



Article

Why Aren't You Married Yet? Effects of Influences to Marry Early on Personal and Relational Well-Being

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Abstract

The pathway to marriage has changed substantially over the past 20 years or so, with many marrying later or choosing not to marry at all. Yet, many young people report that they do want to marry someday and some marry before the age of 25. There are various influences on the choice to marry or not marry. According to social impact theory, some of these choices may have to do with the immediacy of the source of impact. This study investigates how various influences, from various ranges of immediacy impact important areas of personal and relationship well-being. Results show that pressures to marry early are associated negatively with satisfaction with life and relationship satisfaction, while positively associated with stress and depression. Some results also show the connection of social immediacy impact in that parents' marrying early positively associates with satisfaction with life, and negatively associates with relationship disillusionment and stress, while siblings marrying early was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction, and friends marrying early was positively associated with relationship satisfaction and negatively associated with stress. Religious influences were only positively associated with satisfaction with life. Implications for practitioners and researchers are provided based on study results and theoretical information.

Keywords: influences on the decision to marry early; social impact theory; well-being



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1. Introduction

The pathway to marriage has seen several significant changes in the past 20 years or so. Most notably, men and women are delaying marriage longer than any previous generation, with a median age for men of 30.2 and women of 28.6 ([U.S. Census Bureau, 2024](https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2024/tables/2024-01-23-marriage.html)). Many are also appearing to choose not to marry at increasing rates ([Hatch, 2015](https://www.pewresearch.org/2015/02/05/marriage-in-the-us/); [Wang & Parker, 2014](https://www.pewresearch.org/2014/02/05/marriage-in-the-us/)). However, most singles still desire marriage. Among the never-married ages 18–34, 69% say they want to marry someday ([Aragão, 2024](https://www.pewresearch.org/2024/01/23/marriage-in-the-us/)). Of those who do marry, some will even marry at a comparatively young age, before the age of 25 (e.g., [Fry, 2023](https://www.pewresearch.org/2023/01/23/marriage-in-the-us/)). This decision to marry early can have both positive and negative effects on areas of well-being ([Meehan & Negy, 2003](https://www.pewresearch.org/2003/01/23/marriage-in-the-us/); [Selena & Langlais, 2018](https://www.pewresearch.org/2018/01/23/marriage-in-the-us/)). The early marriage decision can impact the individuals as

well as the relationship (Kahn, 2007). What influences people to make these decisions to marry early can range from the practical like convenience and love (Horowitz et al., 2019) to the ideological like religious beliefs (Uecker, 2014). The influence of family values and beliefs has also been shown to motivate early marriage (Li, 2024). However, little is known about how different influences to marry early can affect aspects of personal and relational well-being, and which influences hold the greater weight. This study uses social impact theory as a guide to examine how various influences to marry early, from various levels of social immediacy, can affect personal and relational well-being.

2. Overall Influences on the Decision to Marry

The way relationships such as marriage are done or not done has changed substantially in the U.S. over the past several years. While relationship processes such as marriage are changing, especially in terms of the timing of marriage, the marital union continues to hold meaning for some (Fry, 2023).

Multiple factors contribute to why people marry. While most people marry for internally motivated factors such as love, companionship, and lifelong commitment, others cite external factors such as financial stability or family expectations (Horowitz et al., 2019). These external factors are numerous and range from cultural and societal pressures to insecurity stemming from fear of being single and social network pressure (Kahn, 2007; Sprecher & Feilmlee, 2021). These factors can combine to make people feel they should be in a relationship, which might lead some to marry earlier than planned.

These factors do not just affect the pressure to marry but attitudes about marriage itself. Research has shown that childhood family experiences shape women's views on relationships, especially when parents modeled early marriage (Li, 2024). Religious beliefs, especially among conservative religious groups that emphasize family and morality, can skew early marriage attitudes. Furthermore, southern college students report that community and family expectations often encourage early marriage as a sign of maturity and success (Allison, 2023). These findings suggest that family and religious values can be powerful motivators, though they may sometimes pressure someone to marry sooner than they feel ready.

These pressures can affect a person's happiness and relationship quality. Feeling external pressure from family, religion, or social networks can increase stress or reduce satisfaction later in marriage (Li, 2024; Sprecher & Feilmlee, 2021; Uecker, 2014). On the other hand, people who marry because they genuinely want to, rather than because they feel obligated, tend to report higher life and relationship satisfaction (Horowitz et al., 2019). Overall, the research suggests that both personal motivations and social influences play significant roles in the decision to marry. Still, internal motivation, rather than external pressure, is associated with healthier, more satisfying relationships.

