

Marrying and Divorcing

A Status Report for Canada

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A Status Report for Canada

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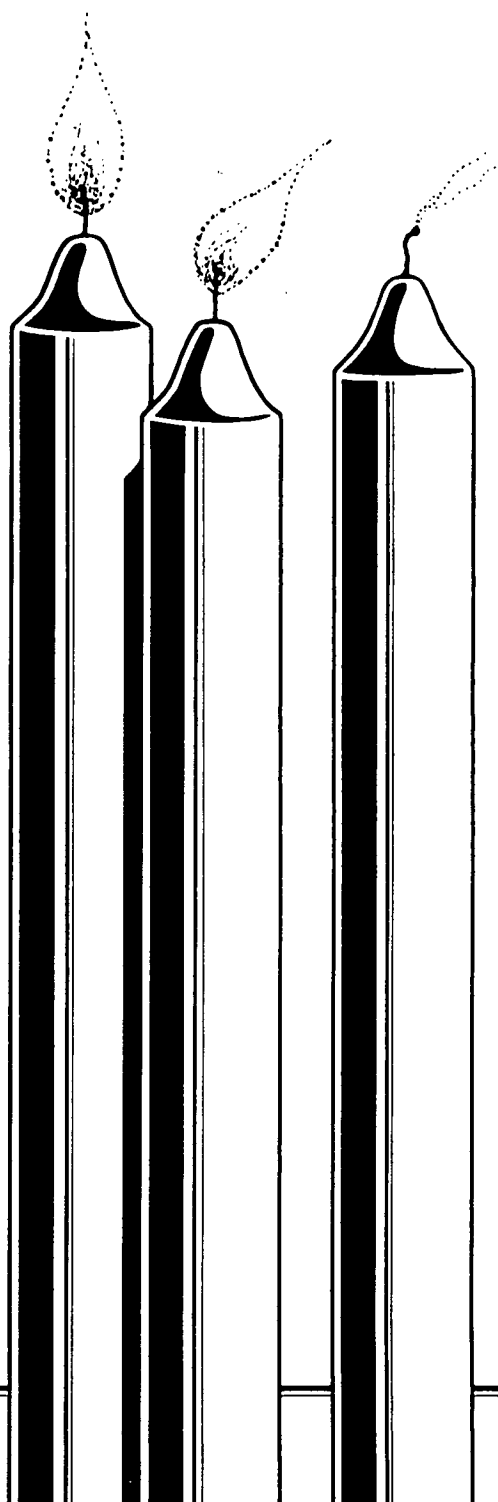
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PREFACE

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, changing patterns of marriage and divorce have had a marked impact on the life course of Canadians. Similar changes have occurred in most of the developed countries in the Western world.

"Marrying and Divorcing: A Status Report for Canada," sketches general changes in marrying and divorcing in Canada between 1970 and 1986. It also examines provincial and regional variations and presents international comparisons. The indicators presented are developed through the application of life table techniques to vital statistics and census data. This report summarizes the principal findings of the publication "Marriage, Divorce and Mortality: A Life Table Analysis for Canada and Regions, 1980-1982" by O.B. Adams and D.N. Nagnur (Statistics Canada, Catalogue 84-536). Readers may refer to this publication for detailed marital status life tables, methodology, sources of data and further analysis.

Dr. Paul Reed, Director General of the Analytical Studies Branch, initiated and directed the work on this report. Gordon McMillan wrote the text, with the assistance of Owen Adams, Dhruva Nagnur, Judy Buehler, Brenda Babcock and staff of the Editorial Services Unit of the Communications Division.

MARRYING AND DIVORCING: A STATUS REPORT FOR CANADA

MARRIAGE: THE CONTINUING CANADIAN TRADITION

Marriage has always stood at the core of the Canadian family. Most of us have grown up assuming that someday we will marry, settle down and perhaps have children. And indeed, most of us continue to do just that.

But over the past two decades marriage seems to have lost a little of its appeal. Fewer Canadians are marrying. In 1972, 200,000 couples married; by 1986, the number had declined to 176,000. This drop occurred despite the coming of age of the post-war baby boomers, most of whom were moving through their prime marrying years during the 1970s and early 1980s.

At the same time, the number of divorces has continued to rise. In 1971, there were 30,000; in 1986, there were over 78,000. Canadians, when they first marry, are now older than before. Divorced and widowed people are less likely to remarry and wait longer before remarrying. And more couples are living together without a marriage contract to legally seal their union. Taken together, these changes mean that, on average, Canadians may expect to spend less time in a "married state" than just a decade ago.

