

Marriage Factsheet #1: Five Facts About Marriage

- 1. Marriage is important to young Canadians.** A survey of Canadian teenagers indicates that 88% expect to get married and stay with the same partner for life, a 3% increase over a 1992 survey of teens.¹ Among unmarried Canadians in their 20s, over three-quarters expect to get married.²
- 2. Living common-law isn't the same as marrying.** Marriages generally last twice as long as common-law relationships. Approximately 30% of marriages are expected to end in separation or divorce, compared with approximately 60% of common-law relationships.³
- 3. Marriage is a more stable foundation for children.** The majority of children (68%) live with married parents. Married parent families tend to be far more stable than common-law unions, or even families where parents marry after living common-law. By the age of 10, 14% of children whose parents married without living common-law had experienced family breakdown, compared with 25% whose parents married after living common-law, and 63% whose parents lived common-law and never married.⁴ Second unions tend to be less stable, particularly if there are children from previous relationships. A 2002 Quebec study found that by the time a child was 2 ½, 9% had experienced their parents' separation when it was both parents' first union, compared to 19% when both parents had been married to or living with a previous partner.⁵
- 4. Marriage is a safer place for women and children.** There is less risk of spousal violence among couples that are married than among separated or common-law partners. Between 1991-2000, the intimate partner homicide rate was 4.4 per million couples for married women, 29.5 for women living common-law, and 37.4 for women who were separated.⁶ Children living with their two married biological parents are much less likely to experience neglect or abuse, and half as likely to witness violence in the home as children living with one parent.⁷
- 5. Divorce has long-term effects on children.** Children of divorce are more likely to have emotional, behavioural and social problems.⁸ They are less likely to finish high school⁹, and less likely to marry. If they do marry, they are more likely to separate or divorce.¹⁰ They are less likely to say they had a happy childhood,¹¹ and are less likely to visit their parents when they are adults if their parent has a new spouse or partner.¹²

¹ R. Bibby, *Canada's Teens: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, Toronto: Stoddart, 2001, p. 144.

² D. Dupuis, "What influences people's plans to have children," *Canadian Social Trends*, Spring 1998, p. 3.

³ *General Social Survey – Cycle 15: Changing Conjugal Life in Canada*, Statistics Canada, July 2002.

⁴ N. Marciel-Gratton, *Growing up with Mom and Dad? The intricate family life courses of Canadian children*, Statistics Canada, 1998, 16.

⁵ N. Marciel-Gratton, C. Le Bourdais and E. Lapierre-Adamcyk, "The Couple – Part II – Parental Separation in Early Childhood: A Preliminary Investigation" in *Quebec Longitudinal Study of Child Development (QLSCD 1998-2002) – From Birth to 29 Months*, Quebec, Institut de la statistique du Quebec, v. 2, no. 11, p. 46.

⁶ C. Trainor, M. Lambert and M. Dauvergne, "Spousal Violence," Chapter 1 in *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2002*, Statistics Canada, 2002, p. 23.

⁷ M. Dauvergne and H. Johnson, "Children Witnessing Family Violence," Chapter 3 in *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2001*, Statistics Canada, p. 25.

⁸ A. Aambert, *Divorce: Facts, Figures and Consequences*, Vanier Institute of the Family, 1998.

⁹ J. Frederick and M. Boyd, "The Impact of Family Structure on High School Completion," *Canadian Social Trends*, Spring 1998, 13.

¹⁰ M. Corak, *Death and Divorce: The Long-term Consequences of Parental Loss on Adolescents*, Statistics Canada, June 9, 1999; C. Le Bourdais and N. Marciel-Gratton, "The Impact of Family Disruption in Childhood on Demographic Outcomes in Young Adulthood," Chapter 6 in M. Corak (ed.), *Labour Markets, Social Institutions and the Future of Canada's Children*, Statistics Canada, Ottawa, 1998.

¹¹ C. Williams, "Family Disruptions and Childhood Happiness," *Canadian Social Trends*, Autumn 2001, 4.

¹² B. Townsend-Batten, "Staying in touch: Contact between adults and their parents," *Canadian Social Trends*, Spring 2002, 11.

