CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY
and relational wellbeing

New Australian research by ANDREW CAMERON, JEREMY HALCROW and TRACY GORDON shows that both marriage and Christian belief are linked to more secure and intimate relationships.

Are defacto relationships harmful to us? Do Christians have better love lives?

Newtown, October 2005
Social Issues Executive, Anglican Diocese of Sydney
1. Introduction

There is an expectation within Christian thought that the knowledge of God as given through Jesus Christ will have a positive effect on relationships, particularly as expressed within marriage. This view relies on a few theological claims:

1. Marriage is designed and given by God to be humanity’s most enduring and fundamental expression of relational intimacy.
2. For the best experience of such intimacy, marriage partners model God’s own ‘faithfulness’, committing to the good of the other for as long as he or she is alive.
3. God changes Christian believers from people who live for themselves, into people who wholeheartedly attend to the needs and concerns of their spouse, generally enabling their relationships to become more satisfying and secure.
4. But Christians, like all people, are implicated in a ‘fallen’ world which pays little or no attention to God and often actively opposes him (‘sin’). Christians are not immune from the effects of sin. They still sin, and are affected by the sin of others.

Given this theological account, we were interested to interrogate the WSS data for any associations between wellbeing and security, Christian spirituality, and married and de facto relationships.

- Does anything in the data suggest that marriage is a ‘better’ form of life for relational intimacy than cohabitation? Our first theological claim would lead us to predict that it is.
- Is the security, intimacy and harmony of a current relationship negatively affected by increases in the number of partners a person has had? Our second theological claim would lead us to predict such an effect.
- Is there any positive association between Christian spirituality and the wellbeing of marriages? Our third theological claim would lead us to expect so.
- (We will deploy the explanatory power of our fourth theological claim toward the end of the paper.)

Unfortunately, it appears that little thought and research concerning these matters has been conducted in an Australian context, particularly in relation to (b) and (c).

a) Wellbeing and marital status

Cohabitation. A large body of literature points to poorer relational outcomes for cohabitation than for marriage. Cohabitors are more likely to undergo dissolution of the relationship whether or not they eventually marry, and report being both less committed to and less happy with their relationships (Brines and Joyner 1999; de Vaus et al. 2003a; de Vaus et al. 2003b; Waite and Joyner 2001; Weston et al. 2005).

According to Waite and Joyner (2001), cohabiters report lower relationship quality than do married couples, but only if they do not have plans to marry. Even so, research in Australia and elsewhere has found that those who cohabit before marriage have an elevated risk of divorce. In surveys of 6483 respondents ‘direct marriages’ (where cohabitation is not the route to marriage) are significantly more likely to survive than ‘indirect marriages’ (de Vaus et al. 2003a).

It is not known what intervening variables might account for these strong associations. It does seem that cohabiters are more likely to have experienced economic hardship, ‘permissive’ parenting and/or parental divorce during childhood, or to have experienced early sexual debut and sometimes premarital pregnancy, or to have poor interpersonal skills. These socio-demographic characteristics increase the risk of relational dissolution (Glezer et al. 1992; Weston et al. 2005).

Brines and Joyner (1999) note very different attitudes seen in cohabiters as compared to married couples. They characterise cohabiters as more ‘individualist’ and married couples as more ‘collectivist’ in orientation. In their analysis, cohabitation promises greater flexibility and experimentation, but underestimates the way some operating principle is needed to mediate the tension between the two people’s interests. Whereas marriage enables husbands and wives to manage these interests, the uncertain and implied contracts of cohabitation intensify tension and necessitate a ‘bargaining principle’ that is difficult to adhere to long-term.

2. Background

In the following subsections, we will briefly review recent literature on related research. The subsequent sections (‘The present study’ and ‘Observations about age and gender’) describe the results of the interrogation of WSS data. The penultimate sections (‘Discussion’, ‘Sociology’s relationship to theology’, and ‘Future directions’) summarise our findings and make suggestions for future research. The final section (‘Concluding comments’) offers a moment of Christian self-understanding to counter some misunderstandings that will inevitably arise from this paper.
Marriage. On the other hand marriage (and staying married to the same person) has been associated with numerous positive outcomes, including better mental health, greater overall happiness and greater physical and emotional sexual pleasure than is experienced by cohabiters (Waite and Joyner 2001; Waite and Lehrer 2003). According to one analysis, married couples’ greater commitment gives them more incentive to develop relationship-specific capital, including learned skills that make a particular relationship better but which are generally less useful in alternative relationships (England and Farkas, cited in Waite and Joyner 2001).

Of course the study of marriage is extremely complex. Waite and Lehrer (2003) note that marriages differ according to the education, earnings, religion and cultural background of each of the partners, and the homogamy of their match on these characteristics. (Measures of homogamy describe how similar each member of the couple is to the other.) Moreover pointing to the conflicted political terrain in which this mainly U.S.-based research proceeds, Huston and Melz (2004) warn of why we should not straightforwardly assume that the wellbeing produced by marriage is due to marriage. Social research needs to investigate any selection bias into and out of marriage; whether beneficial effects are limited or not to ‘good’ marriages and whether ‘good’ other-lifestyles have similar beneficial effects; whether the good effects of marriage hold across the demographic spectrum; and whether the good effects are actually ‘important’ (as opposed to merely statistically ‘significant’). These researchers found that people of a certain character profile (calm, trusting, affectionate, dependable) experience better marriages and lower divorce rates. (They use the curious term ‘good hearted’ for these people.)

The previous two paragraphs hint at the difficult political environment within which research on marriage and family proceeds. Amato (2004) adopts a mediating position when he describes ‘marital decline’ and ‘marital resilience’ perspectives—ideological approaches to the study of marriage that correlate roughly to a transformation from the nineteenth-century’s view of marriage primarily an ‘institutional’, to the twentieth century view of it primarily as ‘companionate’. The two perspectives act as perceptual gestalts that organise observations in different and equally plausible ways. (‘Marital decline’ tells of a decrease in marriage, of eroded adherence to its constitutive principles, and of correlative societal dysfunction. ‘Marital resilience’ tells of hidden familial dysfunction in years past, of human adaptability to various family forms, and of societal dysfunction attributable elsewhere.) However our common commitment to the wellbeing of children makes it reasonable, he thinks, for social institutions (including the state) to seek for an increase in the proportion of children raised by married parents with satisfying and stable marriages (rather than merely seeking decreases in the rate of divorce, which will not necessarily benefit children).

b) General approaches to the study of religion

The previous section gives some hint of the complexity of the study of both cohabitation and marriage. To seek to understand the role that religion plays in such relationships introduces further complexity. But antecedent to this complexity is an (increasingly acknowledged) prejudice against the serious study of religion by psychology and sociology.

