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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Female Perception of Cohabitation and Marriage in Metropolitan Arequipa

Percepción femenina de la convivencia y el matrimonio en Arequipa Metropolitana

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ABSTRACT

Background: During the last decades in Peru there have been greater demographic changes, like the remarkable increase in the number of cohabitating couples and the decrease of married ones. Therefore, this study aims to describe the perception of cohabitation and marriage between women in the city of Arequipa, Peru. **Methods:** 764 women between 18 and 66 years of age were randomly selected according to their socioeconomic level and they were surveyed with a questionnaire about cohabitation and marriage perception. The results indicated that the majority of evaluated women considered marriage important (82.5) because it is the most appropriate way to start living as a couple (35.2%) and it is a legally recognized institution (31.3%), among other reasons. Furthermore, the majority of women do not consider cohabitation as more convenient than getting married (65.8%) and mostly reported that cohabitation is a type of relationship in which members mutually support each other (97.5%), that is exclusive between two people (97%) and in which expenses and duties are shared (95.9%). **Conclusion:** For a great percentage of cohabiters and single women from the sample, marriage is important. The majority of women do not consider cohabitation more convenient than getting married. The women that considered cohabitation more convenient, pointed two main reasons: knowing if the couple is getting along and knowing the couple well. Less than the 10% of these women believe that cohabitation is a step prior to marriage. Regarding the perception of marriage compared to cohabitation, for the vast majority of women, the perception of cohabitation is similar to the characteristics of marriage.

Keywords: Women, cohabitation, marriage, convenience, Law, perception.

RESUMEN

Antecedentes: Durante las últimas décadas en el Perú se han producido grandes cambios demográficos, como el notable aumento del número de parejas que cohabitan y la disminución de las parejas casadas. Por lo tanto, este estudio tiene como objetivo describir la percepción sobre la convivencia y el matrimonio entre las mujeres de la ciudad de Arequipa, Perú. **Metodología:** Se seleccionaron aleatoriamente 764 mujeres entre 18 y 66 años de acuerdo a su nivel socioeconómico y se les encuestó con un cuestionario sobre percepción de convivencia y matrimonio. Los resultados indicaron que la mayoría de las mujeres evaluadas consideraron importante el matrimonio (82,5) por ser la forma más adecuada de empezar a vivir en pareja (35,2%), por ser una institución legalmente reconocida (31,3%), entre otras

razones. Además, la mayoría de las mujeres no considera la convivencia como más conveniente que casarse (65,8%) y mayoritariamente reportaron que la convivencia es un tipo de relación en la que los miembros se apoyan mutuamente (97,5%), que es exclusiva entre dos personas (97 %) y en los que se comparten gastos y deberes (95,9%). **Conclusión:** Para un gran porcentaje de las mujeres convivientes y solteras de la muestra, el matrimonio es importante. La mayoría de las mujeres no consideran más conveniente la convivencia que casarse. Las mujeres que consideraron más conveniente la convivencia, señalaron dos razones principales: saber si la pareja se lleva bien y conocer bien a la pareja. Menos del 10% de estas mujeres cree que la convivencia es un paso previo al matrimonio. En cuanto a la percepción del matrimonio frente a la convivencia, para la gran mayoría de las mujeres, la percepción de la convivencia es similar a las características del matrimonio.

Palabras clave: Mujer, convivencia, matrimonio, conveniencia, Derecho, percepción.

BACKGROUND

For centuries, marriage remained the only socially and legally recognized form of union between a man and a woman in western societies. This does not mean that there were no other forms of union between men and women. However, other types of unions were not regulated as equivalent to marriage as is happening today in several countries, including Peru. Does the perception of marriage and cohabitation possibly reflect this law change? Based on the current family law, it is necessary to know the population's perception of marriage and cohabitation in order to support public policies oriented to fulfill the constitutional mandate of family's protection and particularly, to promote marriage (Constitución Política del Perú, 1993, Artículo 4) through the reduction of costs for marriage's celebration; also massive celebrations, nowadays very popular around the world; reduction of costs associated with married life, such as tax exemptions; or, even adequate marriage preparation. (Domínguez-Hidalgo et al., 2013).