Marriage Factsheet #2: The Benefits of Marriage

1. **Stability: Marriages are generally twice as stable as common-law relationships.**

According to the 2001 General Social Survey, approximately 30% of women who marry without living common-law are expected to separate; the probability doubles among women who first live common-law. When a common-law relationship ends, women are far more likely to enter into another common-law relationship rather than a marriage.¹³

Intact marriages are the most stable family form for children.

Children born to parents who married without living common-law beforehand are approximately three times less likely to experience family breakdown than children whose parents were living common-law when they were born and did not subsequently marry. By the age of 10, 63% of children from common-law unions had had their parents separate, compared to 14% of children whose parents had married without living common-law.¹⁴ A 2002 Quebec study has found that by the age of 2 ½, 3.4% of the children whose parents had married directly had separated parents, compared to 7% of children whose parents married after living common-law, and 16% of children born into common-law unions whose parents never married.¹⁵

Second unions tend to be less stable, particularly if there are children from previous relationships. The same Quebec study found that by the time a child was 2 ½ years old, 9% had experienced their parents' separation when it was both parents' first union, compared to 19% when both parents had been married to or living with a previous partner. The parents were more than twice as likely to separate when both had been in a previous union and at least one parent had a child from a previous union.¹⁶

2. **Family violence: There is a far lower risk of violence for women in intact marriages.**

There is less risk of spousal violence for women who are married than for those who are separated or live common-law. Between 1991-2000, the intimate partner homicide rate was 4.4 per million couples for married women, 29.5 for women living common-law, and 37.4 for women who were separated.¹⁷

Children living with their two married biological parents are much less likely to experience neglect or abuse, or to witness violence in the home. Almost one-half of child maltreatment cases (44%) involved children living in lone-parent families although lone-parent families made up less than one-fifth of families. Almost one-fifth (19%) of child maltreatment cases involved children living in a parent blended family where one parent was a step-parent or common-law partner but not the biological parent of at least one of the children in the family, although these make up approximately 6% or less of families. Among the remaining child maltreatment cases, 28% involved children living with their two biological parents.¹⁸

¹³ *General Social Survey – Cycle 15: Changing Conjugal Life in Canada*, Statistics Canada, July 2002.

¹⁴ N. Marcil-Gratton, *Growing up with Mom and Dad? The intricate family life courses of Canadian children*, Statistics Canada, 1998, p. 16.

¹⁵ N. Marcil-Gratton, C. Le Bourdais and E. Lapierre-Adamcyk, "The Couple – Part II – Parental Separation in Early Childhood: A Preliminary Investigation" in *Quebec Longitudinal Study of Child Development (QLSCD 1998-2002) – From Birth to 29 Months*, Quebec, Institut de la statistique du Quebec, v. 2, no. 11, p. 35.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁷ C. Trainor, M. Lambert and M. Dauvergne, "Spousal Violence," Chapter 1 in *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2002*, Statistics Canada, 2002, p. 23.

¹⁸ N. Trocme and D. Wolfe, ed. Gordon Phaneuf, "The Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect," Chapter 1 in *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2001*, Statistics Canada, p. 11.

Higher percentages of children witnessed physical fights if they were living in blended/step parent (14.7%) or single parent (10.3%) homes as compared to biological or adoptive two-parent families (7.4%). Children were also more likely to witness physical fights in the home if their family structure had undergone change over the previous period, either from two parents to one (13.6%), or from one parent to two (14.4%).¹⁹

3. Relationship formation: Divorce has a significant effect on a child's future relationships.

Children who lost a parent through death are no different than children from intact families in their decisions to marry or have children. However, children who saw their parents divorce are less likely to marry, and more likely to separate or divorce if they do marry.²⁰ Children who saw their parents separate or divorce are more likely to cohabit than to marry. For those who do marry, they are more likely to separate or divorce themselves. Married women are 1.7 times more likely to have their union dissolve, and married men are three times as likely to have their union dissolve. Women who experience their parents' separation or divorce are 1.5 times as likely to have a child before the age of 20, and 1.9 times as likely to have a child outside of a union.²¹