Hill et al. (2000) are ‘surprised’ by psychology’s neglect of religious experience in the US populace, given the pervasive and persistent nature of religious belief, practice, and experience there. Likewise in sociology, “most social scientists continue to display a substantial bias against those who take their religion very seriously (‘fundamentalist’ being a deadly epithet)” (Dollahite 2002; quoting Stark and Finke 2000).

The prejudice against examining the link between spiritual belief and wellbeing appears to be changing on the U.S. scene. Weaver et al. (2002) reviewed quantitative research studies published between 1995 and 1999 in six major marriage and family academic journals, and found that 114 of 864 included a measure of religion, a higher percentage than that found in previous reviews of such research in psychological and psychiatric journals. They concluded that marriage and family research journals were becoming more sensitive to the role of religious factors than in related disciplines. For Wright (1998), many authors now share an approach to modern committed relationship that is overtly grounded in the ‘spiritual’, with such dimensions taking root in the social mainstream. For example, many marriage and family therapists now judge religious beliefs and behaviors to be assets for fostering therapeutic change (Butler et al. 2002).

Similar observations about the paucity of serious attention to the nature and effects of religious belief could be made of the Australia scene. We could find little relevant research in this area, and an important Australian Government report into marital health pointed to a variety of U.S. studies to show the beneficial effects of religious commitment for marriage, but was only able to cite two tangentially relevant Australian studies (Australian Parliament, 1998). Yet our cultural context, while different in many respects to that of the U.S., still includes high levels of religions involvement: over 30% of WSS respondents professed to ‘strong’ Christian beliefs (see below).

The team responsible for the WSS database has conducted a ground-breaking general overview of the links between spirituality and general wellbeing and security (Kaldor et al. 2004). They found wide-ranging positive connections between religious adherence and wellbeing, although a negative

---

**Overview of our research**

This paper reports on an interrogation of data from the 2002-03 Wellbeing and Security Survey (WSS). The WSS was conducted by researchers from Edith Cowan University, Deakin University, ANGLICARE (Diocese of Sydney) and NCLS Research, and is based on a 352 question survey instrument completed in 2002 and 2003 by 1517 randomly sampled Australians.¹

We will engage throughout the paper in a few moments of Christian theology, which we realise may seem odd to some readers. Yet we feel they are necessary, in order to be transparent about our perspective and our motivations. We also hope that the paper will propel some deeper reflection about the sociological study of religion in Australia, and we will comment on that relationship from the theologian’s perspective. Our first moment of theology seeks to explain the impetus for our research.
correlation was found between alternative spiritual beliefs and general security. Their results provided an important impetus for our own research.

What dimensions should be considered in the study of religion, though, are yet to be determined. Religion includes affiliation, theological beliefs, practices, and ‘religiosity’. Religiosity (degree of involvement) may include attendance at meetings, family observance, individual devotion, and salience in a person’s life (Waite and Lehrer 2003). “The literature contains conflicting findings regarding which of these aspects is most important, and the effects associated with the various dimensions are not always consistent. Research seeking to clarify these differences and to identify patterns among the discrepant results would be desirable” (p. 270).

In our discussion below (‘Sociology’s relationship to theology’), we will return to some further difficulties for social science in its encounter with religion. Suffice to say for the moment, with Waite and Lehrer (2003), that a richer set of controls for religion is needed and that “research seeking to improve our understanding of the complex relationships between religion and marriage would be especially valuable” (p. 270). Such attempts at further understanding are proceeding, in the U.S. at least.

c) Studies on the relationship between religion, marriage and cohabitation.

Marriage. Bellah et al. (1996) famously held up evangelical Protestant couples as paradigm examples of a ‘traditional’ conception of marriage resting on a biblical concept of selfless love, as opposed to a ‘therapeutic’ conception of marriage built upon the less stable foundation of individualism, personal growth, and mutual need-gratification; but the stark polarity of this presentation has been critiqued as a form of overstatement (Wright 1998). On the other hand, Herb Goldberg is representative of the view that traditional approaches to marriage are emotionally deleterious:

> While the three r’s of role, ritual and religion seem on the surface to be forces that sustain the man-woman relationship and the traditional family, actually they disguise its fundamental emptiness and the tension, anger and resistance that inevitably build up in it. (Cited in Thornton 1989, p. 218.)

But a substantial literature associates religion with good marriages:

- When Robinson and Blanton conducted in-depth interviews of fifteen couples who had been married for more than thirty years (1993), they found intimacy, commitment, communication, congruence and religious faith to be key elements of enduring marriages. Religious faith was cited by a majority of the couples as being an important component of their marriage, providing social support, and encouraging commitment by highly valuing the marriage bond. (Of course the older age of these couples, and the attendant likelihood of increased religiosity, is difficult to control for since no younger cohorts can have similarly long marriages.)
- In a U.S. questionnaire survey of 97 couples (who were primarily young and Caucasian), Mahoney et al. (1999) “presented data showing that various aspects of marital functioning, including marital satisfaction, conflict frequency, and use of verbal aggression, are predicted by joint religious activities (e.g., praying together) and by perceptions of the sacred qualities of one’s marriage, even after controlling for individual religiousness and religious homogamy” (as summarised by Bradbury et al. 2000, p. 972).
- The National Survey of Families and Households (Wave 1, 1987-88) used a U.S. national sample of 13,007 from a cross-section of 9,637 households, oversampling for minorities. Lehrer (2004a) notes that according to this data, “by far the most unstable homogamous unions are those involving two religiously unaffiliated partners” (p. 709. See also Call and Heaton 1997.)
- Survey results from over 4,500 U.S. married couples find no single dimension of religiosity to adequately describe the effect of religious experience on marital stability, but the frequency of religious attendance had the greatest positive impact on marital stability (Call and Heaton 1997). Where both spouses attended church regularly, the couple had the lowest risk of divorce. These authors also note other studies connecting religion to increased emotional intimacy, marital satisfaction, and stability. (Some of these studies may be susceptible to the difficulties in measuring ‘religion’, noted above.)
- Several studies have found associations between prayer and various positive outcomes in marital relationships (Butler et al. 2002).
There are, however, difficulties with this research. For example Lehrer (2004a) notes that her study was “hampered by the fact that the survey only included a measure of religiosity as of the interview date, a variable that is endogenous to most outcomes of interest” (p. 709). More significantly, much of the research on religious influences upon marital unions combines intra- and interfaith couples and ignores the degree of homogamy or heterogamy in the relationship. Results therefore show a mixture of positive and negative effects that allows no clear interpretation.

