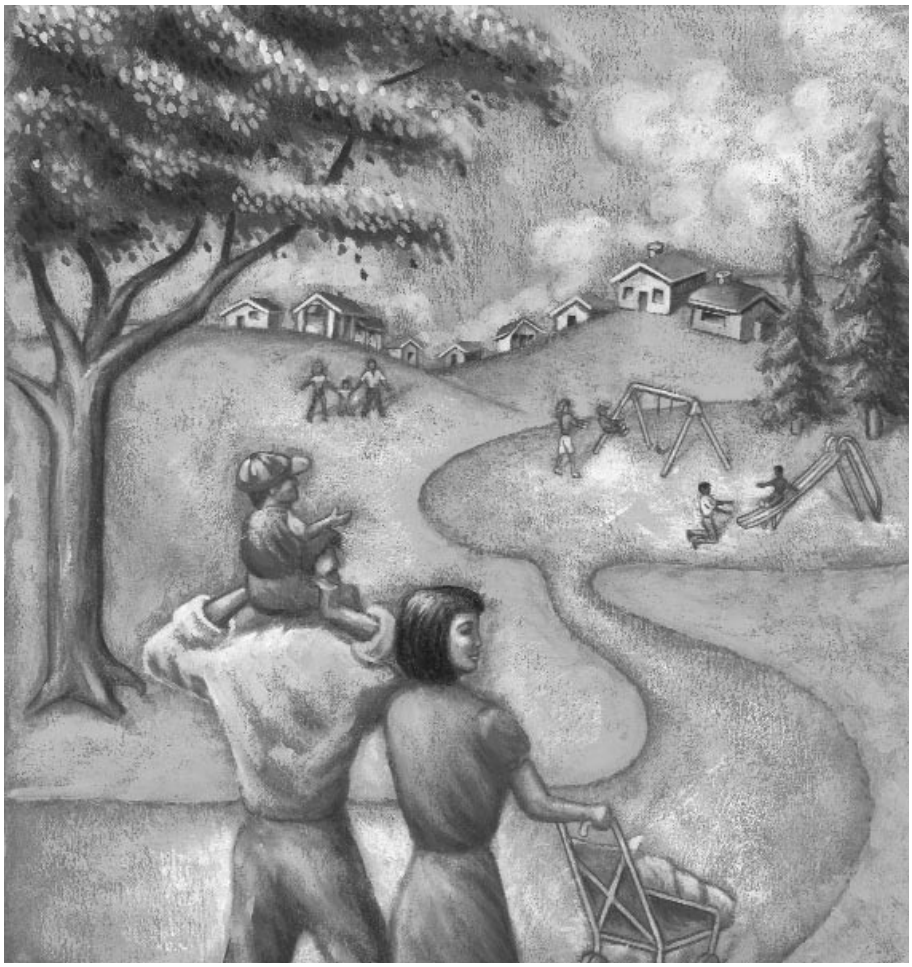
One hundred years of families

by Anne Milan

During most, and certainly the early part, of the past century, marriage was seen as a lifetime commitment, and the "traditional" family, consisting of husband, wife and children, was considered the norm. Early 20th century families were often flexible, expanding and contracting as the need arose. It was not unusual for them to take in older relatives, orphans or newlyweds with limited financial resources, as well as boarders.[1] Having many children was commonplace, and women could spend many decades engaged in childbearing and childrearing, often still caring for infants or young children after the oldest children had already left home.[2]



Exceptions to the traditional family unit — men and women who never married, lone parents, childless couples and couples living common-law[3] — always existed, but they were less likely the result of individual choice than of uncontrollable circumstances, such as the death of a spouse, obligations to aging parents, or poverty. As the 21st century dawns, people have acquired more choice, which has resulted in later marriages, delayed parenthood and smaller families, as well as higher rates of divorce, remarriage and blended families. This article briefly follows Canadian families throughout the course of the 20th century, and identifies some of the social, legal and economic conditions that have affected them.

1. Nett, E. M. 1993. *Canadian Families: Past and Present* (2nd ed.). Toronto: Harcourt, Brace Canada.
2. Ibid.
3. While common-law marriages may have existed in frontier areas where clergy were often unavailable, it is believed that common-law unions were rare. Larson, L. E., J. W. Goltz and C. W. Hobart. 1994. *Families in Canada: Social Context, Continuities and Changes.* Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice Hall and Statistics Canada, Catalogue 91-534E.

What you should know about this study

Data in this article come from several Statistics Canada surveys. The primary sources, however, were the Censuses of Population and Vital Statistics.

Crude marriage rate: number of marriages per 1,000 population aged 15 and over.

Crude divorce rate: number of divorces per 100,000 population aged 15 and over.

Total fertility rate: the average number of births per woman aged 15 and over that would occur during their childbearing years if they survived through their reproductive years and bore children in accordance with the age-specific fertility rates observed in a given year.

Blended families: blended families combine children who have different relationships with their parents. It consists of a married or common-law couple living with at least two children, one of whom does not share the same natural and/or adoptive parents as the other child(ren).

The complete bibliography for this article is available on the CST webpage on Statistics Canada's website:
http://www.statcan.ca/english/ads/11-008-XIE/index.htm

Late marriage and large families the norm at the turn of the 20th century

The cultural heritage of Canada's northern and western European settlers dictated that people establish an independent household when they married. Because this usually required a large financial investment, young men often worked for many years in order to save enough money to provide a suitable home for a wife. As a result, the age at which both men and women got married was relatively old: 28 years on average for men and nearly 25 years for women in 1921.[4]

Although important for both social and economic reasons (especially for women), at no time was marriage a universal phenomenon. Religious vocation and financial difficulty in establishing a new household were two common reasons for not marrying.[5] And in fact, the proportion of people in their mid- to late 40s who had never married reached levels of 12% for women and 15% for men during the early 1900s.[6]

When families were still primarily living on the farm, it was advantageous for couples to have large families. Children were expected to share in daily chores and other farm labour, adding directly to the family's output. This, coupled with religious doctrine and lack of effective contraception, resulted in women giving birth to an average of 6.6 children in 1851. In the late 19th century, families began moving to the cities, attracted by the economic opportunities offered by growing industrialization. Many children were among the family members who found jobs, often working long hours in unsafe conditions.[7] By 1920, however, the implementation of child labour laws, and of mandatory school-attendance until age 16, freed children from the factory. These changes accelerated the decline in family size. In 1901, women had given birth to an average of 4.6 children, but by 1921, the average had fallen to 3.5.