4. Child's behaviour/education: Children from intact families have fewer behavioural and educational problems.

Lone motherhood is associated with a 14% higher probability of the child having one or more psychiatric, schooling or social problems.²² Children living in lone parent families are twice as likely to exhibit delinquent behaviour as children in two parent families.²³ Canadians who lived in blended or step parent families at age 15 later reported a 70% high school graduation rate, compared to 71% for those in lone parent families and 80% for those who lived with both biological parents.²⁴

5. Parent-child relationship: Children aged 10 and 11 living in stepfamilies were more likely to say they lack emotional support from their parents, received erratic punishment and had difficulty getting along with parents and siblings²⁵. Adult children have a significantly lower likelihood of being in frequent contact with a parent who is living with a spouse other than the adult's mother or father.²⁶ Canadians who lived with both parents until age 15 are significantly more likely to say they had a happy childhood than those who experienced change in parental structure before the age of 15, 92% compared to 76%. The more changes in parental structure a child experienced, the less likely they were to indicate their childhood was happy: 70% of those who had two changes in parental structure said they had a happy childhood, compared to 50% of those who had three or more changes in parental structure.²⁷

¹⁹ Mia Dauvergne and Holly Johnson, "Children Witnessing Family Violence," Chapter 3 in *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2001*, Statistics Canada, p. 25.

²⁰ M. Corak, *Death and Divorce: The Long-term Consequences of Parental Loss on Adolescents*, Statistics Canada, June 9, 1999.

²¹ C. Le Bourdais and N. Marcil-Gratton, "The Impact of Family Disruption in Childhood on Demographic Outcomes in Young Adulthood," Chapter 6 in Miles Corak (ed.), *Labour Markets, Social Institutions and the Future of Canada's Children*, Statistics Canada, Ottawa, 1998.

²² M. Dooley, L. Curtis, E. Lipman and D. Feeny, "Child Psychiatric Disorders, Poor School Performance and Social Problems: The Roles of Family Structure and Low-Income," Chapter 7 in Miles Corak (ed.), *Labour Markets, Social Institutions and the Future of Canada's Children*, Statistics Canada, Ottawa, 1998, p. 120.

²³ K. Stevenson, "Family characteristics of problem kids," *Canadian Social Trends*, Winter 1999, p. 5.

²⁴ J. Frederick and M. Boyd, "The Impact of Family Structure on High School Completion," *Canadian Social Trends*, Spring 1998, p. 13.

²⁵ "Canadian Children in the 1990's: Selected Findings of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth," *Canadian Social Trends*, Spring 1997, p. 9.

²⁶ B. Townsend-Batten, "Staying in Touch: Contact between adults and their parents," *Canadian Social Trends*, Spring 2002, p. 11.

²⁷ C. Williams, "Family Disruptions and Childhood Happiness," *Canadian Social Trends*, Autumn 2001.

Marriage Factsheet #3: The Numbers

Summary: The majority of families are married-couple families (70%). The majority of children under 14 years old live with married parents (68%). While the majority of Canadians will eventually marry, younger Canadians are more likely to enter into common-law relationships than marriages as their first union. Common-law relationships are twice as likely to end in breakdown as marriages. Younger Canadians are three times more likely to enter into a second union than older Canadians. More Canadian children are experiencing family breakdown, at younger and younger ages. The children of married parents who have never lived common-law are approximately three times less likely to experience family breakdown as children whose parents are in a common-law union.

1. Family Structure: Of the 8.4 million families in Canada, 5.9 million (70%) are married couples, 1.3 million (16%) are lone-parent, and 1.2 million (14%) are opposite-sex common-law partners. The census counted 34,200 same-sex common-law partners, 0.5% of the total number of families. The census counted 503,100 stepfamilies, with approximately half of the parents married and half living common-law.²⁸ Approximately 40% of stepfamilies are blended (*i.e.* they include children from previous unions).²⁹

2. Union Formation: While the majority of Canadians will eventually marry, younger Canadians are increasingly choosing common-law relationships as their first conjugal union.