As a brief historical context, it is necessary to remember that until the end of the 19th century, marriage was the most frequent state since it was socially necessary to reach a status and, in many cases, to inherit a patrimony (Vásquez de Prada, 2008). However, since the first half of the 19th century, there was an increase in premarital cohabitation and marital relationships began to be disputed (Sanchez-Cordero, 1981). Industrialization led to migration to the city and opened the possibility of choosing a partner without a previous arrangement between families. Non-marital or consensual unions began to be more common, especially in the working class and the trend was on the rise (Lesthaeghe, 2010). However, after World War II, there was an unusual interest and increase in the number of marriages, both in the United States and in Europe, during the so-called baby boom (Vásquez de Prada, 2008).

It was not until the 1960s that the hegemony of the traditional model of marriage and family disappeared (Vásquez de Prada, 2008). Cohabitation increased demographically, both in South America, where the pattern of marriage was already characterized by the incidence of consensual unions (López & Montoro, 2009), and in the rest of the world (Wilcox & DeRose, 2017). The change in marriage patterns occurred not only in the decrease of its intensity but also in the delay of the marriage calendar (López & Montoro, 2009).

Currently, this phenomenon is especially noticeable in Central America, Colombia and Peru (López-Gay et al., 2014). Since the 1960s the age of the first marriage in Peru began to increase and by the 1980s the number of marriages before the twenties had already decreased considerably (Ferrando & Aramburú,

1991). Similarly, marriage patterns became more progressive and pronounced. Comparing the results of the 1981 and 2017 censuses, the number of people over 12 years old living in cohabitation has increased by 14.71% and the married population has decreased by 12.71%, (INEI, 2017). By 2017, the percentage of cohabitants (26.71%) in Peru exceeded the percentage of married people (25.69%) (INEI, 2017).

All these demographic changes accompanied changes in law regarding marriage and cohabitation. However, it's difficult to determine whether the law changes have influenced the environment, whether the environment has influenced the law changes or whether there has been feedback between them. What is certain is that the way in which the State has regulated couples' unions contributes to change the perception about them (Perelli-Harris & Sánchez, 2012).

Therefore, it is necessary to review the context of the marriage and cohabitation laws in Peru. Based on this, we will evaluate the perception about them (Perelli-Harris & Sánchez, 2012).

Peru's civil law define marriage as a union voluntarily entered of a man and a woman legally fit for it and formalized under the provisions of the Code, in order to live together (Código Civil Peruano, 1984). For its part, although the Peruvian Civil Code (1984) does not define what cohabitation is, Article 326 refers to it as *de facto* union and describes its characteristics: a voluntary union maintained by a man and a woman, free from any impediment to marriage, in order to achieve purposes and fulfill duties similar to marriage. It also requires that the union must have lasted at least two continuous years.

As can be seen, cohabitation shares many essential characteristics of marriage, such as the heterosexuality; man and woman, the purpose of living together, and the same rights and duties recognized to the spouses. In addition, it recognizes the obligation to feed and care for their children. Likewise, they owe loyalty, assistance and the obligation of living together in the same home.

With respect to personal effects, there are no substantive differences between marriage and cohabitation, except for the power of the woman to have her husband's surname added to her own and to keep it as long as she does not remarry, as stipulated in Article 24 of the Peruvian Civil Code (1984). Moreover, cohabiters have the right to adopt (Ley N° 30311, 2015) and even to social security (Decreto Supremo N° 014-2016-TR, 2016). Although marriage originates patrimonial effects on the goods acquired by the spouses, they can choose the economic regime of separation of goods or the regime of society of gains (Canales, 2016). On this last point, there is a fundamental difference with the cohabitation since the latter gives rise only to the

regime of society of gains.

