

Marry or mingle: The risks and rewards of being single

February 14 2023, by Simon Sherry



Marriage has traditionally been touted as the goal to which everyone should strive, but remaining single is increasingly common. Credit: Pexels/Freestocksorg

For many people, Valentine's Day can be an isolating time. The dominant Valentine's Day narrative insists that to be in a romantic relationship is to be happy. And for many single people, the day can come with pressure to find a partner.

The sensationalization of romance on Valentine's Day puts pressure on

people. Singles wonder whether there is something "wrong" with being single (or with them for being single). Couples wonder whether their relationship measures up to the ideal and [often break up](#) if they find it doesn't.

Marriage has traditionally been touted as a goal to which everyone should strive, but that norm is changing. In past decades, the stigma caused by [societal disapproval](#) was a driving motive to "find love." But those [pressures](#) have slowly decreased. It is [more normal than ever](#) to remain single or live in a common-law [relationship](#).

More than [40 percent of Canadians are single](#) and the number of single-person households is increasing. In 2021, Canada had around just as many [single-person households](#) (29.3 percent) as it did couple-only households (25.6 percent) and family households (25.3 percent).

Still, the expectation remains that people should be actively trying to find a partner. Valentine's Day reinforces that. Rest assured, there is nothing wrong with remaining or becoming single—in fact, there can be benefits.

The [stereotype](#) is that singles are lonely, miserable, and unhealthy. That's just not true. Single people tend to be more social, active and independent.

The rewards of being single

Being single increases connectedness: Single people are not necessarily isolated. In general, singles often have stronger social networks. Their networks tend to be more expansive, with singles more actively involved in their broader community. Moreover, not only do they have more connections, but single people are more likely to [maintain the social relationships](#) they have by reaching out and

depending on connections.

Marriage can be more insular. When you have a partner, you are less likely to look outwards for support or rewarding social interactions because you already have a close relationship at home to depend on.

Being single increases physical fitness: Single people are more likely to take better care of their physical health. Singles spend [more time exercising](#) than [married people](#) and consequently have, on average, a [lower BMI](#). Single people also report similar levels of overall [well-being](#), [self-esteem](#) and [life satisfaction](#) in comparison to couples.

Being single increases independence: Single people are usually more self-sufficient. They are more likely to experience [personal and psychological growth and development](#) than married people, likely because they have to be more autonomous.

The risks of being single

However, it's not all roses. There are also some detriments associated with being single. In general, married people [live longer](#). There's an ongoing debate about whether this means healthier people are more likely to get married (the marriage selection effect) or that marriage provides a protective environment (the [marriage protection effect](#)).

It's likely that both contribute to the statistics. Research suggests that individuals with poor [physical](#), [psychological](#) and [emotional](#) health are both less likely to marry and more likely to die at an earlier age.

Single people, while more physically active, have [poorer diets](#) than married people. Married people also have built-in social and [emotional support](#) in each other, are less likely to participate in [risky behaviors](#) (such as [problem drinking](#)) and have [better economic conditions](#)

compared to single people.

However, it is important to note that not all [romantic relationships](#) are satisfying. If romantic relationships are loving and supportive, then there are physical and psychological benefits. But when marriages and long-term relationships dissolve, the physical, mental, emotional and economic stress can have significant negative effects on health.

Similarly, if romantic relationships are of [poor quality](#), the corresponding stress can affect a person's well-being. And there's no evidence to suggest that staying in a poor relationship is beneficial.

Altogether, research supports a single message: social connection is important. The number and quality of our [social relationships](#) affect our mental and physical health, behavior and mortality risk. Relationships, whether romantic, familial, friendships or otherwise, keep you healthy. Love *should* be celebrated.

Let's refocus Valentine's Day less on romance and more on cultivating and celebrating having happy lives full of loving relationships in whatever form they take.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Marry or mingle: The risks and rewards of being single (2023, February 14) retrieved 13 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-02-mingle-rewards.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.