	1	16	2	8
What type of ceremony did you have for your current marriage?				
Temple sealing	91	29	91	65
Civil marriage first, then temple sealing later	6	35	5	13
Civil marriage only	4	36	4	22
Where were you when you met your spouse?				
Church meeting or activity	41	18	40	32
Social event (not church related)	14	22	10	17
School event (e.g., in class, field trip)	11	20	7	12
Work-related activity	8	14	10	15
Other	26	26	33	24

One characteristic of mate selection that is unique in the LDS culture is where a person meets his or her spouse. We found that a church meeting or activity was the most popular place for returned-missionary men and women as well as for non-returned-missionary women to meet their future spouses. On the other hand, non-returned-missionary men generally found their spouses at a social or school event or some place other than a church meeting. This may be due in part to being less active in church attendance during their young adult years (Janson, 2002).

Divorce. Given the emphasis the LDS Church places on marriage, a significant and often-asked question is, What is the civil divorce rate among Latter-day Saints, especially for those with a temple marriage? Unfortunately, the information necessary to provide an exact answer to this question is not available. However, researchers have done their best to produce some type of estimate. For example, in the late 1970s, Albrecht, Bahr, and Goodman (1983) conducted a divorce study of individuals of various religious affiliations who lived in the Intermountain West. These researchers compared divorce rates by varying types of marriage settings (e.g., civil marriage, church marriage, temple marriage, other). Given the high rate of Mormons living in Utah, they included “temple marriage” as a category and assumed that only Mormons would select this response. In the end, they found that 7% of LDS members who had originally had a temple marriage were either now divorced or divorced and remarried. Thirty-five percent of the sample (includes all religious affiliations) who had originally married civilly were either currently divorced or remarried. Among those who were originally married in a church or synagogue, 15% were either divorced or remarried, and for those whose original marriage was classified in the “other” category, 21% had divorced.

Given the differences in these rates, divorce rates of temple marriages were about five times lower than civil marriages, two

Table 4. Marital Status among Ever Married LDS and National Men and Women, by Percentage

	Men ¹			Women ²				
	Returned Missionary (1999) <i>n</i> = 411	Non-Returned Missionary ⁴ (2000) <i>n</i> = 85	General Social Survey All ⁵ (1998/2000) <i>n</i> = 101	General Social Survey Whites Only ⁶ (1998/2000) <i>n</i> = 88	Returned Missionary (1999) <i>n</i> = 229	Non-Returned Missionary ⁷ (2000) <i>n</i> = 135	General Social Survey All ⁸ (1998/2000) <i>n</i> = 122	General Social Survey Whites Only ⁹ (1998/2000) <i>n</i> = 101
First Marriage	91	71	59	61	85	79	52	55
Ever Divorced ³	9	29	38	38	15	21	48	45
Widowed	1	0	3	1	0.4	0	1	1

1. Data is from specific age cohorts who are 38 and 39.

2. Data is from specific age cohorts who are 40 and 41.

3. Includes those who are divorced, separated, remarried, and widows who had ever been divorced.
4. Non-RM men's sample is significantly different at the .001 level when compared to the RM men.

5. GSS men's sample (all races) is significantly different at the .001 level when compared to the RM men and is not significantly different when compared to non-RM men.

6. GSS men's sample (whites only) is significantly different at the .001 level when compared to the RM men and is not significantly different when compared to the non-RM men.

7. Non-RM women's sample is not significantly different when compared to the RM women.

8. GSS women's sample (all races) is significantly different at the .001 level when compared to either the RM women or non-RM women.

9. GSS women's sample (whites only) is significantly different at the .001 level when compared to either the RM women or non-RM women.

times lower than church- or synagogue-type marriages, and three times lower than divorce rates of those who married in other settings.

In the 1980s, a study conducted by Heaton and Goodman (1985) compared divorce rates between Latter-day Saints and members of other religious denominations who were white and age 30 and older. They found that Latter-day Saints had the lowest rate of divorce compared to other religious denominations including Catholics, liberal and conservative Protestants, and those with no religious preference. They reported that around 14% of LDS men and 19% of LDS women had been divorced at the time of the study. Twenty percent of Catholic men had divorced, as had 23% of Catholic women. Other religions reported higher percentages than the Catholics, with the highest percentage of divorce found to be among those who claimed no religious preference. Nearly 40% of the men and 45% of the women from this category had divorced.

Heaton and Goodman also looked at the relationship between Church attendance and divorce. They found about 10% of active LDS men were divorced, while 22% of the LDS men who attended church less frequently were divorced. Fifteen percent of active LDS women were divorced as compared to 26% for those who did not go to church as often. Thus, LDS men and women who attended church regularly were about half as likely to be divorced as those who went to church only occasionally and about four times less than men and women nationally.

Finally, Heaton and Goodman showed the proportion of members who had divorced from a temple marriage as compared to a nontemple marriage. Of those who had originally married in the temple, about 5% of the men and 7% of the women had been divorced. Around 28% of non-temple-married men and 33% of non-temple-married women were

divorced. Thus, temple marriages were about 5 times less likely to end in divorce than nontemple marriages.

Follow-up research by Heaton, Bahr, and Jacobson (2004) assessed data from the 1990s and suggested that the divorce rate gap between Latter-day Saints and their national peers is narrowing. Specifically, they estimated that the lifetime divorce rate for Latter-day Saints married in the temple may be two-thirds of the national average of divorce, around 30%.