There have been negative results, too. Although some data suggests an association between higher religiosity and better mental health outcomes, associations have also been found between men who believe in biblical authority more strongly than their partners, and the likelihood of their perpetrating domestic violence (Waite and Lehrer 2003).

There has also been Australian research into a group of believers labeled the ‘unreflectively religious’ by Kaldor et al. (2004). This group is more likely to affirm statements about the authority of the Bible and the Church, and statements such as ‘we should not question just believe’. On many wellbeing outcomes, the unreflectively religious do worse than those who are simply ‘orthodox’ in belief.

Cohabitation. A general consensus has emerged that cohabitation rates are negatively associated with religious involvement (Lehrer 2004a; Lehrer 2004b; Weston et al. 2005; Williams and Lawler 2001).

3. The present study

Given the complexities noted above in the general study of cohabitation, marriage and religion, our own study is only preliminary. In view of the paucity of any similar data on the Australian scene, our analysis should function as an impetus for more detailed Australian research. This section will outline (a) how we gauged Christian spirituality; (b) how we measured relational wellbeing; and what we found for relational wellbeing according to (c) marital status; (d) partnering history and (e) Christian spirituality.

a) Gauging ‘Christian spirituality’

One intention of the WSS project was to assess trends in Australian spirituality and to evaluate the relationship between it and wellbeing. The 352 questions of the WSS survey instrument included questions specific to Christian spirituality. To gauge Christian spirituality, we looked at three measures in the instrument that concerned Christian belief, Bible belief, and religious service attendance:

- Christian belief: The scale used was based on work developed by Peter Kaldor (2004). Kaldor used factor analysis to group items together and then derived this scale. There are six items altogether: Q46, Q47, Q48b (“Jesus’ resurrection from the dead was an actual historical event.”), Q48c (“Jesus Christ was God in a full sense.”), Q48m, and Q96a. The items were adjusted so that they each make an equal contribution to the scale. Response options to questions were (mostly) from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’.

Strong Christian believers were those who strongly affirmed these key Christian doctrines, on a combined scale derived from these six questions.

- Bible belief: “To question the authority of the Bible is wrong” Response options from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’.

Although ‘Bible belief’ could easily be included with ‘Christian belief’, we thought it interesting to differentiate strong Bible believers into a subgroup of Christian believers, since strong Bible belief is sometimes equated with the stereotypically dysfunctional ‘fundamentalist’, in a way that other Christians are not.

- Religious service attendance: “Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days?” Response options from ‘never, practically never’ to ‘more than once a week’.

As non-Christian religious groups form a tiny proportion of the Australian population it is not possible to use a general survey such as the WSS to look separately at even large non-Christian faith groups such as Muslims, Jews, and Buddhists. Among frequent attenders at religious services in the WSS, Buddhists comprise 0.4%, Hindus 0.4%, Muslims 2.2% and Jews 2.2%, a total of 5.2% for the four major non-Christian religions. The vast majority of frequent attendees at religious services identify with a Christian denomination. Given this small proportion, we therefore equated ‘religious service’ attendance with Christian church attendance.

It turns out that those who profess to overtly Christian spirituality constitute a significant proportion of the Australian population. They can be gauged as follows:

- 11.6% of respondents indicated they had very strong Christian beliefs. A further 21.6% indicated they strongly believed these doctrines.
- 5.3% of respondents strongly agree with the authority of the Bible, while 11% agree.
- 13.1% of respondents said they attend church (‘religious services’) weekly, and a further 5.5% said they attend at least monthly.

These three measures enable different ‘snapshots’ of Christian spirituality. They are measures of ‘religiosity’, although not on all the dimensions of religiosity that Waite and Lehrer suggest for future research (2003). The first two measures are analogous to Williams and Lawler’s ‘personal behaviours subscale’ for religiosity, and the third to their ‘church involvement subscale’ for religiosity (2001).

Clearly, it is a group that admits of some complexity. For example, most Protestant evangelicals would strongly affirm the authority of the Bible, but would be suspicious of the authority of the Church (also the subject of a WSS question, which will not be considered here). Therefore rather than
simply defining some total percentage of respondents to be Christian believers, we cross-tabulated the various indicators of relational wellbeing and security with these various indicators of Christian spirituality.

**b) Measuring relational wellbeing**

The WSS provides measures for the following four aspects of relational wellbeing:

- **Security** (& Insecurity):
  "How likely is it that your relationship will continue until death?"
  Response options from 'unlikely' to 'certain'

- **Intimacy** (& Distance):
  "How intimate is your relationship?"
  Response options from 'cold' to 'very warm'

- **Harmony** (& Discord):
  "How well does your partner treat you?"
  Response options from 'badly' to 'very well'

The WSS also included one further question which can be used to examine the health and wellbeing of a relationship:

- **Conflict over gender roles**
  "How often do you experience conflict with your partner over roles in your relationship?"
  Response options from 'never' to 'always'.

**c) Relational wellbeing and marital status**

Returning, then, to the first question posed in the introduction to this paper: is there evidence that marriage forms a better basis for a healthier relationship than cohabitation?

