

'Gray Divorces' Rising in Fairfax County

More Baby Boomers couples in Fairfax County are calling it quits. A recent study by an area law firm shows residents older than 55 are divorcing at increasingly high rates.

Calling the county "the divorce capital of Virginia," the Arlington law firm of Tully Rinckey found that divorce rates for men and women over 55 are increasing even while divorce rates are dropping for younger couples.

"The Baby Boomers are getting older, and [divorce] is becoming more culturally acceptable than it was some 10 to 15 years ago," said H. Eugene Oliver, a family and matrimonial lawyer at the firm.

While the study found the overall number of divorces and annulments granted annually in Fairfax declined 5 percent, it also found the divorce rate for men between the ages of 55 and 64 rose from 9.1 percent to 11.8 percent. For men over 65, the divorce rate rose from 5.2 percent to 6.6 percent.

"They're definitely a lot more secure living by themselves and doing what makes [them] happy," Oliver said. "They're no longer staying together for the sake of staying together."

There are a number of reasons for the growing number of "gray divorces," as the firm's report dubs them, including financial strain on the couples and greater financial independence that allows them to feel more secure, Oliver said. Child custody issues that weigh on their younger counterparts are rare among older couples.

A recent Bowling Green State University study found that the national divorce rate among adults ages 50 and older doubled between 1990 and 2009. In 2009, more than 600,000 people in that age group divorced, accounting for roughly one out of every four divorces, the study found.

Oliver said he expects the trend to continue as the Baby Boomers continue to age.

"It's becoming more and more socially acceptable to date in your 50s and early 70s," Oliver said. "[I can see this] continuing in the immediate future."