It was rarely done, but couples could end their marriage through legal separation, annulment or divorce. Given that existing laws were restrictive, and divorce was only granted with proof of adultery, there were only three divorces per 10,000 marriages in 1901 and the divorce rate remained low throughout the early 1900s. The low rate of formal marital dissolution does not mean that families did not break up. Although no data exist on the extent of family abandonment, some spouses (usually the husband) who wanted to end their responsibilities simply deserted their families.

The most common reason for lone-parenthood or remarriage in the early 20th century was the death of a spouse. Poor health conditions, limited medical knowledge and frequent disease meant that mortality was high during the early 1900s. The "empty nest" stage of the family life cycle — when a couple lives alone after their grown children leave home — was rare, and it was not uncommon for spouses to die when they were relatively young. Widows and widowers often remarried because they needed help with young children, domestic labour or financial support. In 1921, for example,

4. 1921 is the first year for which vital statistics are available.

5. Gee, E. M. 1982. "Marriage in nineteenth-century Canada." *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology.* 19:311-325.

6. Gee, E. M. 1987. "Historical change in the family life course of Canadian men and women." Victor Marshall (ed.) *Aging in Canada: Social perspective.* Markham: Fitzhenry and Whiteside.

7. Ward, M. 1998. *The Family Dynamic: A Canadian Perspective* (2nd ed.). Toronto: ITP Nelson.

17% of marriages involved at least one spouse who had been married before.

People less likely to marry and have children during the Depression

During the Depression of the 1930s — a period of high unemployment and severe deprivation for many Canadians and their families — people were reluctant or unable to take on the financial and social responsibilities of marriage. Consequently, marriage rates decreased dramatically — from 7.5 marriages per 1,000 population in 1928 to 5.9 in 1932 — and the number of children born declined.

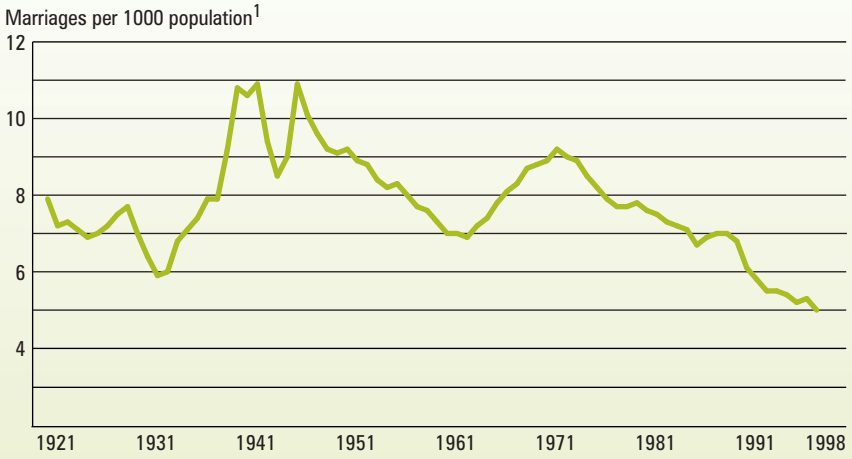
For most of the 1930s, the birth rate stayed at fewer than three children per woman on average; in fact, as many as 20% of women (mostly those with higher levels of education and household income) had no children. By 1937, the total fertility rate had fallen to only 2.6 children per woman.

World War II accompanied by surge of marriages and the baby boom

The Depression reached its lowest point in 1933. By the mid-1930s, economic conditions began to improve, but recovery was slow. In 1939, Canada entered the Second World War, and government spending on the war effort further stimulated employment in several sectors of the economy.[8] The uncertainties of war and the fear that conscription might be introduced (in which case single men would be more likely than married men to be conscripted) caused many couples to rush to the altar. All in all, by 1942, the crude marriage rate had peaked at 10.9 marriages per 1,000 population. During the next few years, while men were away at war, the rate dropped to 8.5 per 1,000 in 1944, only to return to its previous peak in 1946 as couples united after prolonged wartime absences.[9]

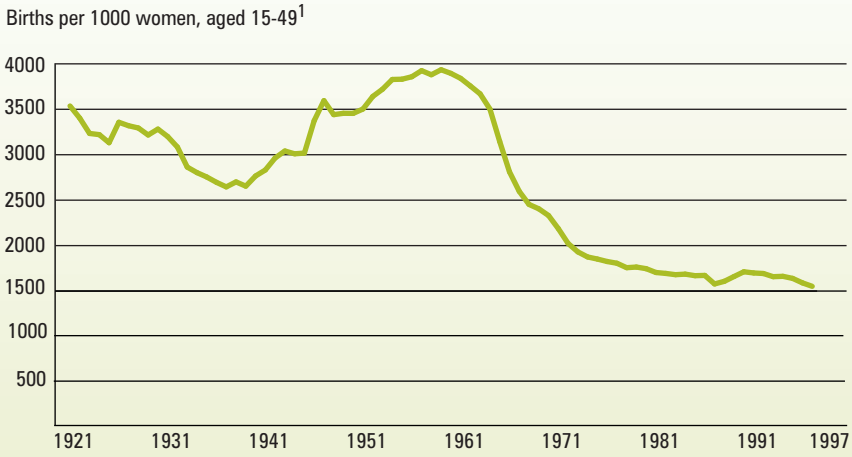
These high marriage rates led to the phenomenon known as the baby boom. During the early 1940s, women were having on average three children, a small number compared with the early 1900s. But the number of children born to

The current marriage rate is now even lower than in 1931 but for different reasons



1. Excluding the Yukon Territory and Northwest Territories, 1921-1923.
Sources: Statistics Canada, Catalogues 11-516-XIE, 84-212-XPB, CANSIM Matrices 6, 7 and 6367-6379, and author's calculations.