A sense of security is an important measure of the health or wellbeing of a relationship. Significantly, marriage gives a greater level of security than is experienced in de facto partnerships. De facto relationships were more strongly associated with insecurity in the relationship than other factors such as health, poverty and work stress (see appendix; Cramers V = 0.200; P < 0.001). Just under 60% of married people (including those remarried after death or divorce) feel highly confident that their relationship will last compared to 71.3% of people in their fourth relationship. (Number of past partners cross-tabulated with Security/Insecurity relational wellbeing scale: Gamma = 0.09; p < 0.001)

**Table 1: Likelihood marriage will continue until death compared to experience of cohabitation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unlikely</th>
<th>Neutral or unsure</th>
<th>Likely</th>
<th>Very likely</th>
<th>Certain</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not experienced a de facto relationship</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>59.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced a de facto relationship</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the link between intimacy and marital status is much weaker (Cramers V = 0.114; p < 0.01), we do see that 56% of married people have a very warm relationship compared to 49.6% of de facts. That said, at the other end of the scale the difference is marginally in favour of de facts (17.3% of married people have a cold relationship compared to 16.5% of de facts).

So in conclusion, it appears that marriage enhances a sense of security and harmony with one's partner, as well as providing couples with some marginal advantages when it comes to intimacy.

**d) Relational wellbeing and partnering history**

The second question we posed asked whether security, intimacy and harmony are affected by the number of relationships experienced in the past. That is, do people who have experienced past relationships, either de-facto or married, have lower levels of security, intimacy, and/or harmony with their current partner? We investigated the database to determine whether there were any associations between 'partnering history' and current experience of relational wellbeing.

Significantly, we found a moderately strong association between higher numbers of past partners and higher levels of insecurity in a current relationship. For example, only 2% of married people in the first relationship think it ‘unlikely’ their marriage will last compared to 15.4% of people in their fourth relationship. (Number of past partners cross-tabulated with Security/Insecurity relational wellbeing scale: Gamma = 0.209; P < 0.001)

In fact, we found an even stronger association between insecurity and past experience of a de facto relationship (see Table 1; Cramers V = 0.239; p < 0.001)

Likewise, when examining intimacy we found that 56.5% of those who have never experienced a de-facto relationship now have a very warm relationship, compared to only 45.7% people who once had a de-facto relationship. Nearly 1 in 10 people who once had a de-facto relationship now have a cold marriage, compared to 5.8% of those who have never experienced a de-facto relationship (see Table 2). (Intimacy/distance relational wellbeing scale cross-tabulated against de facto relationship: Cramers V = 0.101; p < 0.05).
The distance of current relationships may also increase the more partners a person has had. (Number of past partners question cross-tabulated against intimacy/distance relational wellbeing scale: Gamma = 0.40; p < 0.01). This analysis is consistent with our results for past experience of a de facto relationship. More than 57% of people in their first relationship report that relationship is warm or very warm, but in contrast, only 45% of people in their second relationship, 43% of people in their third relationship, and 32% of people who had more than four relationships, report their current relationship as warm or very warm. At the other end of the spectrum, only 5% of people in their first relationship say it is cold, whereas this problem increases to 8.2% amongst those in their second relationship with about 12% of people who have had three, four or more relationships reporting their current relationship as cold.

We found no statistically significant association between the harmony/discord scale and people's past partnering history.

So in summary, it does appear that having experienced a de facto relationship or marriage in the past is associated with lack of intimacy and greater insecurity in a current relationship.

**e) Christian belief and marital intimacy and security**

Lastly, we turn to the third question posed in the introduction: is there a positive association between Christian spirituality and the wellbeing of marriages? In order to answer this question, we compared the relational wellbeing of those who profess Christian spirituality (in terms of Christian belief, Bible belief and church attendance) to those who do not.

Christians are less likely to be divorced, and more likely to be married than cohabiting. (This finding is unsurprising, and supports the reputation Christians have of being ‘pro-marriage’.) Of all WSS respondents, 12.5% have experienced a divorce, while 6.6% of respondents with a strong belief in the Bible have experienced a divorce (Cramers V = 0.114; p < 0.001). In the larger group consisting of all who profess strong Christian belief, 8.6% have experienced a divorce (Cramers V = 0.113; p < 0.001). Similar results can be found when frequency attendance at a religious service is cross-tabulated with current relationship status (see Table 3, below; Cramers V = 0.151; p < 0.001. Totals at the end of each row are less than 100% because we have not shown all forms of current relationship status.)

Of course none of these observations prove that being a Christian causes a strong marriage. It is possible and perhaps even likely that formerly strong Christian believers experience uncertainty about their faith after a divorce, or that otherwise frequent churchgoers stop going to church after a marital separation and divorce. Similarly, it is possible and perhaps even likely that churches feel unwelcoming for divorcees and people who are in de facto relationships, resulting in a lower representation of those people there. Nevertheless these possibilities do not alter the fact that ‘committed Christians’ within the WSS are more likely to be in their first marriage, and less likely to have experienced a de facto relationship, than the general population. This fact clearly constitutes an important piece of evidence in a complex wider puzzle.

Turning now to the connection between Christian spirituality and the various measures of relational wellbeing, we found a moderately strong connection between Christian belief and the security of the marriage (see Table 4; Gamma 0.333; p < 0.005).
Secondly, Christian belief is also linked to higher levels of intimacy with the current partner: 2% of very strong Christian believers in the sample have a cold or lukewarm marriage compared to 14.2% of people with low or no Christian belief, and 98% of very strong Christians believers have a warm or very warm marriages compared to 85.8% of people with low or no belief (see Table 5; Gamma = 0.230; p < 0.05).

Lastly, in terms of discord/harmony, again we found a link between Christian spirituality and positive wellbeing outcomes: 62.6% of strong Christian believers report that their partner treats them very well, compared to 5.5% of people with no or low Christian belief (Gamma = 0.0; p < 0.0). While the correlation is weak, it is important to view it alongside another wellbeing measure that is related to the level of harmony/discord in the marriage: we found a more significant relationship between Christian belief and ease of agreement about roles in the relationship (see Table 6: Gamma = 0.086; p < 0.05). Our inability to get a statistically significant result for other relational wellbeing measures may well have been due to the small size of the sample. Significantly, strong Bible-belief is linked to lower levels of divorce and separation, and a lesser likelihood of having had multiple past partners or a de facto relationship. This is clearly depicted in Tables 7 and 8 below. For example in Table 7 (Gamma = 0.101; P < 0.005) we can see that those who ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ with the authority of the Bible are less likely to have had two partners, and are substantially less likely to have had three or more partners. Likewise in Table 8 (Cramers V = 0.137; p < 0.001), strong Bible believers are less likely to have experienced cohabitation.