We recently did our own assessment of divorce among Latter-day Saints from data collected between 1999 and 2001. Table 4 shows the marital status by about age 40 among ever-married LDS men and women and national men and women. Returned-missionary men rank lowest in divorce, at 9%. This is in comparison to 29% of non-returned-missionary men and 38% of men nationally. This shows that returned-missionary men are around three times less likely to divorce than non-returned-missionary men and a little over four times less likely than men nationally. Non-returned-missionary LDS men are about three-fourths as likely to divorce as men nationally. As for women, returned missionaries have a divorce rate of 15%, while non-returned missionaries are higher, at 21%, and U.S. women are the highest compared to all other categories, with 48% (45%—whites only) who have been divorced. Thus, returned-missionary women are about three-fourths less likely to divorce than non-returned-missionary women and slightly over three times less likely than women nationally. Marriages for LDS non-returned-missionary women are just over half as likely to end in divorce as their national peers of the same age.

If the above rates represent divorce by age 40, is it possible to calculate a lifetime divorce rate? Many scholars believe that the current lifetime divorce rate in the United States is now around 50%. We recognize that there continues to be an ongoing debate among scholars concerning the accuracy of reported divorce rates. Part of the problem is that there are a number of ways to calculate the rate, and each has its own strengths and

weaknesses (Stark, 2004). We use the 50% estimate as a matter of convenience in comparing LDS to national rates. Assuming that the proportion of divorce between LDS members and their non-LDS U.S. peers is similar across the life span, we estimate that the current lifetime divorce rate for returned-missionary men is around 12% and 16% for women. The lifetime rate for non-returned-missionary men is around 38% and around 22% for non-returned-missionary women. These figures include both civil and temple marriages combined.

What, then, would be the divorce rate of temple marriages only? We, like previous researchers, must also estimate this figure. First of all, we know that returned missionaries represent a relatively active subgroup in the Church and, because almost all of them eventually attain a temple marriage (see Table 3), we believe that their lifetime divorce rate, which we reported earlier as 12% for the men and 16% for the women, would represent the lifetime divorce rate for temple marriages among typically active Latter-day Saints. Thus, our estimation of the lifetime divorce rate for those with temple marriages is somewhere in the teens and probably no higher than 20%.

LDS FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

Family size. We found a relatively high fertility rate among the LDS men and women, which confirms the long-held notion that Latter-day Saint families are generally larger than others across the nation. Non-returned-missionary women have the highest number of children, with an average of 3.92 per household, followed by returned-missionary women at 3.83. Returned-missionary men had an average of 3.75 children per household, with non-returned-missionary men the lowest among the LDS groups at 3.31. Compare these to men and women across the United States, where men average 1.73 children and women 1.99 per household, respectively. With all LDS groups averaging more than three children by their early

Table 5. LDS Family Religious Practices, by Percentage

	Men		Women	
	Returned Missionary <i>n</i> = 1678	Non-Returned Missionary <i>n</i> = 282	Returned Missionary <i>n</i> = 1129	Non-Returned Missionary <i>n</i> = 561
During the past year, how often did you pray as a family?				
Every day/a few times a week	74	40	79	62
About once a week/2–3 times a week/About once a month	15	22	13	16
Less than once a month/hot at all	10	38	7	22
During the past year, how often did you study the scriptures as a family?				
Every day/a few times a week	36	18	46	33
About once a week/2–3 times a week/About once a month	36	29	32	30
Less than once a month/hot at all	27	53	21	37
During the past year, how often did you hold family home evening?				
About once a week/2–3 times a month	55	29	63	48
About once a month	15	12	12	15
Less than once a month/hot at all	29	58	24	36

30s, this is almost twice the rate of their peers across the United States.

Family religious behavior. Family religious behavior such as family scripture study, family prayer, and family home evening are shown in Table 5. As can be seen, 74% of the men and 79% of the women who served missions hold regular family prayer. Around 40% of the non-returned-missionary men hold regular family prayer, as do 62% of the non-returned-missionary women. Family scripture study occurs less often than family prayer. Nearly half (46%) of the returned-missionary women say they hold family scripture study at least a few times a week. Returned-missionary men are next at just over one-third (36%). Non-returned-missionary women are at 33%, and only about 18% of the non-returned-missionary men have family scripture study several times a week. Finally, more than half of the families of returned-missionary men (55%) and women (63%) hold regular family home evening. For families of women who did not serve a mission, the rate is around 48%. Twenty-nine percent of the men in this category say they are having regular home evenings with their families.

CONCLUSION

Our findings suggest that most members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are earnestly striving to live the principles found in the proclamation on the family. Research shows significant differences in several marital factors of Latter-day Saints as compared to their peers throughout the United States. A higher percentage of Latter-day Saints are married, fewer are divorced or single, they have more children per family, they marry earlier in life, and they have comparable marital happiness to those across the nation.

Such an enduring social structure within the Church is encouraging, given the antifamily sentiments that seem to be sweeping across the country through various media and political platforms. If families are to receive the help and healing

they need, they must continue to follow the prophetic counsel of both past and present prophets—that the family is the fundamental institution of society, and that love and respect within marriage will create lasting happiness for families and stability in society.

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