Fertility rates have declined over the past century, except for the baby boom



1. Excluding Newfoundland 1921-1990, and Yukon Territory and Northwest Territories 1921-1949.
Sources: Statistics Canada, Catalogues 91-535E, 84-210-XPB and 11-001-XPE (*The Daily*, July 8, 1998 and June 16, 1999).

8. During World War II, Canada became a major producer of ships, cargo carriers, aircraft, tanks and other military vehicles. Foot, D. K. and D. Stoffman. 1998. *Boom, Bust & Echo 2000: Profiting from the demographic shift in the new millenium.* Toronto: Macfarlane, W. and R. p. 24.

9. McVey, W. W. Jr. and W. E. Kalbach. 1995. *Canadian Population*. Toronto: Nelson.

Families as important as ever

Despite much debate about the declining importance of families and the fragmentation of traditional values, Canadians remain fiercely loyal to the idea of family. In a 1994 Angus Reid opinion survey, two-thirds of Canadian adults strongly agreed with the statement that their families are the greatest joy in their lives.[1] Regardless of age, income, or family structure, most Canadians feel that their families are stable and satisfying, and three-quarters describe their family lives as "happy" and "full of love".[2] Most young adults plan to get married, have children, and stay married.[3] However, 40% of Canadians strongly agree that families are in crisis.

The 1995 General Social Survey has found similar results. Almost all people both in legal marriages (98%) and common-law unions (96%) feel that a long-term relationship is important for their happiness. While the younger generation (aged 18 to 29) may be accepting of non-traditional unions, such as common-law relationships, they still believe strongly in the institution of the family. In 1995, nearly half of Canadians aged 20 to 39 intended to have two children and one-quarter expected to have three or more; few planned to have only one or no children. Married people — both men and women — wanted more children than those who were unmarried, but education influenced the number of children they wanted. Women in their thirties with a university degree intended to have fewer children than women with less education; by contrast, men with high education wanted more children than men with lower levels of schooling.

Religion also appears to play an important part in how people perceive relationships and family life. Canadians who attended religious services every week reported having happier relationships with their partners than those who did not attend services at all. Being married and having children was also more important to the personal happiness of weekly attendees than to those who did not attend.

- For more information, see "Attitudes Toward Women, Work and Family," *Canadian Social Trends*, Autumn 1997; "What influences people's plans to have children?" *Canadian Social Trends,* Spring 1998; "Religious Observance, Marriage and Family," *Canadian Social Trends,* Autumn 1998.

1. Angus Reid Group. 1994. *The State of the family in Canada: Summary Notes.*
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

families was already on the rise, reversing a century-long decline in fertility. It continued to climb, reaching a peak in 1959, when the total fertility rate rose to 3.9 births per woman. According to researchers, this phenomenon, which has driven so many social and political trends since the 1950s, had several causes. For many people who had postponed having children because of the Depression, the biological clock was ticking. After the war, the economy continued to grow, employment increased, incomes improved and the prosperity and stability of the times were conducive to raising families.[10]

As one might expect from the increase in post-war marriage and fertility rates, people were starting their families sooner than they had in the 1930s. During the two decades following World War II, the average age at first marriage declined steadily. For men, it fell by more than two years, from 27.5 years in 1945 to 25.2 in 1962, while for women, it dropped by just under two years, from 24.4 to 22.5.

The post-war period also saw the living arrangements of families change, with fewer relatives and extended family members attached to the household. By about the 1950s, most families consisted of parents and dependant children, and they lived in a "breadwinner-homemaker" relationship in which the husband was employed outside the home while the wife cared for the children at home.[11]

Of course, the war had taken its toll on families as well. In the years following the war, 14% of marriages were remarriages, in large part reflecting war widows putting their lives back together. However, the divorce rate also grew sharply, but temporarily, to 66 divorces per 100,000 population, probably as many impulsive wartime marriages were dissolved.[12] After this "correction," the rate remained low throughout the 1950s, generally staying below 40 divorces per 100,000 population.

Post-war marriage rates revisit early 1900s patterns

The high marriage rates of the immediate post-war period began to drop off in the late 1940s and continued to fall during the early 1960s. By 1963, the marriage rate had fallen to a 30-year low of 6.9 marriages per 1,000 population. This was partly due to the "marriage squeeze" Canadian women faced in these years. Women generally marry men who are older than themselves, and the low birth rates of the Depression and World War II had resulted, two decades later, in a shortage of eligible older partners. The economic slowdown from 1957 to 1961 may also have contributed

10. Foot and Stoffman. op.cit. 1998.
11. McVey and Kalbach. op.cit. 1995. p. 310.
12. Larson et al. op.cit. 1994.

to fewer marriages as young couples postponed "tying the knot" until a more favourable time. Indeed, by the mid-1960s, when economic conditions had improved and the baby boomers were old enough to marry, the marriage rates began to climb once again.