While a discussion of all influences on the decision to marry, and especially marry early, would be beyond the scope of this study, this study seeks to explore the unique impact of some of these most salient influences. This study focuses on the unique impacts of family factors (parents and sibling marital timing), peer factors (peer marital timing), religious influences, and overall felt pressures to marry early, and where these pressures were not felt on important areas of personal and relational well-being.

3. Familial Influences on Marital Timing

Family influences are often instrumental in when and why a young person chooses to marry. Some studies have found that marital attitudes of the parents are directly connected with marital attitudes in children (e.g., Willoughby et al., 2012). These familial cues can influence both the timing of marriage and the quality and outcome of the married couple's

relationship (Shenhav, 2017; Sprecher & Feilmlee, 2021). Of note is the importance of family of origin values around marriage, both explicitly taught and intrinsically learned, toward the feeling of pressure to marry (Allison, 2023; Merzlyakova & Golubeva, 2022). These lessons may increase a young person's fear of being single (Sprecher & Feilmlee, 2021), thus increasing the likelihood of premature unions and the known correlation with poorer marital outcomes (Uecker, 2014). Parental over-involvement in a couple's relationship is a potential factor related to marital outcomes for better or worse (Jensen et al., 2018).

While the prevailing theory, that the younger the age at marriage, the poorer the outcome, is generally accepted, there are several protective factors for young couples. Support within the family, particularly parent support, is highly predictive of marital success in young couples (Shenhav, 2017). When parents and families offer approval and support, the couple is more likely to engage in relationship maintenance behaviors, decreasing the likelihood of later relationship dissolution despite the age of the couple when they married (Sprecher & Feilmlee, 2021). Parental influence is an important factor in a couple's romantic relationships. Jensen et al. (2018) noted that warm, autonomy-supportive parenting predicted greater well-being among emerging adults and their relationship decisions.

The best long-term outcomes are found within family relationships that are supportive and not coercive. The quality of familial relationships, those that are warm and autonomy-affirming, can help predict the stability of marriages that flourish (Allison, 2023; Jensen et al., 2018; Shenhav, 2017; Sprecher & Feilmlee, 2021).

4. Peers' Influences on Marital Timing

With the shifts toward delays in marrying and changes in relationship and marital processes, "family researchers have largely abandoned the sociological study of early marriage" (Uecker & Stokes, 2008, p. 1). For this reason, finding recent data on peer influences on marital timing is somewhat challenging. Due to the many factors that contribute to peer choice it is difficult to target solely the implications of peers as a stand-alone factor.

Peer influences may be most pronounced in contexts of groups of people who have similar values and beliefs. For instance, Wozniak et al. (2025) found peer influence has at minimum a small effect on marital timing for those serving in the U.S. Army. The authors posit that this effect is likely due to imitation (copying a behavior), adhering to social pressures (pressures related to marriage or marrying behavior), or spillover effects related to marriage (the effects of marriage knowledge and marriage benefits and resources). Institutions such as the army greatly value conformity, and these effects may extend beyond military work to social engagements and relationships such as marriage. This may be a case where similar values are at play, as those serving in the army often profess similar values such as loyalty, respect, service, and honor (<https://www.army.mil/values/>, accessed on 2 December 2025).

Additionally, Christian college students are often a group among the most likely to marry young (George, 2023). The engagement/marriage culture at Christian colleges/universities appears to be most influential through peer networks. Students who see their peers engaged or married by graduation are likely to feel additional pressure to do likewise and even believe they may be falling behind on the life trajectory by not engaging in these practices during college. Such peer pressures and behaviors have shown to be more present on Christian college campuses (George, 2023; Uecker, 2014). Thus, Christian college campuses often represent a unique entanglement of religious and peer pressures to marry.

5. Religious Influences on Marital Timing

A fairly common research finding is that those who are religious, especially conservative Christian, tend to marry earlier than those who are not (e.g., Fuller et al., 2015; Uecker

& Stokes, 2008, Uecker, 2014). This is often due to the centrality of marriage connecting to many religious faiths. The marital union is often seen as a sacred relationship to be sought after and upheld, and sought after earlier on in life for many who are religious (Dollahite & Marks, 2009). Therefore, an emphasis to marry and to seek out a marital relationship is often stronger for those religious than those who are not due to the importance and sanctifying components of the marital union. In some cases, religion has been identified as a strength for some couples, offering additional unification and resources to deal with hardship, but can also be detrimental when relationship partners have different ideas on beliefs and different ideas on how or when religious principles should be applied (Kelley et al., 2020).