So in summary, we found a significant connections between higher levels of Christian belief and healthier marriages across all four wellbeing measures: security, intimacy, harmony and agreement about roles in the relationship. Those people with no or low Christian belief are more likely to be experiencing a cold and insecure relationship as well discord and conflict with their partner.

Before completing this section, it is worth reporting our results for those Christians who have a very strong belief in the authority of the Bible. Having a stronger belief in the Bible’s authority provided very marginal additional benefits for the security of the relationship. (Accept authority of the Bible’ cross-tabulated with ‘likelihood relationship will continue until death’; Gamma = 0.086; p < 0.05). Our inability to get a statistically significant result for other relational wellbeing measures may well have been due to the small size of the sample. Significantly, strong Bible-belief is linked to lower levels of divorce and separation, and a lesser likelihood of having had multiple past partners or a de facto relationship. This is clearly depicted in Tables 7 and 8 below. For example in Table 7 (Gamma = 0.101; P < 0.005) we can see that those who ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ with the authority of the Bible are less likely to have had two partners, and are substantially less likely to have had three or more partners. Likewise in Table 8 (Cramers V = 0.137; p < 0.001), strong Bible believers are less likely to have experienced cohabitation.

Strong Bible believers are therefore less likely to have experienced some of those antecedent factors which, as we have seen above, are associated with decreased security and intimacy in current relationships.

---

**Table 5: Intimacy of marriage compared to degree of Christian belief (frequencies of respondents shown in brackets)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cold</th>
<th>Lukewarm</th>
<th>Warm/very warm</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very strong belief</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>2% (1)</td>
<td>98% (48)</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong belief</td>
<td>5.0% (8)</td>
<td>6.9% (11)</td>
<td>88.1% (140)</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low/no belief</td>
<td>6.5% (48)</td>
<td>7.7% (57)</td>
<td>85.8% (635)</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Table 6: Ease of agreement on roles in marriage compared to degree of Christian belief (frequencies of respondents shown in brackets)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Difficulty in agreement</th>
<th>Neutral or unsure about agreement</th>
<th>Easy agreement</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very strong belief</td>
<td>6.5% (3)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
<td>89.1% (41)</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong belief</td>
<td>13.7% (21)</td>
<td>11.8% (18)</td>
<td>74.5% (114)</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low/no belief</td>
<td>16.1% (114)</td>
<td>16.2% (115)</td>
<td>67.7% (480)</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Table 7: Number of past partners compared to degree of agreement with authority of Bible**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nil past partners</th>
<th>One past partner</th>
<th>Two past partners</th>
<th>Three or more past partners</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>67.1%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>70.4%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>60.5%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Table 8: Experience of cohabitation compared to degree of agreement with authority of Bible**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Has experienced a past de facto relationship</th>
<th>Has not experienced a past de facto relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>92.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>75.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---
4. Observations about age and gender

Before we can reach any definitive conclusions, we need to consider age and gender. Women and older Australians tend to have higher levels of Christian spirituality. Are our results merely reflecting the influence of age and gender on the variables? The short answer, in relation to gender, is ‘no’. There is no statistically significant difference between the genders when measures of Christian spirituality are cross-tabulated with the relational wellbeing indicators.

In relation to age, important correlations between Christian spirituality and relational wellbeing need to be noticed. The story of these younger Christian respondents begins with those who have experienced cohabitation. Although in all age groups committed Christians are less likely to have experienced de facto relationships than their peers, ‘Gen-X’ (26-39 years old) churchgoers are more likely to have experienced de-facto relationships than are older generations of churchgoers, when both groups are compared to their non-churchgoing peers. That result is hardly a surprise, given changes in social attitudes between generations. (See Table 9. Totals are less than 100% in each row because we have not included the statistically insignificant ‘Gen-Y’, and because not all people have experienced cohabitation.)

Table 9: People who have experienced cohabitation compared to age and church attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>‘Gen-X’ (26-39 yrs old)</th>
<th>‘Boomers’ (40-59 yrs old)</th>
<th>‘Builders’ (60+)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequent and infrequent church-goers</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-attenders</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But it does not follow from this result that a Gen-Xer is more likely to cohabit whilst being a church-goer, since virtually no people in a de facto relationship were churchgoers. (Only two respondents to the WSS were in a de facto relationship and also said they attended church with any sort of regularity, even though some 18.4% of the total WSS population said they attend church monthly or more frequently.) Younger Christians, then, adopt conservative Christian norms against cohabitation, yet participate in Christian communities with relational ‘baggage’ approaching that of their non-churchgoing friends. This ‘baggage’ is reflected in other data found in the comparison of strong Christian belief to security/insecurity indicators. Younger Christians are less likely to be optimistic about the future of their relationships than are those of the older generation.

⇒ 60% of Gen-X strong Christian believers were certain their relationship would last, compared to 28.9% of non-believers in that age group (Gamma=0.184 ; p < 0.005).

⇒ 80% of Boomer (40-59 years old) strong Christian believers were certain their relationship would last, compared to 59.1% of Boomer non-believers (Gamma = 0.124; p < 0.05).

Older Christians might feel some concern at the lesser relational security of their younger counterparts. But what can easily be missed in this data is the much greater extent of relational security experienced by younger Christians when compared to their peers. The ‘gap’ between the relational security of believers and that of their non-believing peers, is much wider for under-40s than for over-40s (as is also reflected by the correlation coefficients).

We can reasonably conclude that within the Australian Christian community, young people have experienced and continue to experience relational turmoil greater than that of their elders. However they are less likely to cohabit, which as we have seen, is associated with negative relational outcomes. Also, young Christian believers are strikingly more secure about their marriage than are their peers.