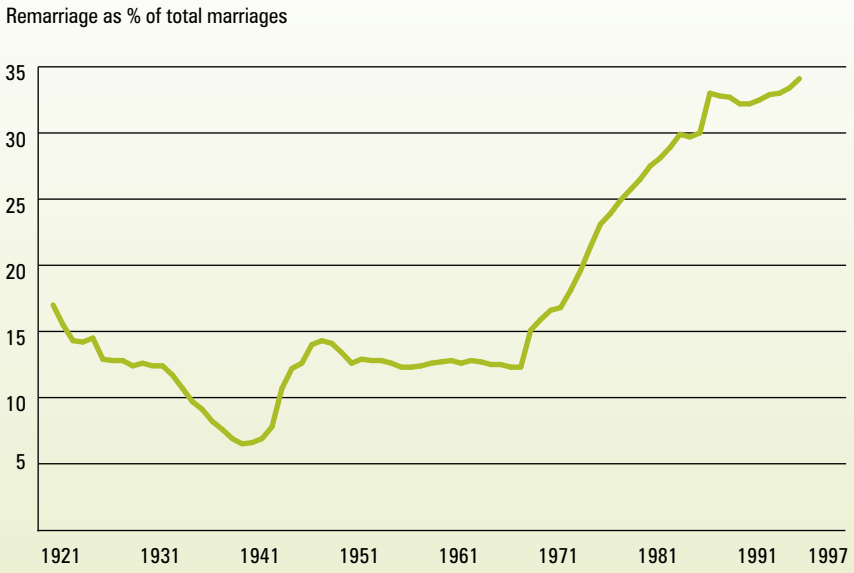
After reaching a high of 9.2 marriages per 1,000 population in 1972, marriage rates began a steady decline that continued for the next 25 years. By the early 1990s, they had declined to the point where they matched the lows recorded in the Great Depression. And they continued to fall. In 1998, the marriage rate reached an all-time low of 5 marriages per 1,000 population.

The decline in marriage was accompanied by a corresponding increase in the proportion of single people. Over the last 100 years, the proportion of younger adults who have never married has fluctuated: it was relatively high at the beginning and at the end of the century and lower in the middle. This "U-shaped" pattern is evident for both men and women. In 1996, 67% of men aged 25 to 29 had never been married compared to 35% in 1951 and 55% in 1911; the corresponding figures for women are 51%, 21%, and 32%. In recent decades, the decline in marriage has also been accompanied by a steadily rising number of couples who live together in a common-law arrangement.

As the marriage rate plummeted, the average age at first marriage started to rise again — to 29.5 years for men and 27.4 for women in 1997 — and the age difference between men and women decreased. This shrinking gap in ages points to potentially significant social changes. Younger ages at marriage are associated with less education and fewer employment opportunities and, generally, less life experience. The fact that men and women are closer in age at the time of their first marriage suggests greater parity between women's and men's relative status in society.[13]

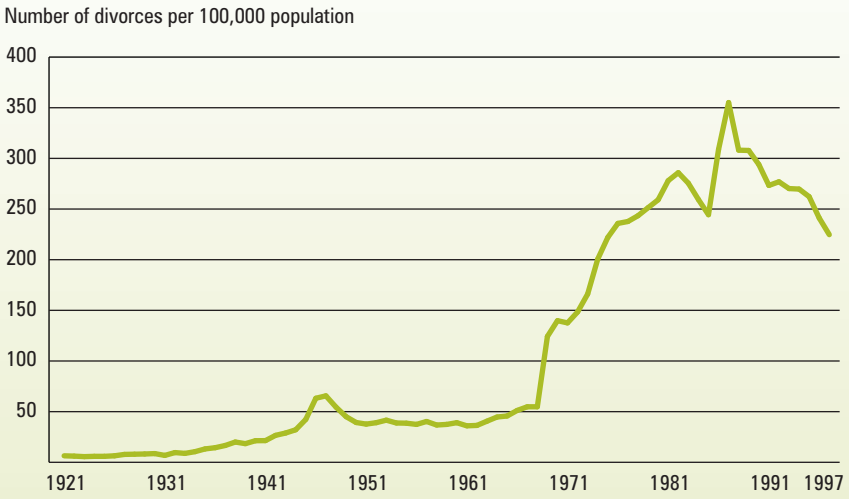
While the figures for average age at marriage and rates of marriage are similar to those early in the century, the reasons behind them are quite different. In the early 1900s, financial or family difficulty and religious

The proportion of remarriages reflects social changes



Sources: Statistics Canada, Catalogues 91-534E and 91-209-XPE.

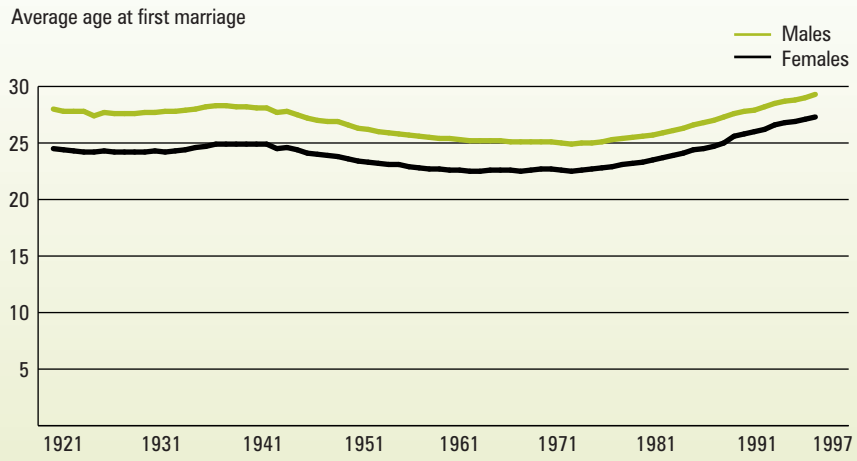
The divorce rate was fairly low until the introduction of the Divorce Act in 1968



Sources: Statistics Canada, Catalogues 11-516-XIE, 89-523E, 84-213-XPB and 11-001-XPE (*The Daily*, May 18, 1999).