However, apart from the possibility for the woman to have her husband's surname added to hers and the option for the economic regime of separation of assets, what are the main legal differences between marriage and cohabitation? Even more, if we consider that Law No. 3007 (2013) recognized the rights and duties of inheritance to the cohabitation. Likewise, the private pension fund system recognizes the right to disability and survival pensions, as well as the retirement pension of one's partner. It even recognizes the right of usufruct over the house where the couple lived, in the event that the sum of his earnings and inheritance is not enough to award the property to the surviving partner (Zuta, 2018). With all this, it seems that the peruvian family law is approaching to an equality between legal effects and consequences of marriage and cohabitation.

On the other hand, most people find that the main difference between marriage and cohabitation would be the fulfillment of forms and solemnities prescribed by law, as well as their respective registration, absent in the cohabitation relationships (Viladrich, 2010). Such statements lead to question of what exists beyond the regulation of civil marriage as a legal act. Marriage precedes Law, so the difference also surpasses it, since marriage is more complex than the legal system. In this regard, it is necessary to emphasize that marriage and the right to marry rather than being positive legal realities, are natural realities (Viladrich, 2010). But what happens with the perception of these realities when the law equates marriage and cohabitation? What do Peruvian people think it is important for them and for their relationships? Therefore, it is essential to know what does marriage and cohabitation mean for citizens.

Regarding the progressive legal approximation between marriage and cohabitation, some studies point out that the State policies oriented to the legal equalization of cohabitation relations, have affected the practical meaning of marriage (Cherlin, 2004; Edin & Kefalas, 2005). Although the symbolic meaning of marriage still remains, as cohabitation has become an institution increasingly similar to marriage, new meanings have been assigned to both of them (Seltzer, 2000). Despite their importance, few studies have investigated the perceptions and reasons linked to them. Some studies noted that personal history, individualization and culture influenced the meanings around marriage and cohabitation (Perelli-Harris & Bernardi, 2015). Besides, the differences in the perception of marriage and cohabitation could vary between groups of people according to their age or life stage. In particular, between different cohorts of women, due to legal and social changes at different times (Kefalas et al., 2011). Therefore, these meanings are constantly changing (Manting, 1996).

Moreover, in the process of couple formation, cohabitation relationships seem to begin without clear communication from the couple about their meaning (Manning & Smock, 2005). Among the reasons argued for cohabitating there are fundamentally: spending more time together, convenience and testing the relationship (Rhoades, Stanley & Markman, 2009). On the other hand, young Mexicans' perception points to consider cohabitation as a trial period that favors strengthening marital stability (Ojeda, 2009). In their opinion, there are no clear advantages

between marriage and cohabitation. Young women even believe that cohabitation is more advantageous because it does not request legal procedures and cohabitation relationships are easier to break (Ojeda, 2017).

In terms of the perception of cohabitation, there are also differences between the genders. Apparently, men perceive cohabitation as a trial period (Ojeda, 2009) and among them; this reason predominates in their decision to live together. Nevertheless, the investigations around this topic are scarce and almost none has taken great samples for its evaluation. The current law in Peru is based on the fact that marriage and cohabitation originate a family, personal and patrimonial effects for its members. Nevertheless, the recognition of cohabitation as a source that generates a family has caused the de-institutionalization of marriage (Plácido, 2013).

The Peruvian State has the obligation to promote marriage, by constitutional mandate (Constitución Política del Perú, 1993, Artículo 4). In this sense, the rule that promote the matrimonial family, demonstrates that the peruvian state, prefers marriage before the cohabitation. This means that the peruvian state, considers that civil marriage is the main, but not the only, source of the family (Plácido, 2013).

It is also necessary to consider that despite their current legal equality, marriage and cohabitation do not function in the same way. Cohabitation is more unstable, tends to dissolve (Bumpass & Lu, 2000) and cohabitating women have more risk of suffering partner violence (Castro, Cerellino & Rivera, 2017).