6. Connecting to Theory: Social Impact Theory

The social impact theory refers to changes in behaviors, feelings, beliefs, motivations, values, etc., in an individual because of the presence or actions of other individuals. The influence of these others may be real, imagined, or implied. The first principle of the theory concludes that the amount of impact on the individual is dependent on the strength, immediacy, and number of sources impacting them (Latané, 1981).

In this context, strength refers to the power, importance, or intensity of a source (Latané, 1981; Oliveira et al., 2025). For example, the strength of a parent's influence may have a more powerful impact than the influence of a coworker, and a coworker's influence may be stronger than that of a clerk at the grocery store. Immediacy refers to how close the source is in space or time without barriers or other interference (Latané, 1981; Oliveira et al., 2025). Therefore, in this case, a roommate or professor may have a more direct influence than family members who do not live with the individual. Likewise, the number of sources interacting with the individual may change the level of impact on individual experiences. (Latané, 1981; Oliveira et al., 2025). For instance, while one stranger at the park may have little impact on an individual, a whole group of strangers could have a much greater influence.

To understand the Social Impact Theory more fully, consider the analogy of the light produced by a lightbulb (Latané, 1981). The amount of light falling on an object is determined by several factors. First, the wattage, or strength, of the lightbulb will influence the amount of light directed at the object. Second, the amount of light will change as the distance, or immediacy, between the bulb and the object increases or decreases. Finally, the number of lightbulbs, or number of sources, will also influence the amount of light that falls on the object.

6.1. Social Influence

Similar to the Social Impact Theory, the concept of social influence in psychology, which can be split into three sub-types, refers to influences that can affect thoughts, judgments, and behaviors. These influences can occur on an interpersonal, group, or socio-cultural level (Sandhu, 2024). The three sub-types of social influence include "norms", "compliance", and "conformity" (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Oliveira et al., 2025).

Norms refer to what individuals perceive to be normal or acceptable in a wider social context (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Sandhu, 2024). It is what individuals believe most people do or would do. These norms inform their actions or attitudes by encouraging or discouraging different behaviors. For example, recycling would be considered positive and is a practice that many or most people adhere to, whereas littering would be considered negative and something that most people avoid. The norms, then, would be for individuals to recycle and avoid littering.

Compliance is acquiescence to a request; this request may be implicit or explicit (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Sandhu, 2024). An explicit request may look like charitable

organizations asking directly for donations. In contrast, an implicit request might look like an advertisement praising a political candidate. While not directly making the request, the advertisement encourages individuals to vote for that particular candidate (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). When an individual chooses to donate to the organization or vote for the candidate, they comply with the social request.

Conformity refers to an individual adjusting their own behavior or attitudes to match the responses of others (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Oliveira et al., 2025; Sandhu, 2024). These changes in behavior are often due to the perception of a larger general consensus and a desire for personal accuracy that is in line with that consensus (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). This can create a sense of affiliation and belonging, which in turn may increase an individual's self-esteem and confidence. It may also be seen as a form of self-protection if an individual feels it is socially safer to conform to a majority (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Conformity may be found in relatively trivial situations such as clothing trends or more complex situations such as political decisions.

6.2. Impact and Influence: Pressures to Marry

Within the context of dating and marriage, both the social impact theory and the concept of social influence play a significant role. There are many different sources that influence and contribute to the potential pressure that individuals feel regarding marriage including parents, peers, members of a religious community, social media influencers, and more. Each of these sources will have a different degree of impact on an individual's marital values, attitudes, and dating behaviors depending on the strength of the relationship and the proximity of the source.

As with previous examples, a parent's influence on an individual's marriage and dating scripts will likely have greater strength than that of a coworker, but each source can still have some impact. Consider, for example, the impact that a comment on an individual's marital status from a grocery store clerk or a member of a religious community may have. While it is not likely to influence them in the same way as a comment made by a friend or family member, there is still some degree of impact.