13. McVey and Kalbach. op.cit. 1995. p. 224.

Men marry at older ages than women but the differential has narrowed



Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogues 91-534E, 84-212-XPB and 11-001-XPE (*The Daily*, January 29, 1998).

vocation probably influenced most decisions not to marry; decisions today are more likely to reflect a personal choice. Recently, social changes have eroded many traditional attitudes and practices; improved economic opportunities, especially for women, and the growing acceptance of non-marriage alternatives, such as common-law relationships, have reduced the tendency toward marrying early, and in some cases marrying at all.

Divorce Act: The end of "forever"

Before 1968, a marriage, whether good or bad, was "till death us do part" for most couples. Terminating it was difficult and frowned upon.[14] The Divorce Act, introduced in 1968, changed all that. It extended the grounds for divorce to include "no-fault" divorce based on separation for at least three years. Less than two decades later, in 1986, an amendment reduced the minimum separation period to one year. These less restrictive divorce laws, combined with other social changes, created a significant shift in the way people perceived marriage, as divorce became a socially acceptable choice for someone whose marriage did not live up to expectations.

Within a decade of the introduction of the Divorce Act in 1968, the divorce rate had jumped nearly six-fold. It rose again after the 1986 amendment, perhaps because people had postponed filing for divorce until it came into effect. Since then, however, the divorce rate has declined steadily, from a record high of 362 divorces per 100,000 population in 1987, to 223 one decade later. Some of this decline may be related to the fact that many people are reluctant to legally marry in the first place. In addition, some marriage breakdowns may be settled by a separation agreement that need not be followed by a legal divorce unless one of the spouses wants to remarry.

Baby boom gives way to baby bust

The two post-war decades of increasing birth rates reversed abruptly in the 1960s when fertility rates began a decline that continues to this day. In fact, in 1997, each woman had an average of 1.6 children, marking the lowest recorded fertility rate in Canada's history. Several reasons account for this baby bust: for instance, contraception became more effective so that couples were better able to limit the number and plan the timing of their children; and women entered the labour force in unprecedented numbers, thereby increasing the opportunity cost of having children.

Despite the drop in the number of children women are having, the percentage of women who do not have children is really no higher than it was earlier in the 20th century. While some women choose to postpone parenthood in order to pursue education or employment opportunities, there is no evidence of a widespread rejection of parenthood. However, data do show that increasing numbers of women are having their first child at older ages. Almost one-third (31%) of first births in 1997 were to mothers aged 30 and over, compared with 19% one decade earlier. Also, births to teenage mothers have been falling for the last 20 years. The proportion of mothers under age 20 has dropped by almost half, from 11% of all births in the early 1970s to 6% throughout most of the 1990s. Delayed childbearing means that parents may be better established financially, but it may also mean that they have less time and energy for their children.[15]

Divorce replaces death as main cause of lone parenthood

Children born outside a union, divorce, and the death of a spouse all create lone-parent families. Although this family type makes up only a slightly higher proportion of all families today than it

14. The Vanier Institute of the Family. 1994. *Profiling Canada's Families*. Ottawa. p. 45.

15. Ibid. p. 41.

did early in the century — 12% in 1931 versus 15% in 1996 — the causes behind it have changed dramatically. While in 1931, three-quarters of all lone-parent families had lost a parent because of death, by 1996 only one-fifth were in this situation. In 1996, divorce was behind the formation of 58% of lone-parent families, compared with less than 24% in 1931. And because most mothers retain custody following a divorce, lone-parent families headed by women currently outnumber those headed by men by more than four to one.[16]

The growing number of births outside a union is also increasingly contributing to the creation of lone-parent families. In 1931 less than 0.5% of lone-parent families resulted from births to women without a partner; by 1996, 22% were in this situation. This may be partly due to the growing economic independence of women, some of whom can afford to raise children alone, but the decreased stigma attached to births outside marriage is probably also a contributing factor.[17] Despite the growing acceptance of lone mothers, many of these women and their children face a life of economic disadvantage. Lone mothers who are young, have low levels of education and few job skills are at even greater risk of having a low income.

Children in low-income families at a disadvantage

Living in a low-income environment exposes children to greater difficulties throughout their formative years. Lower-income women are more likely to have babies with low birth weight, which is associated with a greater risk of health problems later in life. Living in substandard or crowded housing might expose infants and children to more illnesses, and more frequent absences from school due to illness can cause a child to fall behind academically.[1] School performance may be further affected by living conditions at home, if there is no quiet place to do homework. A poor diet, often associated with living in a low-income situation, may make concentrating on school work more difficult.

Data from the National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth (NLSCY) show that most families move into a low-income situation primarily as a result of family breakdown. Between 1994 and 1996, families with children were four times more likely to move into the lowest income quartile if the parents separated or divorced than if they did not break up (26% versus 6%). Movements out of low-income are associated with a parent's remarriage or with one or more parents finding employment. However, the data also suggest that exits out of low income are not rapid: seven in 10 children living in low-income families in 1994 were still living in a low-income environment in 1996.

Based on both 1994 and 1996 NLSCY data, 15% of children in low-income families had a behavioural problem, compared with 9% for children in families that were not low income in either year. Similarly, children of low-income families were more likely to have relationship problems with their parents, friends or teachers. Children in the lowest income quartile are more likely to repeat a grade than children in higher income families, and their parents and teachers are less likely to expect them to attend university. Low-income children may also be excluded from sporting or cultural activities because of a lack of funds, while adolescents may also feel pressure to seek employment in order to contribute economically to the family.

