

Is marriage a prescription for happiness? A new poll says yes

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Credit: Caio from Pexels

While marriage can be hard work, a new survey suggests it can also be a powerful elixir for happiness.

Adults who are married report being more satisfied with their lives than those in any other type of relationship, the [Gallup poll](#) showed.

"Any way you analyze those data, we see a fairly large and notable advantage to being married in terms of how people evaluate their life," poll author [Jonathan Rothwell](#), principal economist at Gallup, told *CNN*.

In the survey, which included data spanning from 2009 to 2023, more than 2.5 million American adults were asked how they would rate their life, with zero being the worst rating and 10, the highest. Then, respondents were asked what they thought their happiness level would be in five years.

To be considered thriving, people had to rank their present life as a seven or higher and their future life as an eight or higher.

Over the survey period, married people consistently reported higher happiness levels, ranging from 12% to 24% higher depending on the year.

The gap remained even when researchers adjusted for age, race, ethnicity, gender and education.

Experts offered up a few reasons why [marriage](#) might be integral to happiness.

"At its bare minimum, the concept of commitment implies the experience of being bonded with another. At its very best, it means being bonded with someone who is a consistent, safe and secure home base that will be there for you in the face of any adversities," Boston psychologist [Monica O'Neal](#) told *CNN*.

Things like race, age, gender and education matter, [Bradford Wilcox](#),

director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia, told *CNN*.

"But marriage seems to matter more than those things when it comes to something like this measure of kind of living your best life," he added.

"We're social animals," Wilcox said. "And as Aristotle said, we are hard-wired to connect."

[Ian Kerner](#), a licensed marriage and [family therapist](#), told *CNN* that happiness in marriage might stem from what people expect of it.

"In my practice over the last decade I've noticed a gradual shift from the 'romantic marriage' to the 'companionate marriage,' meaning that people are increasingly choosing spouses at the outset who are more like best friends than passion-partners," Kerner said.

That means many people are choosing partners based on qualities that promote stability and satisfaction, he added.

But Rothwell noted that it is hard to say whether marriage is the actual reason for higher levels of happiness.

It could be that people who have qualities that lead to more [happiness](#) are also those who seek out marriage, the survey noted.

And O'Neal doubts that being in an unhappy marriage would deliver the same benefit.

"I still believe that those who have unhappy marriages are probably less happy than those who are single," she said.

More information: Harvard Health has more on [marriage and health](#).

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