Additionally, individuals are continually influenced by the presence of marital norms, pressures to comply with these norms, and a desire to conform to perceived societal structures. Prescribed timelines, such as those described by the social clock theory (Neugarten et al., 1965), produce norms that individuals feel pressure to adhere to in the same way that they feel pressure to avoid littering or to recycle. They may also feel a need to conform with perceived societal standards surrounding marriage such as seeking to be married by a certain age or life milestone. Individuals may also comply with requests that push them towards a marital outcome such as agreeing to dating interactions they may not have otherwise. These efforts may stem from a desire to garner social approval, increase feelings of self-esteem, or avoid ridicule or censure. This study examines the influences from various levels of social immediacy from the social impact theory—parents, siblings, friends, overall religious influences, and overall pressures to marry on important areas of individual and relational well-being.

7. The Current Study

This study offers a distinctive investigation of the unique impacts of important influences on marrying early (family, peers, religious), while also investigating other overall influences on various aspects of personal and relational well-being, using social impact theory as a guide. Connecting to theory, failure to meet the expectations created by various influences may lead to distress or decreased well-being. The study seeks to understand the layers of influences that form an individual's social network and how these influences

impact well-being. This study uses social impact theory as a guide to examine these associations from various areas of social immediacy—parents, siblings, friends, religious influences, and overall pressures to marry. It is anticipated that the factors discussed in this section promote certain influences—real, imagined, or implied—that influence the decision to marry. Such an investigation has not yet been conducted taking into account various influences on marrying early and various effects on aspects of well-being. Such investigations are of importance as they provide insight on how certain influences can be helpful or harmful to personal and relational development and further identify areas for improvement.

The following research questions were formulated for this study based on past literature and using social impact theory as a guide, assessing the impact of influences from various levels of social immediacy (parents, siblings, friends, religious influences, and overall pressures to marry) on important areas of personal and relational well-being:

R1: How does parents' marital timing affect important areas of personal and relational well-being (stress, satisfaction with life, depression, relationship satisfaction, and relationship disillusionment)?

R2: How does sibling marital timing affect important areas of personal and relational well-being (stress, satisfaction with life, depression, relationship satisfaction, and relationship disillusionment)?

R3: How does friends' marital timing affect important areas of personal and relational well-being (stress, satisfaction with life, depression, relationship satisfaction, and relationship disillusionment)?

R4: How do religious influences to marry affect important areas of personal and relational well-being (stress, satisfaction with life, depression, relationship satisfaction, and relationship disillusionment)?

R5: How do overall pressures to marry early affect important areas of personal and relational well-being (stress, satisfaction with life, depression, relationship satisfaction, and relationship disillusionment)?

8. Method

8.1. Sample

This study is a part of an investigation of the “ring by spring” phenomenon, a uniquely U.S. practice, and primarily collected data from universities in Oklahoma and Utah within the U.S. to investigate this phenomenon. This study focused on the young adult portion of the sample, 18–30 years of age. The nonprobability/convenience sample was composed of 419 individuals, where 99.2% indicated U.S. residency. The sample was primarily female (81.1%), with ages ranging from 18 to 30 ($M = 21.56$; $SD = 2.72$). For race/ethnicity, most reported White/Caucasian (87.4%), with Hispanic/Latino/LatinX (8.4%), and Asian or Pacific Islander (5%) as the next largest groups. For education, most reported “some college” (68.5%), “high school diploma” (16%), and “college graduate” (12.2%). For household income, 55.3% reported income up to \$30,000, 14.4%, \$30,001–\$60,000, 14%, \$60,001–\$90,000, and 16.3% over \$90,000. For relationship status, most reported “single” (41.8%), “married” (23.2%), or “committed relationship, not living together” (27%).

8.2. Procedure

An IRB-approved online Qualtrics survey was distributed across college campuses and social media. No compensation was provided for participation. Informed consent for participation was obtained from all subjects involved in the study at the start of the online form.

8.3. Measures

Relationship Satisfaction: Measured via the Couple Satisfaction Index—4 (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Measured via four Likert-scaled items: e.g., *In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?* (1 = Not at all–6 = Completely; $\alpha = 0.93$).

Satisfaction with Life: Measured via the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Arrindell et al., 1991). Measured via five Likert-scaled items: e.g., *In most ways my life is close to my ideal* (1 = Strongly disagree–7 = Strongly agree; $\alpha = 0.88$).

Stress: Measured via the Perceived Stress Scale 4 (Cohen et al., 1983). Measured via four Likert-scaled items: e.g., *In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?* (1 = Never–4 = Very often; $\alpha = 0.78$).

Relationship Disillusionment: Measured via the Marital Disillusionment Scale (Niehuis & Bartell, 2006). Measured via 11 Likert-scaled items: e.g., *My marriage/relationship hasn't gone quite as perfectly as I thought it might* (1 = Extremely disagree–5 Extremely agree; $\alpha = 0.94$).