For this reason, it is worth asking whether the equalization of cohabitation and marriage constitutes a social demand on the part of the couples. Likewise, we wonder if, in Arequipa, the second most populated city in Peru, couples prefer to cohabit rather than get married, and what is their perception of cohabitation and marriage? We believe that these questions are fundamental keys to fulfilling the constitutional mandate of Article 4 of the Political Constitution of Peru (1993): the promotion of marriage, not only through laws, but also through programs and public policies that allow Peruvian couples to marry. To achieve this purpose, we have taken the concepts of marriage, found in Peru's laws, to identify the preferences and perceptions around marriage and cohabitation from a representative sample of the female population of Metropolitan Arequipa.

METHOD

Design

This study is transversal with a simple correlational design (Ato et al. 2013).

Sample

The sample consisted of 764 women who lived in the city of Arequipa, Peru. Regarding the socioeconomic level, 17.4% of women belonged to level A/B, 41.6% to level C, 31.4% to level D and 9.7% to level E. Likewise, most of those evaluated had between 36 to 45 years (19.6%) or between 56 to 65 years (18%). As for marital status, most of the participants were married (37.6%) or cohabiting (23.8%, see Table 1). For the selection of the participants, a stratified probabilistic sampling was followed according to their socioeconomic level (Hernández et al., 2014).

Measuring instrument

Survey about perception of cohabitation and civil marriage: It was created by the researchers in order to assess perception of women about cohabitation and civil marriage. Its items were prepared based on the current civil law of marriage and cohabitation in Peru, that is, articles 4 and 5 of the Political Constitution of Peru (1993) and the Family Law Civil Code (1984). Besides, some of the items about the perception of cohabitation considerate the results from the study of Rhoades, Stanley and Markman, H. J. (2009).

The instrument consists of 14 items, which are divided into two dimensions: 8 items evaluate the perception of cohabitation: 7 items are dichotomous (yes or no) and 1 of them is nominal with eight response options. That item can only be answered by those participants who consider it is more convenient to cohabit than to marry, since it investigates the reasons for their response. The other 6 items evaluate perception of civil marriage, 4 of which are dichotomous (yes or no); while 1 item is nominal with 7 response options and can only be answered by those women who consider that civil marriage is important, since it investigates the reasons for their response. The last item is nominal with four response options and it can only be answered by those who consider that marry by civil law is difficult, since it asks about the reason for their response.

To assess the content validity of the test, in a first stage, eight judges evaluated the questions and issued various observations that led to a reformulation of some items. In a second stage, five judges evaluated the items, obtaining Aiken V values that

fluctuated between .867 and 1 with 95% confidence intervals between .621 and .796, which was an indicator that the items comply with evaluating the study variables according to the criteria indicated in Merino & Livia (2009). Reliability was evaluated using the internal consistency method through McDonald's Omega coefficient. In this way, the questions on perception of coexistence ($\omega = .713$) and perception of civil marriage to a lesser extent ($\omega = .654$) proved to be reliable.

Sociodemographic questionnaire: It was used to collect data on age, marital status and record the SES of those evaluated.

Procedure

Data collection was done in the houses of those evaluated, which were randomly selected according to their socioeconomic level. Informed consent was given to each of the evaluated women. Evaluators explained the purpose of the research to the sample and ensured anonymity and confidentiality of the responses. The surveys were individual and lasted approximately 10-15 minutes.

Data analysis

Descriptive analysis of the data was carried out through an analysis of frequencies and percentages; while for the inferential part, Pearson's Chi-square test was used. The software used was SPSS version 25.

