

## Fear of Divorce: A Deterrent to Marriage?

Sociologists describe marriage as a partnership of mutual give-and-take between two people within the legal and moral fold of society.

**Marriage and Cohabitation:** Marriage may offer many benefits to an individual in the form of love and someone to share responsibilities and desires with. At the same time, it demands a lot of cognitive, financial and emotional investment from the couple. A marriage needs to be sustained through repeated emotional and social investment. This investment can be tangible and intangible in nature. An individual only thinks about his or her contribution to marriage once a decision to divorce is on the horizon.

Everything has to be divided fairly. Usually, this is not possible. The couple finds it extremely difficult to separate personal financial and emotional contribution from joint familial investment. An apt example would be calculating the amount of emotional strength and capacity invested by the individual in a marriage. Is it the number of hours spent in doing housework or is it the amount i.e. the number of household chores done in a day? Can it be calculated by counting the number of household errands done in a week or the amount of time spent in childcare?

Thus, calculation and separation of personal marital investment becomes difficult. It usually gives rise to emotional trauma and pain. The individual begins to feel a failure and is enveloped by grief, sadness, disappointment and pain. Coupled with this is the feeling of abandonment and loneliness, helplessness and guilt. The London firm of Family Solicitors states that this could be one of the primary reasons why modern people are not opting for marriage.

More than 53% of unmarried couples prefer to remain engaged. They opt for a live-in relationship. Compared to the legal marriage, the live-in relationship offers the individual personal freedom devoid of familial responsibilities. Live-in relationships are based on the fulfilment of the basic human drive of human contact. These relationships are flexible and informal in nature. The individual has the option to share personal wants and needs with the live-in partner. The live-in couple makes joint investments of a financial nature only to minimise the expense of two separate households. There is no emotional, cognitive and social investment. The partners are not required by law and society to shoulder any responsibility or duty. Even when the live-in couple has children, they remain the sole responsibility of the partner who wanted them.

**Popularity Rate:** The live-in relationship is suited to the fast-paced, unscrupulous lifestyle of modern society. People today engage in cut-throat competition and do not have time and energy to invest in a family life. They prefer relationships devoid of legal family ties. People today are ambitious and prefer not to be tied down to one place. They want to keep moving, achieving personal goals. Marriage and its consequent added responsibilities are just an inconvenience.

Further, there is no emotional trauma involved in case a live-in couple wants to split. Thus, live-in relationships provide individual protection against the travails of divorce. It is better to opt for a live-in relationship than marriage. An individual gets to avoid the mental and emotional pain of a final legal split in a marriage. From this perspective, perhaps, there is a valid reason for the rise and rapid growth of the live-in relationship.

**Marriage:** But marriage is a unique emotional experience which should be experienced by all. The trauma of a break-up is not more in a marriage and less in a live-in relationship. Social psychologists argue that usually the degree and magnitude of emotional turmoil experienced depends on the individual. An individual can be committed to a marital as well as a live-in relationship. Thus on the eve of break-up in either relationship, there is every chance that the individual will go through feelings of pain, misery, depression and grief. It is a misconception and fallacy to assume that emotional turmoil is minimised in a live-in relationship.

When there is close human contact, strong emotional feelings are bound to develop. When these feelings are cruelly severed and jolted, emotional trauma is bound to occur. An individual invests similar emotional and financial commitment in a marriage and in a live-in relationship. The major difference being that marriage is sanctified by society and law. Marriages can be flexible depending on the priority accorded to it by the individual. It is foolishness to think that an individual can avoid emotional turmoil of divorce by not getting married. The degree of love and trust is similar in both relationships. Even live-in couples, after some years of cohabitation, come to have certain expectations and demands. It is wrong to assume that the emotional turmoil of divorce is far greater than the emotional turmoil of a break-up in a live-in relationship.

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