Depression: Measured via the Personal Health Questionnaire Depression Scale (Kroenke et al., 2009). Measured via eight Likert-scaled items: e.g., *Little interest or pleasure in doing things* (1 = Not at all–4 Nearly every day; $\alpha = 0.85$).

Felt pressure to marry: Measured via one Likert-scaled item created for his study: *I felt/feel pressure to be married early* (e.g., *during college or by the time I graduate/graduated*) (1 = Strongly disagree–7 Strongly agree).

Religious influence: Measured via one Likert-scaled item created for his study: *The pressure to marry early comes mostly from my own religious beliefs* (1 = Strongly disagree–7 Strongly agree).

Parents' marital timing: Measured via one Likert-scaled item created for his study: *My parents married early* (e.g., *during college or before graduation*) (1 = Strongly disagree–7 Strongly agree).

Sibling marital timing: Measured via one Likert-scaled item created for his study: *I have at least one sibling who married early* (e.g., *during college or before graduation*) (1 = Strongly disagree–7 Strongly agree).

Friends' marital timing: Measured via one Likert-scaled item created for his study: *Most of my friends married early* (e.g., *during college or before graduation*) (1 = Strongly disagree–7 Strongly agree).

The single-item measures and measure wording appear in Appendix A.

9. Analytic Plan

Descriptive statistics were first examined and were supplied to the reader to view the psychometrics of the study (See Table 1). Listwise deletion was used to handle data. Listwise deletion has certain benefits when data are missing completely at random (Pepinsky, 2018), as they were in this study (most variables had less than 5% missing data). Following descriptive analyses, multiple regression analyses were utilized to assess the prediction of the influences to marry (based on levels of social immediacy from the social impact theory) on well-being (family factors (parents and siblings marrying early), friends marrying early, religious influences, and felt pressure to marry early) on the areas of well-being (stress, satisfaction with life, depression, relationship satisfaction, and relationship disillusionment) in different models. Since around half of the sample reported a serious romantic relationship (e.g., married, living with a romantic partner), relational variables were also included. Gender, age, income, and education were controlled in all of the multiple regression models.

While the use of single-item measures may be questionable, their use does provide value (Allen et al., 2022; Cheung & Lucas, 2014; Hoepfner et al., 2012). This may especially be the case where a phenomenon is new in exploration and multiple-item measures are not

available (Allen et al., 2022; Cheung & Lucas, 2014). Since influences to marry have not been fully explored, and there is a lack of multiple-item measures available, we believe the use of single item measure is appropriate in this exploratory study of influences to marry on individual and relational well-being. For all regression results please see Tables 2–6.

Table 1. Study descriptive statistics.

Variable	Mean	SD	Range
Stress	10.89	3.00	15
Satisfaction w/life	24.89	6.49	30
Depression	11.61	4.24	18
Rel. Satisfaction	20.62	4.600	21
Rel. Disillusionment	18.10	8.01	44
Parents married early	4.90	2.40	6
Sibling married early	3.69	2.45	6
Friends married early	4.64	1.81	6
Religious influences	3.75	1.81	6
Felt pressure to marry early	4.09	2.08	6

Table 2. Multiple regression results: Stress as the dependent variable ($N = 399$).

Stress Model						
Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	β	95% Confidence Interval Lower	95% Confidence Interval Upper
Parents marrying early	−0.16	0.07	1.51	−0.09 ⁺	−0.25	0.02
Sibling marrying early	0.04	0.06	0.57	0.06	−0.09	0.16
Friends marrying early	−0.20	0.09	2.16	−0.12 [*]	−0.38	−0.02
Religious influence	−0.03	0.09	0.74	−0.02	−0.20	0.14
Felt pressure to marry early	0.28	0.08	3.53	0.19 ^{***}	0.12	0.43

Note: Controlling for gender, age, income, and education; ⁺ $p < 0.10$, ^{*} $p < 0.05$, ^{***} $p < 0.001$.

Table 3. Multiple regression results: Satisfaction with life as the dependent variable ($N = 400$).

