

Cohabitation among unmarried older couples on the rise

By Anita Creamer, Sacramento Bee

The ceremony in February seemed like a traditional celebration. One of Charlotte Benedict's sons walked her down the aisle in the Eskaton Village Carmichael auditorium, while two of Jim Jordan's sons stood up with him. A minister blessed their union.

"We had 150 people there," said Jordan, 85, a retired architect and engineer. "But we didn't have a wedding license."

It's a quiet little fact of senior residences across the country: Grandpa is living with someone else's Grandma.

In their 70s, 80s and beyond, older couples meet in seniors-only housing and live together unencumbered by marriage vows. Their relationships are committed and bonded, meant to last the rest of their lives, sometimes even informally blessed by clergy.

According to U.S. census figures, co-habitation numbers for people 65 and older have tripled in the past decade, jumping from 193,000 in 2000 to 575,000 in 2010.

A generation or two ago, the idea of older adults living together might have been shameful, even scandalous. That's changed, in part because societal attitudes toward marriage have changed.

Only 52 percent of all American adults identified themselves as married in the 2010 census – and almost 60 percent of people age 50 and younger have lived with a partner without being married, the Pew Research Center says.

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