Ethical considerations

This project had the approval of the Comité de Ética de la Uni-

Table 1. Sociodemographic variables

		n	%
Age	18 to 25 years	147	19,2
	26 to 30 years	79	10,4
	31 to 35 years	82	10,7
	36 to 45 years	150	19,6
	46 to 55 years	127	16,6
	56 to 65 years	142	18
	66 years or more	37	4,9
Marital status	Single	176	23,1
	Married	287	37,6
	Cohabiting	182	23,8
	Separated from husband	42	5,5
	Separated from cohabiting	26	3,3
	Divorcee	22	2,9
	Widow	28	3,7
Socioeconomic status	A/B	133	17,4
	C	317	41,6
	D	240	31,4
	E	74	9,7

versidad Católica San Pablo (Acta 43 CEPI.UCSP).

RESULTS

In Table 2, it can be seen that most of the women evaluated consider that civil marriage is important (82.5%), the main reasons being: they believe it is the most appropriate way to start living together as a couple (35.2%) and marriage is a legally recognized institution (31.3%). It is also observed that for most of the women evaluated both civil and religious marriage are important (57.6%), while 24.9% consider that only civil marriage is important. In addition, the majority of women surveyed do not consider it difficult to marry in civil law (87.3%). The majority of women who perceive that it is difficult to marry by civil means that civil marriage is very expensive (46.9%) or that carrying out the procedures is tedious (42.7%). Most of the evaluated women did not consider it would be easier if there were only one type of marriage (61.1%).

In Table 3 it can be seen that 34.2% of those evaluated consider cohabiting to be more convenient than civil law marriage. In addition, most of the women evaluated consider that cohabiting is a union between a man and a woman (94.9%), it is a type of relationship in which children can be born (83.6%). Moreover, our sample considers it is a type of relationship in which the members support each other (97.5%), it is a type of relationship in which the members share expenses and duties (95.9%), it is a type of exclusive relationship between two people (97%) and it is a commitment between two people (95.8%).

Table 4 shows the responses of those women who consider co-

habiting is more convenient than marriage ($n = 261$), according to their socioeconomic level. Among which, regardless of their SES ($\chi^2 = 20.537$; $p = .303$), the majority of women from A/B levels (56.8%), C (51.4%), D (58.5%) and E (50%) consider that cohabiting allows to know if the couple will get along or not. The second reason is that cohabiting will allow the couple to know each other better, A/B (27.3%), C (21.5%), D (20.7%) and E (28.6%).

In Table 5, it can be seen there is a statistically significant relationship between the marital status of women and their perception of why living together is more convenient than civil law marriage ($\chi^2 = 66.314$; $p = .002$). Although the majority of women, regardless of their marital status, consider cohabiting allows them to prove that the couple is getting along, this perception is notably more frequent in divorced women (88.9%) and occurs less in women separated from their husbands (40.9%) or partners (35.7%).

Furthermore, it is important to note that the present study sought to relate the perception of women regarding marriage and cohabitation with their age. However, in none of the cases was this relationship statistically significant ($p > .05$).

DISCUSSION

This quantitative research examined the perception of women about marriage and cohabitation. The results are only representative of Metropolitan Arequipa, where it has been found that the majority of the sample evaluated (82.5%) considers civil marriage important. These women believe that marriage is the

Table 2. Arequipa women's perception of civil marriage

		n	%
Do you consider that civil marriage is important? ($n = 764$)	No	134	17,50%
	Yes	630	82,50%
Why do you think civil marriage is important? ($n = 630$)	It is the most appropriate way to start living as a couple	222	35,20%
	It is the most suitable union to have children and raise them	76	12,10%
	It is a legally recognized institution	197	31,30%
	Male and female are required to support each other	75	11,90%
	It is a universally recognized institution	51	8,10%
	Married people are more accepted	8	1,30%
	Other	1	0,20%
What type of marriage is most important? Only the civil marriage ($n = 764$)	Only the civil marriage	190	24,90%
	Only the religious marriage	79	10,30%
	Both of them	440	57,60%
	None	55	7,20%
Is it difficult to marry in civil law? ($n = 757$)	No	661	87,30%
	Yes	96	12,70%
Why is it difficult to marry in civil law? ($n = 96$)	It is very expensive	45	46,90%
	It is difficult to obtain the information about the procedure	10	10,40%
	Carrying out the paperwork is tedious or tedious	41	42,70%
Would it be easier for there to be only one type of marriage? ($n = 721$)	No	459	63,70%
	Yes	262	36,30%