Satisfaction with Life Model						
Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	β	95% Confidence Interval Lower	95% Confidence Interval Upper
Parents marrying early	0.37	0.14	2.57	0.14 ^{**}	0.09	0.65
Sibling marrying early	−0.18	0.13	1.41	−0.07	−0.45	0.07
Friends marrying early	0.20	0.20	1.41	−0.07	−0.18	0.60
Religious influence	0.44	0.18	2.38	0.12 [*]	0.08	0.80
Felt pressure to marry early	−0.44	0.17	3.18	−0.17 ^{**}	−0.87	−0.20

Note: Controlling for gender, age, income, and education; ^{*} $p < 0.05$, ^{**} $p < 0.01$.

Table 4. Multiple regression results: Depression as the dependent variable ($N = 394$).

Depression Model						
Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	β	95% Confidence Interval Lower	95% Confidence Interval Upper
Parents marrying early	−0.07	0.10	0.67	0.04	−0.26	0.13
Sibling marrying early	0.10	0.09	1.11	0.06	−0.08	0.28
Friends marrying early	−0.17	0.14	1.26	−0.07	−0.44	0.10
Religious influence	−0.08	0.13	0.63	−0.03	−0.32	0.17
Felt pressure to marry early	0.22	0.11	1.89	0.11 ⁺	−0.01	0.44

Note: Controlling for gender, age, income, and education; ⁺ $p < 0.10$.

Table 5. Multiple regression results: Relationship satisfaction as the dependent variable ($N = 269$).

Relationship Satisfaction Model						
Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	β	95% Confidence Interval Lower	95% Confidence Interval Upper
Parents marrying early	0.21	0.12	1.68	1.11	−0.04	0.49
Sibling marrying early	−0.27	0.18	2.31	−0.15 *	−0.50	−0.04
Friends marrying early	0.36	0.17	2.14	0.14 *	0.03	0.69
Religious influence	0.13	0.16	0.84	0.05	−0.78	0.44
Felt pressure to marry early	−0.28	0.14	1.80	−0.13 +	−0.56	−0.00

Note: Controlling for gender, age, income, and education; + $p < 0.10$. * $p < 0.05$.

Table 6. Multiple regression results: Relationship dissolution as the dependent variable ($N = 227$).

Relationship Dissolution Model						
Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	β	95% Confidence Interval Lower	95% Confidence Interval Upper
Parents marrying early	−0.52	0.25	2.11	−0.15 *	−1.01	−0.03
Sibling marrying early	0.21	0.23	0.92	−0.15	−0.24	0.66
Friends marrying early	−0.52	0.34	1.53	−0.18	−1.20	0.15
Religious influence	−0.09	0.31	−0.28	−0.02	−0.70	0.53
Felt pressure to marry early	0.39	0.28	1.38	0.10	−0.18	0.95

Note: Controlling for gender, age, income, and education; * $p < 0.05$.

10. Results

10.1. Results for Stress Model

Multiple regression analysis was used to test if the social immediacy factors (parents marrying early, siblings marrying early, friends marrying early, religious influences, and overall felt pressures to marry early) significantly predicted stress in this analysis. The results of the regression indicated that the predictors explained 9% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.09$, $F(9,389) = 4.04$, $p < 0.001$). It was found that friends marrying early significantly predicted stress ($\beta = -0.12$, $p = 0.03$), as did felt pressures to marry early ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.001$). The parents marrying early variable approached significance ($\beta = -0.09$, $p = 0.08$).

10.2. Results for Satisfaction with Life Model

Multiple regression analysis was used to test if the social immediacy factors (parents marrying early, siblings marrying early, friends marrying early, religious influences, and overall felt pressures to marry early) significantly predicted satisfaction with life in this analysis. The results of the regression indicated that the predictors explained 7% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.07$, $F(9,380) = 3.08$, $p < 0.001$). It was found that parents marrying early significantly predicted satisfaction with life ($\beta = 0.14$, $p = 0.01$), as did religious influences ($\beta = 0.12$, $p = 0.02$), and felt pressures to marry early ($\beta = -0.17$, $p = 0.002$).

10.3. Results for the Depression Model

Multiple regression analysis was used to test if the social immediacy factors (parents marrying early, siblings marrying early, friends marrying early, religious influences, and overall felt pressures to marry early) marginally predicted depression in this analysis. The results of the regression indicated that the predictors explained 4% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.04$, $F(9,384) = 1.77$, $p = 0.07$). It was found that felt pressures to marry early marginally predicted depression ($\beta = 0.11$, $p = 0.06$).

