

Divorce reduces chance of new, successful relationship

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After a separation or divorce the chances of marrying or cohabiting again decrease. In particular, a previous marriage or children from a previous relationship, reduce the chances of a new relationship. Moreover, the prospects are slimmer for women compared to men.

A possible explanation for this negative impact of previous experiences might be that people are more cautious following a divorce. Dutch researcher Anne-Rigt Poortman has recently completed her Veni-sponsored study into the consequences of previous relational experiences on a person's further 'relationship career'.

The last few decades have seen considerable changes in the marriage market. An increasing number of people are entering the marriage market for a second or third time following a relationship breakdown. There they meet a wide range of singles; some of them have children from a previous marriage, others have only cohabited and then there are others who have never had a relationship. Poortman investigated the consequences of previous relationships on a person's future relationships.

The chances of a new relationship are particularly small if people have already been married or have children from a previous relationship. Although separated or divorced people still want a partner just as much, they have a stronger preference for less committed types of relationships such as a living-apart-together relationship or unmarried cohabitation. Divorcees in particular would rather not live with a partner, whereas people who have only cohabited in the past still want that. Previous divorce experiences affect the preferences of women more profoundly than those of men.

Divorced men and women quite often have a partner who has also divorced. This remains the case even if the fact that divorced people are older and therefore more likely to meet divorced people

is taken into account. Hence, there appears to be a distinction between the first marriage market for people without a divorce experience and a second marriage market for divorcees. Gender and age are the most important predictors for who crosses this boundary. Women and older people without divorce experiences more frequently have a divorced partner, whereas for divorcees both men and younger people more frequently have a new partner without a relationship history.

Previous experiences also appear to influence the success of the next relationship. Norwegian data reveal that people who have experienced a divorce are more likely to divorce again. Under ex-cohabitants the chance of breaking the relationship is just as high as for people who cohabit for the first time. As soon as former cohabitants marry, the chance of them divorcing is actually slightly lower than for that of people in their first marriage. Future research should determine whether these findings also apply to the Netherlands and especially in other countries where cohabitation is less common.

Source: NWO

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