



2017 divorce statistics and their stories

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Jan 12, 2018 (<http://stories.avvo.com/relationships/divorce/2017-divorce-statistics-stories.html>)

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American family views are changing. Marriage and [divorce rates have declined](http://stories.avvo.com/relationships/divorce/numbers-breakdown-divorce-generation.html) (<http://stories.avvo.com/relationships/divorce/numbers-breakdown-divorce-generation.html>), while acceptance of divorce has increased. Here's what changed in 2017.

Marriage has become less important

Young adults are [delaying marriage](http://www.gallup.com/poll/183515/fewer-young-people-say-relationship.aspx?g_source=%22marriage%22&g_medium=search&g_campaign=tiles) (http://www.gallup.com/poll/183515/fewer-young-people-say-relationship.aspx?g_source=%22marriage%22&g_medium=search&g_campaign=tiles) – or opting not to marry at all. Meanwhile, cohabitation has risen, across all age groups. And Americans are less likely to believe it is important for [couples who want to live together or have a child together](http://www.gallup.com/poll/163802/marriage-importance-dropped.aspx?g_source=marriage+important&g_medium=search&g_campaign=tiles) (http://www.gallup.com/poll/163802/marriage-importance-dropped.aspx?g_source=marriage+important&g_medium=search&g_campaign=tiles)

to get married. In fact, the [2017 Avvo Relationship Study](https://www.avvo.com/research/relationships) (<https://www.avvo.com/research/relationships>) found that only 5 percent say having a child would be a primary reason to wed.

“As US adults come to see marriage differently than in the past, it seems natural that they will view divorce differently too,” [Gallup News](http://news.gallup.com/poll/213677/divorce-rate-dips-moral-acceptability-hits-new-high.aspx) (<http://news.gallup.com/poll/213677/divorce-rate-dips-moral-acceptability-hits-new-high.aspx>) reported in *U.S. Divorce Rate Dips, but Moral Acceptability Hits New High*.

The divorce rate continues to fall

Divorce rates rose to historically high levels in the 1980s and 1990s. In 2015, the rate fell to a 35-year low, according to the [US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/marriage-divorce.htm) (<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/marriage-divorce.htm>), and today it continues to fall.

Which isn't to say that [divorce attorneys](https://www.avvo.com/divorce-separation-lawyer.html) (<https://www.avvo.com/divorce-separation-lawyer.html>) are about to go out of business. The Avvo Relationship Study bears this out, reporting that 7 percent of married respondents are definitely thinking about divorce.

“Nearly four out of 10 first marriages end in divorce,” says divorce and parenting coach Rosalind Sedacca, who founded the [Child-Centered Divorce Network](https://www.childcentereddivorce.com/) (<https://www.childcentereddivorce.com/>). “The divorce rate is lowering ever year, but not because family relationships are improving – it's because fewer couples are marrying.”

Divorce affects one million children annually

“Sixty percent of divorcing couples have children, and over one million children each year experience the [divorce of their parents](https://www.avvo.com/topics/divorce-and-family) (<https://www.avvo.com/topics/divorce-and-family>),” says Sedacca. That does not include the number of children whose unmarried parents part ways.

West Palm Beach family attorney [Abigail Beebe](https://www.avvo.com/attorneys/33401-fl-abigail-beebe-1236709.html) (<https://www.avvo.com/attorneys/33401-fl-abigail-beebe-1236709.html>) of [The Law Office of Abigail Beebe, P.A.](http://www.abeebelaw.com/about/) (<http://www.abeebelaw.com/about/>) sees a trend in rising paternity actions versus divorce cases. “More parents are not getting married at all,” she explains. When they go their separate ways, paternity actions are initiated for the children. “It's essentially divorce, minus [alimony](https://www.avvo.com/topics/alimony) (<https://www.avvo.com/topics/alimony>) and

equitable distribution (<https://www.avvo.com/topics/equitable-distribution-in-divorce>), for couples who have children and are not married.”

Divorce has become morally acceptable

Ironically, even as the rate of divorce falls, the rate of acceptance of divorce rises. Seventy-three percent of US adults say divorce is “morally acceptable (http://www.gallup.com/poll/210542/americans-hold-record-liberal-views-moral-issues.aspx?g_source=%22morally+acceptable%22&g_medium=search&g_campaign=titles),” according to Gallup’s 2017 Values and Beliefs poll, which likely explains why the Avvo Relationship Study found that three-quarters of divorces are uncontested. The Gallup numbers represent the highest rate ever (and 14 percentage points higher than it was in 2001). For the first time, the majority of married adults and “very religious” Americans calls divorce morally acceptable. Acceptance has grown most among those 55 and older.

Gray divorce is on the rise

With increased acceptance comes increased action: the Avvo study found that people 55 and older had the highest percentage of first-time divorces of any age cohort. Divorce attorneys are seeing this trend in their practice. “In the US, the rate of divorce among people 50 and over has doubled since 1990,” says Jonathan E. Fields (<https://www.avvo.com/attorneys/02481-ma-jonathan-fields-1347305.html>), family law attorney and partner at Fields and Dennis, LLP (<http://www.fieldsdennis.com/attorney-fields>) in Boston. The trend, known as “gray divorce (<http://stories.avvo.com/relationships/divorce/ozzy-sharon-part-gray-divorce-trend.html>),” presents a unique set of issues.

“They are closer to retirement (<https://www.avvo.com/topics/divorce-and-retirement-accounts>) or retired, they may have cognitive issues, they may have guardians, or they may be involved in a so-called ‘predatory marriage (http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/suzana-popovicmontag/predatory-marriages_b_16867824.html),’ says Fields. “Additionally, their age may make them likelier to die before they have had a chance to change the beneficiaries on certain assets (life insurance policies, retirement plans) that may inadvertently end up going to their ex-spouse.”

Fields also sees older couples involved in “Medicaid divorces,” that is, people who divorce in order to qualify for state benefits. “And believe it or not,” he says, “this can be achieved by people at


upper middle-class income levels.”

What new marriage and divorce trends will 2018 bring?

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