We began by pointing to Christian theology’s claims for marriage, for marital faithfulness, and for those inward personal changes that build stronger marriages. The once ‘mainstream’ nature of Christian morality is now marginal, and the wider society inhabited by young people is not very supportive of Christian sexual and marital norms. It is arguable that a better relational prognosis is being seen in Christian young people, which testifies in favour of the theological claims we have outlined. The effect of belief in those claims seems increasingly to stand out in a culture that is increasingly opposed to these claims.

Table 9: People who have experienced cohabitation compared to age and church attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>church-goers v not experienced a defacto</th>
<th>% been in a defacto</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen Y (18-25 yrs old)</td>
<td>.498 (a strong correlation)</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen X (26-39 yrs old)</td>
<td>.377 (a moderate correlation)</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boomers (40-59 yrs old)</td>
<td>.647 (a very strong correlation)</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builders (60+)</td>
<td>.701 (a very strong correlation)</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Discussion

We began by pointing to an expectation within Christian thought that the knowledge of God as given through Jesus Christ will have a positive effect on relationships, particularly as expressed within marriage. We stated four theological claims that such an expectation is reliant upon, and offered four predictions associated with those claims. We indicated that our interrogation of WSS data was motivated by an interest to test these predictions, by determining whether there were any associations between marriage and wellbeing/security, and between Christian spirituality and relational wellbeing and security. We hope that framing the matter in this way has also had the effect of making transparent our presuppositions and interests.

Our reading of a body of mainly U.S. research gave a reasonable expectation of finding the associations we were looking for within Australian data. The results of our research do seem to be in broad agreement with this other literature, and do seem to offer support for our theological predictions.

1. We offered the theological claim that ‘marriage is designed and given by God to be humanity’s most enduring and fundamental expression of relational intimacy,’ which led us to suspect that marriage is a ‘better’ form of life for relational intimacy than cohabitation. We have found that married people do experience greater security and harmony in their relationships than cohabiters, and are slightly more likely to experience greater intimacy.

2. We next offered the theological claim that ‘marriage partners model God’s own “faithfulness” for the best experience of such intimacy, committing to the good of the other for as long as he or she is alive,’ which led us to suspect that the security, intimacy and harmony of a current relationship will be negatively affected by increases in the number of partners a person has had. We have found that relational security significantly declines with an increased number of partners, and that relational security and intimacy declines with a past experience of a de facto relationship. (We found no statistically significant association between relational harmony and people’s past partnering history.)

3. Our next theological claim was that ‘God changes Christian believers from people who live for themselves, into people who wholeheartedly attend to the needs and concerns of their spouse, generally enabling their relationships to become more satisfying and secure,’ from which we expected a positive association between Christian spirituality and marital wellbeing. We found that Christian spirituality is associated with higher levels of intimacy, security, harmony, and agreement on roles within the relationship, with slight relational advantages in strong Bible belief. (Our observation that cohabiters are unlikely to be Christian believers or churchgoers, when put alongside the decreased likelihood of relational wellbeing for cohabiters, might also support the claim that Christian spirituality enhances relational wellbeing.)

4. We also offered a fourth claim: that ‘Christians, like all people, are implicated in a “fallen” world which pays little or no attention to God and often actively opposes him (“sin”). Christians are not immune from the effects of sin. They still sin, and are affected by the sin of others.’ We indicated that we would deploy the explanatory power of this claim toward the end of the paper, and will do so below.

The complex web of multiple causation that characterizes human social systems does not allow us to claim that Christian spirituality causes good relationships. Nevertheless, our analysis points to some very significant findings, including that:

- a) marriage enhances a sense of security and harmony with one’s partner, as well as providing couples with some marginal advantages when it comes to intimacy;
- b) past experience of a de facto relationship or marriage is associated with less intimacy and greater insecurity in a current relationship;
- c) there is a very significant connection between higher levels of Christian belief and healthier marriages across all four wellbeing measures: security, intimacy, harmony and agreement about roles in the
relationship; and
d) the benefits of Christian belief for relational wellbeing are becoming more apparent amongst young generations, a finding linked to the fact that the once 'mainstream' nature of Christian morality is now marginal.

These findings suggest that both 'Bible-believing' and 'conservative' Christianity, far from being deleterious to relational wellbeing, seems to actually enhance the health of a marriage. We think it likely that Christian spirituality exerts a beneficial effect upon relational wellbeing and security, and we think the data supports our predictions about Christian spirituality made at the outset. Two comments about methodology assist to make the findings more secure:

- The WSS survey instrument is not susceptible to some of the critiques of other research of this kind, such as when single, global items are used to assess religious variables and marital satisfaction (Mahoney et al. 1999). The WSS instrument is a very 'fine grained' survey tool, capable of providing a much wider range of measures of religion and spirituality than in most similar studies (Kaldor 2004). Similarly, a range of variables probes relational satisfaction, wellbeing and security. Indeed we have only used some of its capacities in our analysis, and the WSS database is ripe for further research to uncover the properties of all its variables.

- While multiple regression analysis might test other factors related to marriage (e.g. in Huston and Melz 2004), the strength of the link we have found between Christian spirituality and relational wellbeing makes it unlikely that Christian spirituality would drop out of the picture under such analysis, given that we have already examined the most likely variables that could have been acting through the Christian spirituality variables (viz. age and gender). Of course a correlational study is only an important first step in any enquiry, providing a broader picture upon which to build more targeted research. We would welcome these more complex forms of analysis, and any other kinds of research (such as case-studies, longitudinal datasets, interviews etc.).

Clearly then, much work remains to be done (particularly in the Australian context) to attain a greater understanding of associations between religion and relational wellbeing. We will offer some specific suggestions below. However in keeping with our penchant for theological comment, we wish to offer the following small excursus for sociologists who might go on to examine the effects of religion in Australia.

6. Sociology's relationship to theology

Stretching back to the 1950s, a vigorous empirical research effort has mined the sociological field labelled 'religion', particularly in the U.S. but also in the U.K., Canada and Australia, with widely published results. The sociology of religion is represented on many university campuses; sociology recognises that religion is susceptible to empirical research; and an increasingly sophisticated body of theories and empirical studies support this contention.