Growing up in a low-income family may increase the probability that an individual encounters low income as an adult. Analysis of tax data suggests that low income in one generation is associated with low income in the next, with children of very low-income families most likely to end up in the bottom income groups. Thus, families with low-income may produce a new generation of individuals at high risk of exposure to a low-income situation.

- For more information, see "National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996-97," *The Daily,* October 28, 1998; "Getting ahead in life: Does your parents' income count?" *Canadian Social Trends,* Summer 1998.

1. Clarke, M. 1988. *Wasting our future: The effects of poverty on child development*. Ottawa: Canadian Council on Children and Youth.

Remarriage leads to new family forms

Rising rates of divorce have increased dramatically the size of the population able to remarry. Being widowed renders one person eligible to remarry; being divorced theoretically returns two people to the marriage pool. As well, those who divorce are more likely than widows and widowers to remarry, because divorce tends to occur younger in life when people may be more eager to start a new relationship. Since the 1970s, remarriage has become a relatively important factor in the formation of new relationships. In 1997, 34% of marriages involved at least one spouse who had been previously married; in almost half of these, both spouses had already been married at least once.

16. Although mothers still retain custody in the majority of cases, over time more and more fathers have become custodial parents. In 1978, almost 79% of divorces involving custody decisions granted custody to mothers, compared with 16% for fathers. By 1997, about 61% of children were awarded to mothers, 11% to fathers and almost 28% were joint custody decisions.

17. The Vanier Institute of the Family. op.cit. 1994. p. 59.

Unpaid work: What we do for our families

Without the unpaid work that Canadians do every day in support of their families and communities, things would run much less smoothly than they do now. Statistics Canada has estimated that unpaid work — activities such as childcare, home maintenance, volunteer work, helping friends, relatives and others — was worth about $235 billion in 1992. This was about one-third the dollar value of the Gross Domestic Product, which measures the total value of goods and services produced for the market economy.

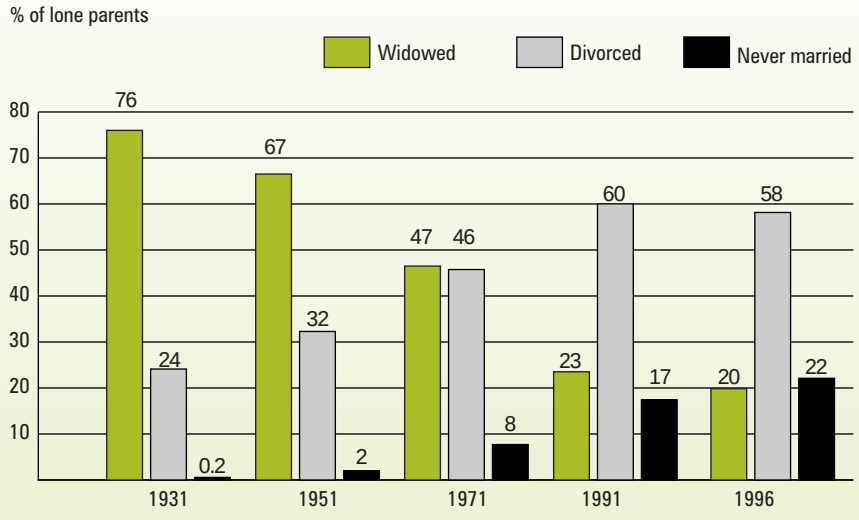
Work in the home accounts for the lion's share of unpaid work. And in most homes, women take care of most housework. In 1998, women spent almost twice as much time on unpaid housework per week (15.2 hours) as did men (8.3 hours). Although the time spent on childcare may overlap with housework, women reported devoting 18.9 hours per week to childcare, while men spent 8.3 hours on this task.[1]

Another aspect of unpaid work that has been much discussed in recent years is providing care for the elderly. According to the 1996 General Social Survey, 2.1 million Canadians aged 15 and over provided some care to a senior with a long-term health problem. These care-givers devoted an average of 4.2 hours of their time per week to help with chores, assist with personal care and similar tasks. Women were more likely to be providing eldercare (61% or 1.3 million) and they also dedicated more time to this activity — an average of 5 hours per week compared with 3 hours for men.

- For more information, see "Measuring and valuing households' unpaid work," *Canadian Social Trends,* Autumn 1996; "Eldercare in Canada: Who does how much?" *Canadian Social Trends,* Autumn 1999.

1. The hours spent on unpaid housework and childcare can overlap (e.g., a respondent who spent one hour on housework and child care at the same time would be expected to report that hour as both housework and child care). Consequently, the hours cannot be summed for a total number of hours spent on unpaid work.

CST Until 1971, the majority of lone parents were widowed



Note: Divorced includes the category "married, spouse absent".
Sources: Statistics Canada, Censuses of Canada, Catalogues 91-535E and 94-009-XDP.

Men are more likely than women to remarry. Following a divorce, women tend to get custody of children which may, among other reasons, reduce the likelihood of finding another spouse. In addition, men's tendency to marry younger women creates a larger marriage pool for men; in fact, the age differential between brides and grooms is often larger in second than in first marriages. In recent years, however, the remarriage rate has fallen, largely due to the increase in common-law unions and women's greater economic independence.

Many couples in a new marriage or common-law union have children from previous relationships. In 1994-95, nearly 9% of Canadian children under the age of 12 were living in a stepfamily. The majority of these children lived in a blended family, which most often included the couple's biological children and the wife's children from a previous relationship.

Given the complicated nature of stepfamilies, it is not surprising that many 10- and 11-year-old children in stepfamilies do not have a favourable view of their interactions with their parents. They were more likely than children from intact families to say they lack emotional support from their parents (33% compared with 27%) and to report difficulty in getting along with parents and siblings in the previous six months (44% and 28%, respectively). While parent-child relationships in stepfamilies seem more problematic than those in intact families, it is not clear if this is because of the way adults behave or the way children perceive them. Although children in stepfamilies showed more dissatisfaction with their family relationships, the majority did report that they have moderate to good experiences with their parents.