most appropriate way to start living as a couple, and because they consider it a legally recognized institution. These results seem to be related to the sociodemographic data in our sample where the percentage of married women is 37.6% and 23.8% cohabitates. However, it also indicates that marriage is not only important for married women but it is also relevant for a great percentage of cohabiters and single women.

Data about women cohabiters in Arequipa also shows that most of them have plans to get married (Rivera & Castro, 2019), which could explain their perception that marriage is the best way to start living as a couple. On the other hand, we observe that this result differs from other studies on women that indicate that cohabitation is the best way to start to live together as a couple and that a prior period of cohabitation is necessary

before getting married (Ojeda, 2017).

Even among those who consider cohabitation more convenient than getting married (34.2%), less than the 10% believe that cohabitation is a step prior to marriage. Representative data from women in Arequipa shows that only 15% of married women cohabitated before getting married (Rivera & Castro, 2019).

Additionally, it was found that the majority of women (87.3%) do not consider that marrying in civil law is difficult. The majority of women that considers it difficult to marry in civil law (12.7%) are cohabiters or ex-cohabiters. This indicates that the requirements and procedures that are required for the celebration of civil marriage in Peru do not constitute an obstacle to access marriage. Despite the fact that the marriage process in our country implies compliance with mandatory formalities and

Table 3. Arequipa woman's perception of cohabitation

		n	%
Is cohabiting more convenient than getting married in civil law?	No	502	65,80%
	Yes	261	34,20%
Union between male and female	No	39	5,10%
	Yes	725	94,90%
Relationship where you can have children	No	125	16,40%
	Yes	639	83,60%
Relationship where partners support each other	No	19	2,50%
	Yes	744	97,50%
Relationship where partners share expenses and duties	No	31	4,10%
	Yes	733	95,90%
Exclusive relationship of two people	No	23	3,00%
	Yes	740	97,00%
Compromise between two people	No	32	4,20%
	Yes	732	95,80%

Table 4. Reasons why women from Arequipa consider that cohabiting is more convenient than getting married according to the SES

SES		Why do you think that living together is more convenient than getting married?						
		If the couple gets along	Step prior to marriage	Have more than one partner at a time	Set the rules you want	Meet my partner	Union without legal formalities	Union without economic commitment of couple
A/B (n=44)	n	25	2	0	5	12	0	0
	%	56,80%	4,50%	0,00%	11,40%	27,30%	0,00%	0,00%
C (n=107)	n	55	12	3	7	23	7	0
	%	51,40%	11,20%	2,80%	6,50%	21,50%	6,50%	0,00%
D (n=82)	n	48	6	5	1	17	4	1
	%	58,50%	7,30%	6,10%	1,20%	20,70%	4,90%	1,20%
E (n=28)	n	14	4	1	0	8	1	0
	%	50,00%	14,30%	3,60%	0,00%	28,60%	3,60%	0,00%
Total (n=261)	n	142	24	9	13	60	12	1
	%	54,40%	9,20%	3,40%	5,00%	23,00%	4,60%	0,40%

Note: $\chi^2 = 20.537$; $p = .303$

legal requirements throughout the national territory, it seems that the women in the sample have internalized that whoever wishes to marry in Peru must comply with all these requirements, without exception.

