

# Marriage and Divorce in the Bahamas

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This article is a brief comparative statistical overview of marriage and divorce in The Bahamas. Each year in The Bahamas more than two thousand resident couples get married, and about six to seven thousand tourist (non-resident) couples come to The Bahamas to be joined in Holy Matrimony. The Bahamas is one of the hot spots internationally for tourist weddings and honeymooners. Over one hundred thousand newly weds come to The Bahamas each year for their honeymoon. In 2002, 112,000 honeymooners visited our golden shores to enjoy the first days of their marriage in our sun, sand, and sea.

At many of the large hotels, wedding bells can be heard each week. Some of the hotels have more than 100 couples getting married in a given month. It has become a lucrative business for local ministers of the gospel and others who conduct these weddings as they often take home a healthy pocket full of contributions for their services. It is impossible for us to measure statistically how these non-resident couples make it in their marriage. However, let us look closely at our local marriages and compare them with other countries. It is important to note that the statistics we are about to share do not give the comprehensive picture of marriage and divorce. We know that statistically five out of ten couples in North American get divorced. However, like The Bahamas, that figure does not measure those couples who separate on their own or are emotionally divorced. It seems that in The Bahamas many couples get married but not many get legally divorced. In Jamaica, many couples live together for a very long time and are reluctant to get married. Therefore it is important to understand that I will be presenting the actual statistics of The Bahamas and various countries. Let them speak for themselves.

## **MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE STATISTICS**

Statistically, one out of every five marriages (1/5) in The Bahamas end up in divorce. There were 2,366 resident marriages and 503 divorces in 2000. That is 25 percent of resident marriages in The Bahamas end up in divorce each year. The crude divorce rate (that is how many divorces per 1000 population) for 2000 was 1.5 divorces per 1000 population. In 2001 marriages and divorces went down significantly in The Bahamas. There were only 1,700 marriages and 350 divorces. The crude divorce rate for 2001 of 1.0 per 1000 population, was the lowest since 1984. Generally, The Bahamas has maintained a crude divorce rate of 1.5 and a 25 percent divorce rate since 1984. In the United States the crude divorce rate is 4.95 per 1000 population.

For years I boasted that the divorce rate in The Bahamas was very good because I compared it with the United States where more than five out of ten marriages end up in divorce. That is about 50 percent of the marriages. However, when I began comparing other countries with The Bahamas, I discovered that statistically, we were not in an admirable marriage position. For example, in Jamaica in 2001, there were 22,301 marriages and only 1,691 divorces. That means that only one out of thirteen marriages (1/13) ended in divorce, while in The Bahamas it was one out of five (1/5) marriages. Jamaica's crude divorce rate is only 0.38 per 1000 population as compared to The Bahamas' 1.5. After looking over the crude divorce rates of many countries, it was obvious only a few were higher than The Bahamas. The following rates are based on the 2000 statistics:

Sri Lanka 0.15, perhaps the lowest in the world; Brazil 0.26, Italy 0.27, Mexico 0.33, Mongolia, 0.37, Chile 0.38 Jamaica 0.38, 0.39 El Salvador 0.41, Ecuador 0.42, Mauritius 0.47 Thailand 0.58 Syria 0.65, Panama 0.68, Greece 0.76, China 0.79, Singapore 0.80, Albania 0.83, Portugal 0.88, Korea 0.88, Trinidad 0.97, Guadeloupe 1.18, Barbados 1.21, Bahamas 1.6, Finland 1.85, Canada

2.46, Australia 2.52, New Zealand 2.63, Denmark 2.81, United Kingdom 3.08, Russia 3.36, Puerto Rico 4.47, US 4.95

Note carefully where The Bahamas stands. It is among one of the top twenty countries with the highest divorce rate in the world. It is also alarming to look at the percentage of marriages that end in divorce each year:

Cuba 75%, Belarus 68%, Russian Federation 65%, Sweden 64%, United Kingdom 53%, United States 49%, Canada 45%, Bahamas 25%, Turkmenistan 18%, Italy 12%, Albania 7%, Macedonia 5%.

Cuba has the highest divorce rate in the world with 75% of its marriages each year ending in divorce. This is said to be due to the large migration population and the little work available that pressures families to split up.

### **WHO GETS MARRIED IN THE BAHAMAS?**

I selected the year 2000 as a sample year to illustrate the statistical dynamics in Bahamian marriages. As already mentioned, there were 2,366 marriages in 2000. The most popular months in 2000, and most years, for weddings in the Bahamas are December (204) and January (215); with June (168) and July (175) coming next. September is the least popular month for weddings in the Bahamas (99).

The age of the brides and grooms were equally fascinating. There were four couples with a great disparity in age who got married in 2000. There were two couples where the bride was between the ages of 15-19 and the groom was 60 or older. There were two couples where the groom was between the ages 15-19 and the bride was over 60 years old. The greatest age group of people getting married (238), was where the bride was between ages 30-34 and the groom was also between ages 30-34. Very few couples got married where both partners were over the age of 60 (24).

Based on the 2000 statistics, couples married for 10-14 years (121) and over 20 years (123) had the highest divorce rate. Couples married under 5 years seldom divorced.

Children seem to play a big factor in divorce decisions. Couples with zero to three children were more likely to get divorced than couples with a great number of children. Look at the statistical breakdown from the 503 divorces in 2000. No children, 172 divorces; one child, 133 divorces; 2 children, 110 divorces; three children, 61 divorces; four children 16 divorces; six children, 1 divorce; eight to nine children, no divorce; ten or more children, four divorces. Is this saying that there is a better guarantee of staying together in marriage if you have lots of children. I hope not. Remember, that statistics do not measure the level of happiness and contentment in marriage.

### **STRENGTHEN MARRIAGES**

We must take the time to strengthen our marriages in The Bahamas. As far as marriage and family life are concerned, we are not in a healthy position globally. Couples must find more ways of developing long-lasting loving, and mutually supportive relationships. Churches and other institutions need to provide more programs to strengthen marriages. **Barrington H. Brennen is a marriage and family therapist. You can reach him at 323 8772 or email [info@soencouragement.org](mailto:info@soencouragement.org), or write SOE P.O. Box N-896, Nassau, Bahamas. Visit the web site [www.soencouragement.org](http://www.soencouragement.org)**