10.4. Results for Relationship Satisfaction Model

Multiple regression analysis was used to test if the social immediacy factors (parents marrying early, siblings marrying early, friends marrying early, religious influences, and overall felt pressures to marry early) significantly predicted relationship satisfaction in this analysis. The results of the regression indicated that the predictors explained 13% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.13$, $F(9,259) = 4.21$, $p < 0.001$). It was found that siblings marrying early significantly predicted relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -0.15$, $p = 0.02$), as did friends marrying early ($\beta = 0.14$, $p = 0.03$), and felt pressures to marry early ($\beta = -0.13$, $p = 0.049$).

10.5. Results for Relationship Disillusionment Model

Multiple regression analysis was used to test if the social immediacy factors (parents marrying early, siblings marrying early, friends marrying early, religious influences, and overall felt pressures to marry early) marginally predicted relationship disillusionment in this analysis. The results of the regression indicated that the predictors explained 5% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.05$, $F(9,217) = 1.32$, $p = 0.23$). It was found that parents marrying early significantly predicted relationship disillusionment ($\beta = -0.15$, $p = 0.04$).

11. Discussion

This is the first study to investigate how various influences to marry early affect multiple areas of personal and relational well-being, based on ideas from social impact theory. In most cases, felt pressures to marry early were associated negatively with well-being. Tying to theory, some areas of social immediacy, such as parents, siblings, and friends marrying early were also associated with well-being. In these analyses, other areas of social immediacy, namely religious influences to marry, had limited effects. The results, in connection with previous literature and theory, are discussed in greater detail below.

In general, where pressures to marry early were felt, the associations were negative. These results highlight the power and influence of pressures to marry early in connection with negative, unhealthy outcomes.

From a more direct level of social immediacy, parents marrying early showed associations in two of the models (positive with satisfaction with life, and negative with relationship disillusionment) and may represent a stronger level of social immediacy influence. Much of this is likely due to the family-of-origin context, where beliefs and values of the parents are transmitted through conversations and behaviors with children. The values and beliefs of the parents, in part, may have included a connection to marriage and the importance of marriage, and these values and beliefs were transmitted to children in the family. Values and beliefs about marriage and marital timing of the parents are often connected to those in children and can have both positive and negative consequences (e.g., [Shenhav, 2017](#); [Sprecher & Felmlee, 2021](#); [Willoughby et al., 2012](#)). Therefore, the value of marriage and marrying early can be perpetuated by children of parents who also hold similar values and beliefs. However, this linkage is not directly clear and the connection needs further investigation to add clarity to how this does or does not happen (see implications for researchers). And likely these influences may differ if sampled from different populations with different sets of family beliefs.

Also, interestingly, siblings marrying early was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction in this study. This finding is somewhat difficult to interpret, but perhaps siblings had a negative experience with marriage and provided a negative influence and example. Additionally, sibling competition/rivalry may have also played a part, as the effort to show a positive relationship/marriage may have had a negative impact.

Additionally, from another level of social immediacy, friends marrying early was positively associated with relationship satisfaction and negatively associated with stress. It

may be that seeing friends enter and enjoy an earlier marital relationship had a spillover, positive influence on those in the sample. This may have been more the case for those who had also entered a marital relationship close to the marital timing of friends, but this was not directly tested in this study.

It should be noted that the parents, siblings, and friends variables were assessing the marital timing of these different areas of social immediacy, and therefore represent an indirect effect on well-being. Yet, according to social impact theory, what is happening around a person, especially bigger decisions such as marriage are likely to have an effect, and that effect was found in these results somewhat based on the level of social immediacy.

From a larger level of social immediacy, curiously, religious influences had limited associations in this study, except for a positive association with satisfaction with life. This finding is somewhat surprising considering the centrality of marriage to many religious institutions (Dollahite & Marks, 2009), and the fact that those who are religious tend to marry at earlier ages (Uecker, 2014). It may be that religious influences in this context are not seen as “pressure” to marry, or the “pressure” to marry early aspect of this item may have been more fully captured in the “pressure to marry early” variable. This finding is somewhat curious as religiosity has shown positive correlations with health and well-being (e.g., Koenig, 2012), yet the other variables in this study were more influential. This also may be connected to lowering trends in religiosity and rises in secularism (Smith, 2025). And for the findings in this study, it is likely that the positive association with satisfaction with life represents a relationship where marrying and marrying early is connected to one’s religious worldview.