Although those who pointed out that the difficulty of accessing it was mediated by its cost and the cumbersome process, it seems that the cost is not related to the payment of fees, but to the cost of marriage as a social event. We deduced it, because there is a significant relationship between the women that consider it is difficult to marry by its cost and socioeconomic level, both in the A/B level and in the D level. Related to this phenomenon, the historical and sociological data regarding the *servinacuy* suggest that one of the purposes of this period of cohabitation was to collect money for the celebration of marriage (Rodríguez 1990). So, it is possible that in Peru there is already an expectation of spending a large amount of money in the celebration of marriage. Another study that analyzed the marriage perception, found that having a wealthy economic status is important in the decision of getting married (Kuzembayeva, 2020). Therefore, the cost of marriage could be linked not only to the celebration of marriage itself but also to the costs of the married status.

On the other hand, it should be noted that despite the fact that in Peru since 1936, canonical marriage was stripped of all legal effect (Código Civil Peruano, 1936), more than half of the women evaluated indicated that both religious and civil marriage are just as important. This reflects that even if law could influence the perception about cohabitation and marriage (Perelli-Harris & Sánchez, 2012), the meaning of marriage goes beyond the

value granted by current legal laws (Huang et al., 2011).

Regarding the perception of marriage compared to cohabitation, we found that the majority of women do not consider cohabitation more convenient than getting married (65.8%). This perception differs from the results previously found in other investigations in female populations in Mexico (Ojeda, 2017). However, this may be because the sample sociodemographic differences between the aforementioned study and our research. On the other hand, we found the same preference towards marriage in other studies from different European countries and Australia, where the increase in cohabitation did not devalue the meaning of marriage but rather, reiterated their preference towards this type of union (Perelli-Harris et al., 2014).

In the results of our study, the 34.2% of women that considered cohabitation more convenient than marrying pointed two main reasons for this consideration: knowing if the couple is getting along and knowing the couple well. These kinds of perceptions fit as internal reasons for cohabitate (Rhoades et al., 2009). These types of reasons are associated with better relationship quality compared to external reasons for cohabitate like economic convenience (Tang et al., 2014).

Another outstanding fact found in the present study is that although the majority of women consider that marriage is the most appropriate way to start living as a couple, many of them cohabitate and, in the long term, it seems that few will get married. This phenomenon could be partially explained by the findings in other studies that indicate that those women who believe in the institution of marriage are more dedicated to

Table 5. Reasons why women from Arequipa consider that living together is more convenient than marrying according to their marital status

Marital status	Why do you think that cohabitation is more convenient than getting married?							
		If the couple gets along	Step prior to marriage	Have more than one partner at a time	Set the rules you want	Meet my partner	Union without legal formalities	Union without economic commitment of the couple
Single (n=60)	n	34	6	2	2	14	2	0
	%	56,70%	10,00%	3,30%	3,30%	23,30%	3,30%	0,00%
Married (n= 68)	n	39	4	2	3	17	3	0
	%	57,40%	5,90%	2,90%	4,40%	25,00%	4,40%	0,00%
Cohabiting (n= 84)	n	46	10	2	5	16	5	0
	%	54,80%	11,90%	2,40%	6,00%	19,00%	6,00%	0,00%
Separated from husband (n= 22)	n	9	0	2	2	9	0	0
	%	40,90%	0,00%	9,10%	9,10%	40,90%	0,00%	0,00%
Separated from cohabiting (n= 14)	n	5	2	1	2	2	2	0
	%	35,70%	14,30%	7,10%	14,30%	14,30%	14,30%	0,00%
Divorcee (n=9)	n	8	0	0	0	1	0	0
	%	88,90%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	11,10%	0,00%	0,00%
Widow (n= 7)	n	3	2	0	0	1	0	1
	%	42,90%	28,60%	0,00%	0,00%	14,30%	0,00%	14,30%
Total (n= 264)	n	144	24	9	14	60	12	1
	%	54,50%	9,10%	3,40%	5,30%	22,70%	4,50%	0,40%

Note: $\chi^2= 66.314$; $p= .002$

their relationship as cohabiters and tend to have more stable relationships (Rhoades et al., 2011; Parker, 2021)