Kids testing the limits

Testing the rules and boundaries of acceptable behaviour is generally associated with adolescence. According to the 1996-97 National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), 15% of 12- and 13-year-olds reported belonging to a group that "did risky things" (such as running away from home, vandalism, stealing, fighting) during the previous 12 months, although most had done so only once or twice. Close to 31% reported that they had stolen from a store, their school or their parents at least once, and 41%, particularly boys, reported having threatened to beat someone up or having been in a fight.

Interestingly, 12- and 13-year-olds who smoked cigarettes, and/or had smoking friends, were much more likely to steal, fight, skip school, attach low importance to school grades, engage in physically aggressive behaviours and have difficult relations with their parents.

Although many young people will test the limits of acceptable behaviour, these activities do not often translate into criminal activity. In fact, less than 5% of 12- to 17-year-olds were charged with a criminal offence in 1997. About half of young people that year were charged with a property crime, most often theft, and break and enter. Violent offences, including assault and robbery, were much less frequent, accounting for about 18% of young people charged.

• For more information, see "National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth: Transition into Adolescence," *The Daily*, July 6, 1999; "Youth and crime," *Canadian Social Trends,* Summer 1999.

Common-law relationships becoming a new norm, especially among the young

The proportion of people who choose to live in common-law arrangements is, without doubt, on the rise. According to the 1981 Census (the first time data on common-law arrangements were collected), 6% of all couples lived common-law that year. By 1996, the proportion had increased to 12%, or about one in eight couples. If the current growth rates continue, by the year 2020, there will be as many people living in common-law relationships as in marriages.

Although common-law is most popular among the young, it is also becoming more acceptable among the older generations. In 1996, 39% of 20- to 29-year-olds who lived as a couple were in a common-law union compared with 10% of those 50 years or over. Both mark an increase from a decade before, when 22% of couples in their 20s and 5% of those 50 years or over lived in a common-law arrangement.

In the last two decades, it has become more acceptable to bring up children in a common-law relationship. Although childbearing in common-law unions is still less frequent than in marriages, almost half of common-law families (47%) in 1996 included children, whether born in the current union or in a previous relationship. In comparison, in 1981 34% of common-law families had had children. Across Canada, over one-tenth of all children under the age of 14 were living in a common-law family in 1996.

Although common-law unions are on the rise, they continue to be less stable than marriages. If a common-law union does not turn into a legal marriage, about half dissolve within five years. And if people in common-law unions eventually marry, they are still more likely to separate than people who married without living common-law.

Family forms change and new life cycle stages emerge

Families continue to be affected by changes occurring outside the home. The patterns of recent decades suggest a return to the malleable family forms experienced early in the century. Now, as then, family members move into and out of households as old relationships shift and new family units are created. For example, since the 1960s, the expansion of postsecondary institutions, along with a decline in social pressure to marry, has extended the period of adolescence. Although the proportion of young adults who lived with their parents decreased between 1971 and 1981, the 1996 Census shows that young adults are now once again more likely to live in the family home. Between 1981 and 1996, the proportion of 20- to 24-year-old single women who lived with their parents rose from 60% to 67%. The corresponding figures for men were 69% and 74%, respectively. Much of the growth in this age group may be explained by children's continued attendance at university or college (that is, extended adolescence). What is more notable is the increase in the percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds living at home: 33% of women and 40% of men in 1996, up from 23% and 28% in 1986. The recession of the early 1990s, and the slow recovery that followed, likely played a part in their decision to live at home.

Lower fertility and mortality rates as well as higher life expectancy have created other new stages in the family life cycle. In addition to an extended period of adolescence, the empty-nest stage between the last child's departure from the family home and the death of one of the spouses is now common. Whereas this stage was virtually non-existent for the average couple in the mid-

nineteenth century, a woman born between 1951 and 1960 can expect to share an empty nest with her spouse for about 24 years.[18]

Recently, Canada has seen a growth in the number of three generation households. Certainly nuclear families are still most common — grandparents, parents, and grandchildren living together represent less than 3% of all family households — but the number of three-generation households in Canada grew from about 150,000 in 1986 to more than 208,000 in 1996. Although the number is not high, these types of households grew twice as fast as the number of all family households. Nearly half of all three-generation households in 1996 were headed by immigrants. With longer life expectancy, an aging population, and high levels of immigration, three-generation households may become more common.

Future trends

Most Canadians will continue to marry and have children in the 21st century. However, marital histories are becoming more complex. Common-law unions, delayed marriages or no marriage at all will probably increase, especially with the pursuit of higher education and employment by both men and women. Divorce will likely remain an option when relationships no longer fulfill the expectations of one or both partners. But if people continue to marry at older ages, the divorce rate may drop, as younger age at marriage is associated with a higher risk of divorce. Meanwhile, people in same-sex unions are gradually winning social recognition for their unions and legal rights similar to those of heterosexual couples.