Connecting to Social Impact Theory

The results of this study reflect elements of the theoretical framework given. In keeping with the concept of social influence, pressures to conform to or comply with norms for a perceived social timeline may have led many young to seek early marriage (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Oliveira et al., 2025; Sandhu, 2024). Several factors, including parents, siblings, friends, and religion, were assessed for their contribution to the perceived influences to marry early and the possible influences on those individuals’ well-being outcomes. While pressure to marry early generally resulted in a negative trend for well-being, some sources of influence were actually associated with positive outcomes for well-being.

As a main example, the parents’ marrying early variable saw many associations with well-being. Additionally, friends and siblings marrying early also had an effect. However, a limited impact on well-being was noted as a result of religious influences. These findings reflect the social impact theory, showing that different sources of pressure to marry early, from different levels of social immediacy, had varying degrees of impact on individuals depending on the strength and immediacy of that association (Latané, 1981; Oliveira et al., 2025). The immediacy of the parent–child relationship implies that parents will have a stronger impact on the well-being of their children, particularly in a relational sense, and this study suggests that that influence continues into emerging adulthood. While other sources of influence, from other levels of social immediacy, also showed associations with well-being, not every source was capable of producing positive outcomes.

12. Implications for Practitioners and Researchers

The results of this study underscore the dangers of felt pressures to marry early on various areas of individual and relational well-being. Pressures to marry, and especially marry early, may cause someone to feel rejected and disillusioned by a marital relationship—and this may lead to negative consequences. They may feel they ended up in a marriage

when they may not have fully made the decision to be in the marriage. As noted in this study, this has associations with both the individual and relationships.

Relationship programmers should discuss with participants the dangers of external influences to marry early, and how these dangers can be mitigated. Programmers should focus on healthy individual decision-making, making choices for oneself, and healthy aspects of compatibility and partner selection. Relationship programmers should focus more on skills, what we know works well in healthy partner selection and relationship behaviors, and seek to lessen the effects of burdensome influences to marry and marry early.

The results also highlight the parents marrying early in association with many positive and negative associations. Interestingly, these associations were connected with the relational variables as well. Researchers should seek to further investigate the mechanisms through which these values are conveyed to children and have positive effects. Beyond marrying early, what individual and relational values, beliefs, and practices in the parents and the parents' marriage have the most influential and positive effects on the children and children's relationships? Such investigations are in need for future discovery.

13. Limitations and Conclusions

The design of this study is cross-sectional, and thus no claims can be made about causal relationships. Other main limitations include the non-diverse composition of the sample in terms of geographical location and racial and gender diversity. The results may vary due to relationship beliefs in different parts of the world and urban vs. rural considerations. The sample is also fairly well-educated. These limitations should be noted as the results may not generalize to more diverse samples. In addition, several of the predictors are single-item measures, which preclude examinations of internal consistency/reliability and may lead to elevated Type II errors. Yet, single-item predictors have shown utility in past research (Allen et al., 2022; Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007). Yet, as this is a new area of investigation, some of the single items in this study referred to general pressures to marry but no specifications as to what these pressures are/were. Also, the multiple research questions examined in this study may have also led to increased Type II errors. The wording of the "felt pressures to marry early" as during college or by the time someone finished college may have led to different interpretations, especially for those outside of the college context. Some of the coefficient effect sizes and R^2 values are somewhat low, which needs to be taken into consideration as well. Yet, the exploratory nature of this investigation, and placement as the first study to use ideas from social impact theory to investigate how influences to marry influence not only individual well-being, but also relationship well-being is notable, and such investigations add to our understanding of healthy relationship development principles, highlighting areas that should or should not be emphasized to those considering a marital decision. Relationship programmers can use such information to more adequately instruct on which pressures tend to lead to healthier outcomes and which pressures do not. Such investigations are important as religious populations continue to marry at younger ages and supporting the individual and relationship health of these people and couples is an important endeavor.

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Appendix A

Data are available from the first author, including the data codebook and analytic syntax.

Wording for sing-item measures (included in the study analysis as follows):

Felt pressure to marry: I felt/feel pressure to be married early (e.g., during college or by the time I graduate/graduated) (1 = Strongly disagree–7 Strongly agree).

Religious influence: The pressure to marry early comes mostly from my own religious beliefs (1 = Strongly disagree–7 Strongly agree).

Parents' marital timing: My parents married early (e.g., during college or before graduation) (1 = Strongly disagree–7 Strongly agree).

Sibling marital timing: I have at least one sibling who married early (e.g., during college or before graduation) (1 = Strongly disagree–7 Strongly agree).

Friends' marital timing: Most of my friends married early (e.g., during college or before graduation) (1 = Strongly disagree–7 Strongly agree).

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