

# Is Marriage on the Decline?

This article is my cursory review of the latest marriage, divorce, and live births statistics for The Bahamas. Take your time to review this information. You might find some of the figures shocking, while others might dispel some myths about family life in our country.

## DIVORCE

My first observation is that the figures suggest that while the number of divorces is increasing, the number of people getting married is not. Ninety-nine was the lowest number of divorces in The Bahamas in 1975 during a 30-year period (1975-2005). The divorce rate in 1975 was .05 divorces per 1000 population. In 2005 the number of divorces granted was 689. That's nearly 700 percent increase in divorces in 30 years (1975 to 2005). This is compared to a population growth of about 65 percent for the same 30 years. Here is what is more shocking: The divorce rate moved from .05 divorces per 1000 population in 1975 to 2.1 divorces per 1000 population in 2005. This is a significant increase and ranks The Bahamas far above most Caribbean islands, except Puerto Rico, Cuba, and other industrial countries around the world.

Another interesting comparison is the number of divorces filed as compared to the number of divorces granted. Between 2000 and 2006, the divorces each year fluctuated slightly. For example in 2000, 503 divorces were granted as opposed to 461 divorces in 2001. Then the number jumped to 647 in 2004 and 689 in 2005. On the other hand, the number of divorces filed by those who wanted a divorce increased steadily each year between 2002 (556 cases filed) and 2006 (758 cases filed). Perhaps we can conclude that more couples are deciding to end their marriages each year, but the judicial process is not moving as fast to grant the divorces, or perhaps some are changing their minds after they file for divorce. Whatever the reason, this is not a healthy picture for marriage in The Bahamas.

## MARRIAGE

Note carefully that in 2005 there were 689 divorces as compared to 1,731 marriages. **(That is 1 out of 2.5 couples got a divorce or 40%. This is a major increase from 21% or 1 out of 5 in 2000. In other words, for every 10 marriages in The Bahamas, 4 are ending in divorce. That is compared to 5 out of 10 in the United States).** The marriage rate for 2005 was 5.3 marriages per 1000 population. This represents a decline over the past 30 years (from 1975 to 2005) when the rate was 5.6 per 1000 population. However, it was not until 1998 when the Department of Statistics began separating residential marriages from tourist marriages. Hence, if we compare the rates from 1998 to 2005, we will still note the decline. For example: 1998, 5.7; 1999, 7.4; 2003, 6.5; 2004, 6.4; 2005, 6.3. Note carefully that the number of marriages each year from 1998 to 2005 does not show a healthy growth but instead a slight decline. Here are the figures: 1998, 1,684; 1999, 2,204; 2000, 2,366 (the highest year since 1998); 2001, 1,787; 2002, not available; 2003, 2,039; 2004, 2,043; 2005, 1,731. Note the gradual decline in marriages, keeping in mind population growth.

It's noteworthy that thousands of tourists come to our shores to get married each year. It's also important to note that tourist marriages are not included in the marriage or divorce rates as presented above. Let us look at a few of the tourist marriage figures in The Bahamas. In 2005 there were 4,133 tourist marriages as compared to 1,731 residential marriages. This means there was a total of 5,864 marriages in The Bahamas in 2005. In 2000 there were 3,752 tourist marriages and 2,366 residential marriages with a total of 6,118 marriages. Are tourist marriages ending in divorce? Yes, some of them are. Perhaps in the future I will try to find out, if possible, what is the divorce rate for those marriages.

## **LIVE BIRTHS OUT OF WEDLOCK**

We are all alarmed about the number of babies being born out of wedlock in The Bahamas. Every day we see young unwed pregnant mothers on our streets. Many have to leave school, ruining their plans for life. However, a look at the actual figures may startle you. I noted with interest that 1985 was the highest year for illegitimate births in The Bahamas between 1975 and 2005. There were 3,380 babies born out of wedlock that year as compared to 2,027 in 2005. Between the years 1980 and 1985 were our worst years in the history of The Bahamas for the number of babies born out of wedlock. Since 1985, no other year has passed the 3000-birth mark. Perhaps we can attribute this to the terrible drug usage and sale at the time. We can also construe that since 1985 there has been greater education about contraception or more illegal abortions.

We also hear stories of so many girls under the age of 14 giving birth. Here's another startling revelation. The year with the highest number of babies born out of wedlock by mothers ages 10 to 14 was in 1984 with 56 births. The following years also had double digits birthrate for unwed mothers ages 10-14: 1977, 22; 1979, 19; 1981, 17; 1983 25; 1987, 19; 1988, 21; 1993, 29. From 2001 the rates for this age group has been in the single digits: 2001, 5; 2003, 9; 2004, 8; 2005, 8. What a surprising decrease!

The age groups with the greatest number of illegitimate births are ages 20 to 24 and 15 to 19. We are all concerned about teenage births out of wedlock, but take a close look at these figures. In 1985 for mothers ages 20 to 24, there were 1,178 babies born out of wedlock compared to 789 for ages 15 to 19. Fifteen years late, in 2000, for mothers ages 20 to 24, there were 844 babies born out of wedlock compared to 519 for ages 15 to 19. In 2005 for mothers ages 20 to 24, there were 883 babies born out of wedlock compared to 508 for ages 15 to 19. Both of these figures are alarming because they represent the crucial formative years of women. It is a time to concentrate on finishing basic education and choosing careers. Note that the total number of babies born out of wedlock for 2000 was 2,584; 2003, 2,835, and in 2005, 2,706.

Here's some good news. More married women than unmarried women ages 25 to 44 are having children. Let's look at a few figures. In 2000 there were 1,581 births to married mothers, ages 25 to 44 compared to 1,192. In 2004 there were 1,608 births to married mothers, ages 25 to 44 compared to 1,119. In 2005 there were 1,731 births to married mothers, ages 25 to 44 compared to 1,302.

## **AFTER AGE FORTY-FIVE**

Are mothers over the age of 45 having babies in The Bahamas? Certainly! Here are a few figures. In 2000 there were 8 babies born to unmarried mothers between ages 45 and 49 as compared to 2 babies born to married mothers. In 2005 there were 2 babies born to unmarried mothers between ages 45 and 49 as compared to 2 babies born to married mothers.

## **PROMISCUOUS BEHAVIOR**

I hope that these facts will help you to understand better the direction in which our families are heading. However, these figures do not fully reveal all teenage sexual promiscuous behavior. They only tell us about pregnancy rates and not how many are having sex out of marriage. However, I have reason to believe that sexual promiscuity has increased significantly over the past 30 years. Over the past 10 years, I have conducted short surveys to ascertain sexual behavior among Christian teenagers. The results always show that at least 50 percent of the Christian teenagers completing the survey were sexually active. My research also indicates that homosexual practices are increasing

among Christian teenagers and young adults and anal sex in on the rise – especially among so-called Christians. The use of contraceptives is at an all-time high among unmarried teenagers, and the horror stories about abortions are increasing. Let us wait and see what the 2006 and 2007 statistics will reveal to us.

Our young people are being exposed to sexually explicit materials more than ever before. More and more young people, especially our females, are contracting the HIV virus. These are terrible days; however, I believe that with education and training we can save our families. **Barrington Brennen is a marriage and family therapist. Send your question or comments to P.O. Box N-896, Nassau, The Bahamas; or email [question@soencouragement.org](mailto:question@soencouragement.org), or call 242 323 8772, or visit the website [www.soencouragement.org](http://www.soencouragement.org)**