The family-related trends of those aged 65 and over are of par-

18. Gee. op.cit. 1987.

Parenting styles make a difference

Parenting style refers to the way parents interact physically and emotionally with their children. An effective parenting style nurtures and disciplines children while supporting their emotional, physical, social, and psychological development. Successful parents can produce an environment in which children regard themselves positively, believe in their own competence, and feel that they are worthy of giving and receiving love.[1]

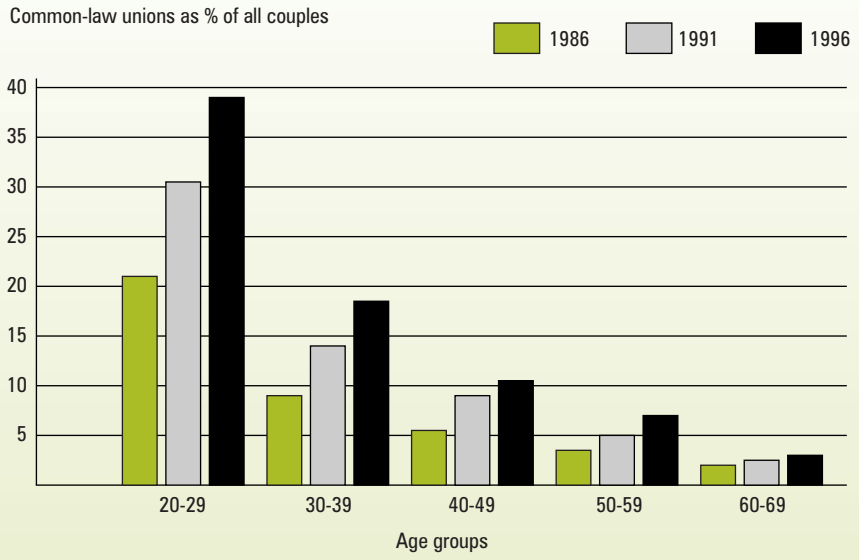
Analysis of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth shows that poor parenting practices are strongly associated with relationship and behavioural problems in children. Children who did not have positive interaction with their parents were twice as likely to show persistent behavioural problems as children who did have positive interaction. Similarly, children whose parents employed ineffective parenting techniques were nine times more likely to exhibit behavioural problems than children who were not exposed to this type of parenting.

Children who were "at risk" — ones who lived in lone-parent families, in families with low income or low parental education, in dysfunctional families, or who had experienced prenatal problems — generally had lower developmental scores and more behavioural problems than those who were not at risk. Good parenting, however, can make a difference in these difficult circumstances. Children who were at risk but had positive parenting scored at least as high as children in more favourable circumstances who received negative parenting. Clearly, many things can affect a child's outcomes, but good parenting can counterbalance the negative effects of certain risk factors.

- For more information, see "National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, Cycle 2, 1996-97," *The Daily,* October 28, 1998.

1. Cassidy, J., R. Parke, L. Butkovsky and K. Braungart. 1992. "Family-Peer Connections: The Roles of Emotional Expressiveness within the Family and Children's Understanding of Emotions." *Child Development.* 63: 603-618.

CST Common-law unions are increasing for all age groups but still are most frequent among the young



Sources: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 92-353XPB and author's calculations.

Family violence

Violence in the family affects everyone in the family, even if they themselves are not the victims. Parents assault children, both men and women assault their spouses, and the elderly may be victimized by their adult children.

Women were more likely to be victimized by a spouse, either married or common-law, than were men.[1] In 1997, 88% of victims of spousal assault (19,575) were women. During the four years between 1993 and 1997, the number of women assaulted by their spouse decreased 8%, while the number of male victims increased 18%. When an assault becomes murderous, though, women are still more likely to be the victims: between 1978 and 1997, over three times as many wives (1,485) as husbands (442) were killed by their spouses.

Children are among the most vulnerable family members and violence often has the most substantial effect on their lives. In 1997, 5,300 children under 18 years were victimized within families. Most were assaulted by their own parents, who accounted for 65% of family members charged with physical assault and 44% of those charged with sexual assault. Fathers committed almost all sexual assaults (97%) and most (71%) physical assaults. Parents were also responsible for nearly eight in 10 homicides of children under age 18. The number of parents charged with killing their children (more than one-half of whom were under age three) has risen over the past decade. In 1997, fathers were implicated in 37 homicides and mothers, in 25.

Violence against seniors represents another, little-recognized, aspect of family violence. In 1997, 2,300 men and women over age 64 were victims of violent crimes, representing 2% of the total. Despite most seniors' fear of being mugged by a stranger, once again, family members were implicated in 29% of all violent incidents against senior women and 17% of those against senior men. Senior men were more likely to be victimized by their adult children (41%) than by a spouse (28%), while older women were equally likely to have been victimized by their adult children or their spouse (40% each).

- For more information, see *Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile 1999.* Statistics Canada Catalogue 85-224-XIE. pp. 23 and 28.

1. 179 police forces provided data, representing only 48% of the national volume of reported crime. Consequently, the information is not nationally representative.

ticular significance, given that life expectancy is increasing and the proportion of elderly in the population is rising. Growing up in an era in which alternative options were scarce, most seniors today adopted the "traditional" family approach to marriage and childbearing that was expected of them. However, the changes affecting younger generations — the general acceptance of common-law unions, non-marital childbearing and divorce — are likely to create a future generation of seniors with more diverse family characteristics.

Immigration patterns in recent decades are also contributing to the variety of family forms.[19] Immigrants coming from Asia, the Caribbean, and Central and South America have increased in number, bringing with them different family traditions, such as a greater reliance on the extended family for social, emotional and financial support.

19. Ward. op.cit. 1998.

Summary

Canadian families have both changed and remained the same during the past century. While most people still marry and have children, marriages are less apt to last for a lifetime. People also marry later in life and have fewer children than ever before. Perhaps most striking over the past century is the dynamic between the size and composition of family and social and economic conditions. In periods of financial difficulties — for example, during the Depression — both marriage and fertility rates decreased. In times of prosperity, such as the era following World War II, the popularity of marriage and large families increased. The impact of legislative changes is evident in the increased divorce rates following the 1968 and 1986 Divorce Acts. The last decades of the 20th century have brought greater individualism and more choice, giving rise to new living arrangements. This pattern of both change and continuity is likely to be a defining characteristic of families into the 21st century.

CST

Anne Milan is an analyst with Housing, Family and Social Statistics Division, Statistics Canada.