Likewise, it is noteworthy that for the vast majority of women, the perception of cohabitation is similar to the characteristics of marriage. Since they consider that cohabiting is a union between a man and a woman, a relationship where they can have children, they also consider that it is a relationship where the couple: support each other, share expenses and duties, in which the couple are in an exclusive relationship and have commitment between them. Therefore, the perception of cohabitation in Arequipa seems to be consistent with the legal equalization made between them by the Peruvian State (Código Civil Peruano, 1984). This means that women in Arequipa consider cohabitation like a marriage. At the same time, it distances itself from the conception of cohabitation as a trial period leading to marriage, existing in other cultures such as the United States (Bumpass & Lu, 2000).

It is also necessary to contextualize the meanings about marriage and cohabitation, based on the cultural history of the people (Perelli-Harris & Bernardi, 2015). It is possible to link the results of this research and the meanings attributed to the Andean *Servinacuy* that has survived to this day. Although there was a general feeling that cohabitation was something morally wrong; the Andean conception of cohabitation was of a stable union and not a provisional relationship (Rodríguez, 1990). This could explain why the majority of Arequipa women consider marriage more convenient, important and wish to marry but at the same time their perception of cohabitation is similar to the marriage: a lasting union. This, in turn, could be given greater stability and satisfaction to their domestic partnership. Although it was a questioned support, there are multiple findings in the literature that indicate that cohabiting relationships that are perceived as a trial period are related to poorer communication and partner functionality, greater physical aggression, levels of insecurity, symptoms of depression, anxiety (Rhoades et al., 2009), instability (Brown, 2000; Hohmann-Marriott, 2006; Parker, 2021) and they are also related to more ambivalence regardless of the level of satisfaction with sacrifices (Tang et al., 2014).

Despite the results found, the present study has limitations, since it only examines the female population, for which the male perception is excluded. Therefore, it is not possible to analyze the differences of perception between the genders or within the couple. Although some studies do not find greater differences about the cohabitation perception between genders (Chaney et al., 2014), it would be interesting to examine those. On the other hand, the questions were oriented to a perception of marriage and cohabitation in general; however, the reasons why they decided or would decide to cohabit or marry were not investigated. Another limitation is that aspects related to the differences between the breakdown of marriage and cohabitation was not addressed. Likewise, our questionnaire has not assessed the impact of religious beliefs or marital status of the women's parents on the perception and meaning of marriage or cohabitation. We suggest considering these questions in a future study, because of the evidence about the influence they could have in the marriage perception of men and wom-

en (Kuzembayeva, 2020). Aware of the importance of cultural context in these perceptions (Cherlin, 2004), other studies could also address other sociodemographic variables like the rural or urban place of origin, especially because during the last decades Peru have had great migratory movement inside the country (Sánchez Aguilar, 2017).

Finally, we also suggest complementing this study with a qualitative approach to the variable, which could allow us to know in greater depth the perception of Peruvians regarding civil marriage and cohabitation. In this way, we recommend to delve into these issues in subsequent studies and address the differences between personal reasons and general perceptions about marriage and cohabitation. Besides, other studies could address the relationship between the perception of marriage and cohabitation and decision-making when forming a couple. We hope that this study contributes to the clarification of current perceptions about marriage and cohabitation. We also think that our results could lead to subsequent studies and must be taken into account in the evaluation of public policies that seek to strengthen couples' unions, even more so if it is considered that The Peruvian State, by constitutional mandate, has the obligation to promote marriage, compared to other possible ways of forming a couple.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there were no conflicts of interest.

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REVIEW PROCESS

This study has been reviewed by external peers in double-blind mode (Rozzana Sánchez Aragón and Willy Valle). The editor in charge David Villarreal-Zegarra. The review process can be found as supplementary material 1.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The database can be found in supplementary material 2 and the questionnaire can be found in supplementary material 3.

DISCLAIMER

The authors are responsible for all statements made in this article.

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