Among women in their 30s, 42% are expected to choose a common-law union as their first union and 51% to choose marriage. It is estimated that 78% of women in their 30s will get married at some point. Just over half (53%) of women in their 20s are expected to enter into a common-law relationship as their first union and 31% will likely marry first.³⁰

In 2001, there were 156,340 marriages performed in Canada, a slight increase (1.7%) over the number of marriages performed in 2000.³¹ In 1998, three-quarters of both brides and grooms were married for the first time, with 22% remarrying following divorce and 3% remarrying after being widowed.³²

3. Union Dissolution: Marriages are more stable than common-law relationships. Common-law relationships are twice as likely to end as marriages: approximately 30% of those who married directly and 60% of those who lived common-law as their first union are expected to separate.³³

A total of 71,144 marriages ended in divorce in 2000. The risk of divorce peaked after the couple's fourth anniversary, with 25.5 divorces per 1,000 marriages. Statistics Canada reports that the risk of divorce decreased slowly for each year of marriage after the fourth. The proportion of couples expected to divorce by the 30th wedding anniversary increased slightly to 37.7% in 2000.³⁴

If current trends continue, it is likely that three times as many women in their 30s will experience a second union (33%) compared to women in their 60s (11%). Women in their 30s who first married are twice as likely to enter into a common-law relationship for their second union. Women in their 30s who first cohabited are 14 times as likely to enter into a common-law relationship for their second union.³⁵

²⁸ *Profile of Canadian families and households: Diversification continues*, 2001 Census Analysis Series Statistics Canada.

²⁹ *General Social Survey – Cycle 15: Changing Conjugal Life in Canada*, Statistics Canada, July 2002.

³⁰ *General Social Survey – Cycle 15: Changing Conjugal Life in Canada*, Statistics Canada, July 2002.

³¹ *Marriages*, CANSIM II, table 053-0001, Statistics Canada.

³² "Marriages," *The Daily*, Statistics Canada, November 15, 2001.

³³ *General Social Survey – Cycle 15: Changing Conjugal Life in Canada*, Statistics Canada, July 2002.

³⁴ "Divorces," *The Daily*, Statistics Canada, December 2, 2002.

³⁵ *General Social Survey – Cycle 15: Changing Conjugal Life in Canada*, Statistics Canada, July 2002.

4. Children: The majority of children live with married parents. However, the proportion of children living with parents in a common-law relationship is growing, according to the 2001 census.

- 68% of children 0 to 14 years live with married parents (4.6 million children) in 2001.
- 13% of children 0 to 14 years live with common-law parents (732,915 children). Younger children are more likely to live with common-law parents: 17% of children 0 to 4 live with common-law parents.
- 19% of children did not live with both parents: about 18% with one parent, about 1% with other relatives.
- 0.5% of children live with a parent who has a same-sex partner.³⁶

The majority of children (71%) were born to married parents in 1994-95, with 20% born to parents in a common-law union and 9% born to parents who did not live together.³⁷

More Canadian children are experiencing family breakdown and at younger and younger ages.

Among children born in the early 1960s, 25% experienced family breakdown by the age of 20. Among children born in the late 1980s, almost 23% experienced family breakdown by the age of 6. The percentage of children born into two-parent households who have experienced family breakdown by the age of two almost doubled between 1985-86 and 1991-92 (from 9.5% to 15.4%).³⁸

Children born to married parents are far less likely to experience family breakdown. Children born to parents who married without living common-law beforehand are approximately three times less likely to experience family breakdown than children whose parents were living common-law when they were born and who did not subsequently marry. By the age of 10, 63% of children from common-law unions had experienced family breakdown.³⁹ By the age of 2 ½, 3.4% of Quebec children born to married parents had separated parents, compared to 7% of children whose parents had married after living common-law, and 16% of children born into common-law unions whose parents never married.⁴⁰

³⁶ *Profile of Canadian families and households: Diversification continues*, 2001 Census Analysis Series
Statistics Canada.

³⁷ Nicole Marci-Gratton, *Growing up with Mom and Dad? The intricate family life courses of Canadian children*,
Statistics Canada, 1998, p. 8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴⁰ N. Marci-Gratton, C. Le Bourdais and E. Lapierre-Adamcyk, "The Couple – Part II – Parental Separation in
Early Childhood: A Preliminary Investigation" in *Quebec Longitudinal Study of Child Development (QLSCD 1998-
2002) – From Birth to 29 Months*, Quebec, Institut de la statistique du Quebec, v. 2, no. 11, p. 35.