However for the theologian, the sociological concept of 'religion' is often problematic, particularly when confined to some measure of outward practice that is unconnected to an 'inner' or 'spiritual' life and/or to any transcendent reality. The theologian is convinced of a spiritual reality lying beyond institutions such as churches, and beyond other sociologically measurable units. The theologian thinks that there would be no sociological manifestations without this spiritual reality, which also needs to be talked about and understood.

Some sociologists are aware of this point, and understand that the complex multidimensional nature of religion and spirituality makes it difficult to define and so to measure well (Hill et al. 2000). "Past attempts to define these constructs are often too narrow, resulting in operational definitions that foster programs of empirical research with limited value, or too broad, resulting in a loss of distinctive characteristics of religion and spirituality" (p. 52).

The interaction between religious ideas, religious practices and everyday behaviour is complex enough to be something mysterious, and includes philosophical terrain beyond the ambit of social science. It is inherent to the nature of any science that it must work with the material before it, and not with those transcendental elements which are, after all, a subject of perennial controversy. Science can access and teach some very substantial elements of human relationships, but cannot handle people in all the dimensions by which it is possible to describe them. It would not be fair; then, to expect sociologists to become theologians, and it is reasonable for the sociologist to declare what she will not, and perhaps cannot, investigate.

However it quite fair to expect sociology's handling of religion not to do violence to the inherent 'structure' of religion by use of categorisations and concepts that religious people do not themselves recognise. We were especially intrigued by what seemed to us an example of the sociological study of religion 'damaging' the very object it sought to study. Hatch et al. (1986) concluded that religiosity influenced familial wellbeing not 'directly' through 'spiritual intimacy', but more probably 'indirectly' through the 'intervening variables' such as commitment, appreciation, communication effectiveness, and time spent together—virtues that everyone agrees will benefit a marriage (cf. Parker 2001).

Of course the language of path analysis, and the concept of an 'intervening variable', are modes of scientific discourse that the theologian has no reason to argue with. But in this case, the particular distinction deployed by Hatch et al. makes no sense for the Christian theologian, since it simply did violence to the way Christianity understands itself. To make their point, it was necessary for Hatch et al. to make contrast between merely "simply getting people to be more religious" (p. 544), which they construed as pointless for familial wellbeing, and the 'intervening variables', which were considered useful. In our view, they concluded that the 'variables' were what did the really useful work in marriages, not the religious fluff. But no Christian recognises the distinction: it is not possible, in Christian thought, to dissect a virtue such as 'commitment' out of the theological soil that gives it life; and conversely, Christian theology envisages a kind of 'religion' that is fraudulent precisely because it does not produce the relational virtues listed.
Speaking theologically again, a certain ‘seamlessness’ to life follows from what Christ and the Bible teach as ‘true religion’, which the fourth century theologian Augustine of Hippo could sum up as ‘the enjoyment of God and of one another in God’. To orbit in devotion around God and Christ organically results in the kind of ‘fruit’ that we have been discussing: wellbeing in human relationships. Hence the Protestant view of marriage can be characterised as a ‘covenental’ conception, where partners work toward a life of intimate companionship with a fabric of honesty, trust, openness and acceptance, with concomitant boundaries upon behavior, and all within an ongoing exploration of the Christian faith. This view also entails a commitment to break the covenant only if the marriage’s life of intimacy is dead, and all means to renew it through forgiveness and reconciliation have been exhausted (Yates 1985). This summary has affinities to the ‘collectivist’ orientation to marriage noted above (Brines and Joyner 1999).

For a sociologist to imagine, then, that it is more useful for a marriage to attend to the ‘intervening variables’ rather than “simply getting people to be more religious” completely sidesteps whether or not the intertwined beliefs and practices of the religion are of significance for relational wellbeing. The question at issue is whether religion produces people who think and live virtuously, not how ‘religiosity’ may be delineated from other more ‘socially useful’ variables.

Our plea, then, is for religions to be dealt with in their particularity and not according to generalisations that are foreign to religious believers. We realise that to engage in research with this level of care and attention presents significant operational difficulties (e.g. bigger research teams; careful mapping of a religion’s ‘sub-species’, and of adherents’ views of themselves; fine-grained survey instruments; etc.). Those difficulties are either a challenge to be risen to, or limitations to be humbly acknowledged, but not problems to be pretended away through clumsy, cavalier or over-generalised categorisations.

7. Future directions

We agree, then, when Mahoney et al. (1999) state that “[b]y using a more fine-grained conceptual framework, the results [will] highlight more clearly what it is about religion that relates to marriage” (p. 333). We also agree with Waite and Lehrer (2003) that a richer set of controls for religion is needed and that “research seeking to improve our understanding of the complex relationships between religion and marriage would be especially valuable” (p. 270).

If the associations we have seen are indeed due to Christian spirituality, we are not able to say to what extent Christianity might shape the internal motivations that people have about marriage, or to what extent Christian community is an external ‘regulative’ force upon it (Gross 2005); or whether what Mahoney et al. (1999) call ‘proximal’ religious factors (such as a couple’s religious involvement and beliefs about marriage) are more responsible for marital wellbeing than are ‘distal’ religious factors (such as individual religiousness, or religious like-mindedness). Moreover, several aspects of religious experience are directly related to marital stability (Call and Heaton 1997), and so presumably also to people’s experience of marital wellbeing. People’s understanding of the Christian faith, and the degree to which they engage with church life, may be at least as important as mere exposure to religious ideas and institutions. There are likely to be important differences in how different individuals and couples respond to otherwise identical milieus or experiences (Bradbury et al. 2000). All of these considerations will need to be pursued for a proper understanding of the connections between religions and relationships in Australia.

Kaldor et al. (2004) have begun work in this direction, providing a range of measures of spirituality, religion and secularism and showing that aspects of wellbeing do vary between religious and spiritual orientations. Our own work has explored further variables on relational wellbeing from the viewpoint of marriage. Perhaps a future research project could bring the two projects together into one analysis of the data.

More controversially, we suggest that further research might need to consider the politically fraught question of ‘which religion’. Are some ‘spiritual’ beliefs and practices more associated with relational wellbeing than others? Can it be determined with any finer degree of detail whether it is the particularity of biblical Christian thought about marriage and relationships that assists people to live well in their relationships? In view of the complexities noted throughout this paper, such a task might be beyond the operational capacity of the social science community. Nevertheless, for religious people who seek to know the truth about the world and about themselves, any fair-minded and sensitive studies along these lines are sorely needed for the Australian context, and will be very welcome.

