

‘Grey divorce’ on the rise as third of Australian couples over 50 separate

New research reveals divorce after the age of 50 is becoming more common, with empty nest syndrome as the leading cause.

Sydney, December 2023 – The ‘grey divorce’ trend is on the rise in Australia, with new data revealing close to a third (32%) of divorces are taking place after the age of 50.

New research by Australian Seniors has revealed a growing proportion of older couples are splitting up, with more than half (51%) of over 50s admitting grey divorces are becoming more common among their peers, while two in five (41%) older Australians have experienced divorce or separation in their lifetime.

Commissioned by Australian Seniors in partnership with consumer research group CoreData, the [Love After 50 Report 2023](#) surveyed 1,240 Australians over 50 to uncover how we’re approaching relationships and what factors drive satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

The findings point to empty nest syndrome as the leading cause for almost half (48%) of divorces after the age of 50. Meanwhile, financial pressures (35%) and retirement adjustments (34%) were also amongst the top reasons for divorce and separation, suggesting economic uncertainty is putting a strain on older couples.

“The findings from this research are deeply concerning,” says renowned psychiatrist, author and couple therapist, Dr George Blair-West. “Divorce rates have been falling in Australia since they peaked in the 1990s. Divorce rates in the over 50s, however, have bucked the trend.”

On the flip side, over half (57%) of older Australians are content with being single after 50. The trend of choosing personal happiness first rings true for almost half (46%) of divorcees who prefer to stay single, while only 4% hope to get remarried. According to the findings, more than half (55%) of single seniors are enjoying the benefits of additional personal space (73%), greater independence (72%) and peace and quiet (63%). While more than half (55%) of singles feel satisfied in the absence of a committed partner, the research suggests women are far more comfortable about this (61%) than men (47%).

On a macro level, shifting societal expectations around marriage and divorce are also driving the rise in the ‘grey divorce’. According to the report, around a third (34%) of over 50s believe societal attitudes towards divorce and separation are becoming more acceptable these days, and increased expectations of marriage compared to previous generations (30%) are key contributors to the growing trend.

Dr Blair-West commented on the significance of the ‘grey divorce’ trend. “The current over 50’s cohort typically married in their early twenties before their personalities and core values had consolidated. People literally grow apart as they mature in different directions, so it’s no surprise that it is the number one cause of divorce,” he explained. “Fortunately, these issues are eminently fixable through low-level couple therapy. Given that divorce is in the top three of life’s most distressing events, it’s worth working on.”

While the average Australian couple over 50 have been together for 34 years, almost three-quarters (74%) admit they’re facing challenges in their relationship. In fact, close to two in five (37%) have had doubts about continuing their current relationship, and a quarter (25%) have even seriously considered the possibility of separating or getting divorced. Interestingly, the latter is more likely among couples in their 50s (32%) than any other cohort, suggesting many are pursuing personal fulfilment in their ‘second act’ over societal pressures to stay in unsatisfying relationships.

“The good news is that re-partnering later in life means people are much more able to choose a partner who aligns with their values and the life that they want”, says Dr Blair-West. “Maturity brings an ability to better assess a potential partner’s character and thereby make a better match.’

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About Australian Seniors

Australian Seniors launched in 1998 to meet the needs of the often ignored over 50s market. Since then, we’ve helped countless Australians protect the most important things in life – whether it’s their family’s future, valuable assets, or even their long-planned retirement.

We strive to be different through the diverse offering of our life, funeral, health, home & contents, car, landlords, pet, and travel insurance products by carefully selecting underwriters that share our vision of providing insurance that’s simple, easy to understand, and cost-effective. That’s why our policies have helped everyone from hard-working over 50s to self-funded retirees take control of the things that matter most.

About the Australian Seniors Research Series

The Love After 50 Report 2023 forms part of the Australian Seniors Research Series. In its latest instalment, this study explores the landscape of relationships within Australia’s over 50s, delving into the factors influencing relationship satisfaction in later stages of life, the dynamics of singlehood, and the interplay between financial matters and relationships.

The report is compiled based on research commissioned by Australian Seniors and conducted by CoreData between 7 and 11 August 2023. The research was conducted via a quantitative online survey, gathering 1,240 responses from Australians aged 50 and above. The sample is representative of the general senior population of Australians who are in a relationship, divorced/separated or widowed in terms of age, gender, wealth, and state/territory.