Further research into the links between non-Christian beliefs and relational wellbeing is also needed. Previous work analysing the WSS data suggests that people with alternative or eastern spiritual orientations probably do not experience the positive relational outcomes we have observed for Christian believers, since these groups are not significantly associated with general security and wellbeing (Kaldor et al. 2004).

8. Final comments

In contrast, evangelical Christian thought would claim that its own ‘true religion’ produces the kind of people who can stay married well, and we welcome this claim being further put to the test through various kinds of research. But we realize, of course, that such a claim for Christian spirituality, especially when made by conservative Christian authors, will seem smug and arrogantly self-indulgent. These final comments are our reply to that concern.

Firstly, our parallel study into home/work conflict and relational wellbeing (Halcrow et al. 2005) finds that Christian spirituality has no protective effect whatsoever against very serious home/work conflicts that are being experienced in the general population, and which affect the security and intimacy of relationships. There are reasons to think that Christian theology should bring such benefits. That they do not, we believe, reflects poorly upon our Christian community, and suggests that Christian leaders have not effectively articulated Christian teaching about work and family.
Secondly, it is never the intention of truly Christian theology to be self-congratulatory of Christians. Our fourth theological claim was that Christians, like all people, are implicated in a ‘fallen’ world which pays little or no attention to God and often actively opposes him (‘sin’); and that Christians are not immune from the effects of sin, still sinning and being affected by sin. In keeping with this theological claim, the data indicates that the Christian populace also has many broken, distant, and insecure relationships, and that Christian young people are struggling with higher levels of relational turmoil and disappointment than their elders. The Christian community must always humbly attend to its own propensity to sin. Indeed, a major challenge will come when the results of this paper begin to be noticed, for Christians will be sorely tempted to declare that they are somehow superior. Of course we are not: we have been blessed with good news of a Rescuer who frees his people from any divine penalty for sin, and whose Spirit works graciously to heal and restore all who have sinned or have been wounded by the sin of another.

When Christ says “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10), he has many dimensions in mind, not least of which is relational wellbeing and security. Any self-congratulatory stance in relation to our findings would entirely betray the One who brings life, and who offers life to everyone else in the world. Our main interest in bringing this data to the attention of other Australians is that all who are struggling in difficult, distant and broken relationships might find the kind of new life for their relationships that many Christians appear to be experiencing.

We are reminded of words attributed to Sri Lankan Christian D.T. Niles: that the Christian is just “one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread.”

10. Acknowledgements

The Wellbeing and Security Survey, conducted by researchers from Edith Cowan University, Deakin University, ANGLICARE (Diocese of Sydney) and NCLS Research was made possible by a grant from the Australian Research Council, together with the support of ANGLICARE (Diocese of Sydney), the Uniting Church in Australia NSW Board of Mission and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. The research has been jointly supervised by Professor Alan Black, Professor Robert Cummins and Mr Keith Castle. The research team included John Bellamy, Philip Hughes, Peter Kaldor and Sue King. For further information about the WSS see http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?docid=1873&track=30127.

The authors are particularly grateful to Dr John Bellamy from NCLS Research for his extensive advice, assistance and feedback which has helped significantly improved and shape this paper. Of course all of its shortcoming remain our own.

11. About the authors

ANDREW CAMERON is lecturer in ethics at Moore Theological College, Sydney. His PhD thesis from London University looked at the links between emotions and ethical decision making. He has written publications across a wide range of public policy issues including church/state relations and bio-ethics.

JEREMY HALCROW was engaged as research/communications consultant on this project. He was previously employed by Anglicare NSW where his work involved communicating the findings of 2002-2003 Well Being and Security Survey. He has a regular newspaper column and writes about social policy issues, including workplace relations, for Australia’s largest circulation Anglican newspaper Southern Cross.

TRACY GORDON is Research Officer for the Social Issues Executive, Anglican Diocese of Sydney. She has a particular interest in researching issues affecting women and their family relationships, as well as refugees and asylum seekers.
12. References


How weak or strong are the connections of the various factors linked to the well-being of a marriage?

### Intimacy/Distance in Marriage/De Facto

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gamma Correlations (Ordinal Factors)</th>
<th>Cramer V Correlations (Category Factors)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.842 &gt;&gt; How spouse treats you</td>
<td><strong>Very Strong</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.756 &gt;&gt; Feel secure in marriage/defacto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.495 &gt;&gt; Less conflict over roles</td>
<td><strong>Strong</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.230 &gt;&gt; Christian belief</td>
<td><strong>Moderate</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.140 &gt;&gt; fewer past partners</td>
<td><strong>Weak</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.138 &gt;&gt; church attendance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.139 &gt;&gt; work/home conflict</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.132 &gt;&gt; poor health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**No statistically significant difference:** gender; experienced blended family; past gay relationship, household income (poverty), personal income, strong belief in the authority of the Bible; hours in paid employment; want fewer work hours

### Security/Insecurity in Marriage/De Facto

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gamma Correlations (Ordinal Factors)</th>
<th>Cramer V Correlations (Category Factors)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.773 &gt;&gt; How spouse treats you</td>
<td><strong>Very Strong</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.756 &gt;&gt; Intimacy of relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.476 &gt;&gt; Less conflict over roles</td>
<td><strong>Strong</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.391 &gt;&gt; Christian belief (high belief)</td>
<td><strong>Moderate</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.333 &gt;&gt; Christian belief</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.209 &gt;&gt; fewer past partners</td>
<td><strong>Weak</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.203 &gt;&gt; church attendance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.119 &gt;&gt; household income (poverty)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.110 &gt;&gt; personal income</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Very weak connection:** home/work conflict; stronger belief in Bible’s authority; experienced a blended family; poor health

**No statistically significant difference:** total number of hours in paid employment; want fewer work hours
The Relational Well Being papers are a joint project of Anglican Media Sydney and the Social Issues Executive, Diocese of Sydney

The project was only possible with cooperation and assistance of the joint-research team from Anglicare and NCLS Research behind the 2002-2003 Well Being and Security (WSS) database