Nevertheless, Canadians are still choosing to marry (and remarry) in large numbers. Marriage has not been abandoned and no alternative system of social order appears ready to replace it. Four out of five children, for instance, are born to married parents, and the people who do marry can expect to stay married for more than half of their lives.

Marriage remains the most popular way to formalize relationships and promises to continue to play an important role in Canadian society and family life.

A STATISTICAL VIEW OF LIFE

The typical lifespan of a Canadian can be divided into four states: single, married, divorced and widowed. Of course, while everyone starts out single, not all will marry, get divorced, or become widowed. But if we picture a man and woman who typify the real-life experience of Canadians, we find they each spend a certain percentage of their life in these four states (See Figure I).

In the past, statisticians developed indicators of the lifetime experience of a population in these states by using what is called the single-state life table approach. But this measurement technique did not take into account that some of the widowed and divorced population would remarry. In other words, once divorced meant always divorced; once widowed meant always widowed.

Then, in the 1970s, an alternative technique was introduced that did account for people remarrying. This more realistic (and more complex) approach is called the multi-state life table approach or, as it is referred to when applied to nuptiality statistics, the marital status life table approach (See Figure II). And so, using this technique, the time the average Canadian spends as a married person would include not only first marriages but also subsequent marriages.

The figures in the marital status life tables in this report are derived by taking statistical data for the years 1970-1972 and 1984-1986 and applying them to the whole population from birth to death. By comparing the results we can see where marriage may be headed in the future. We can also see how regions across the country compare and how we compare with other nations.

Figure I

Percentage of Total Lifetime Lived in the Four Civil States, Men and Women, Canada, 1984-1986

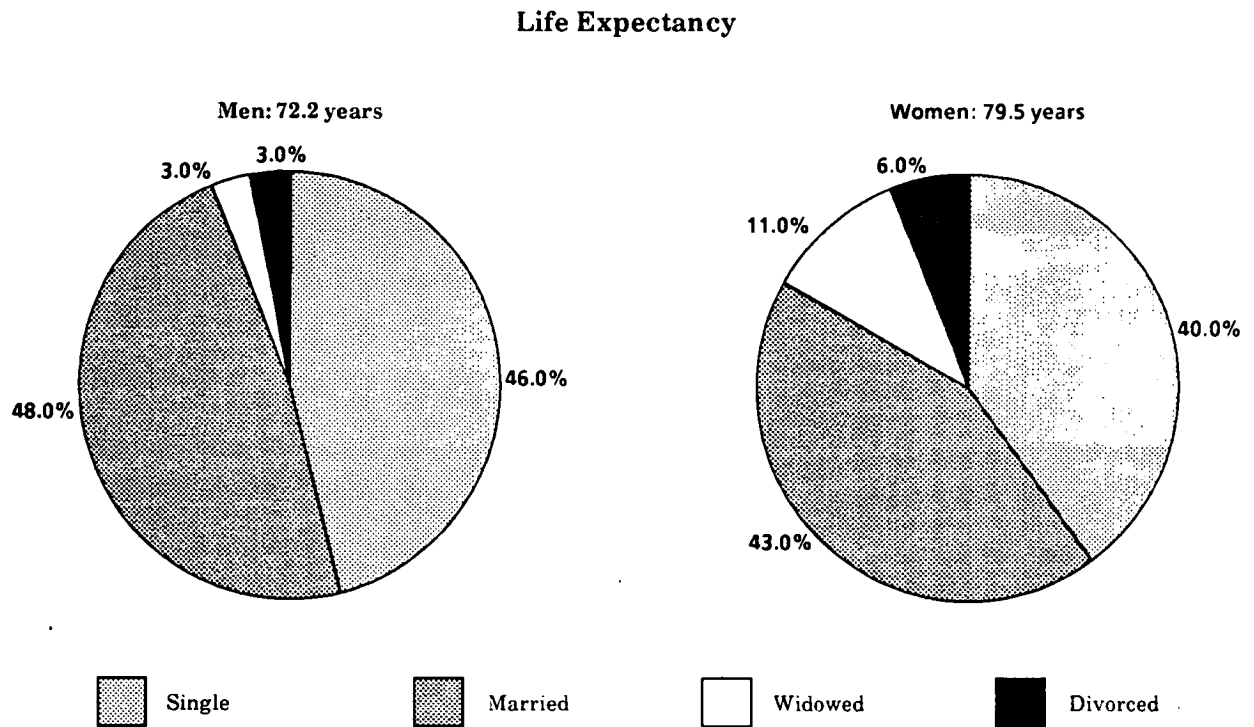
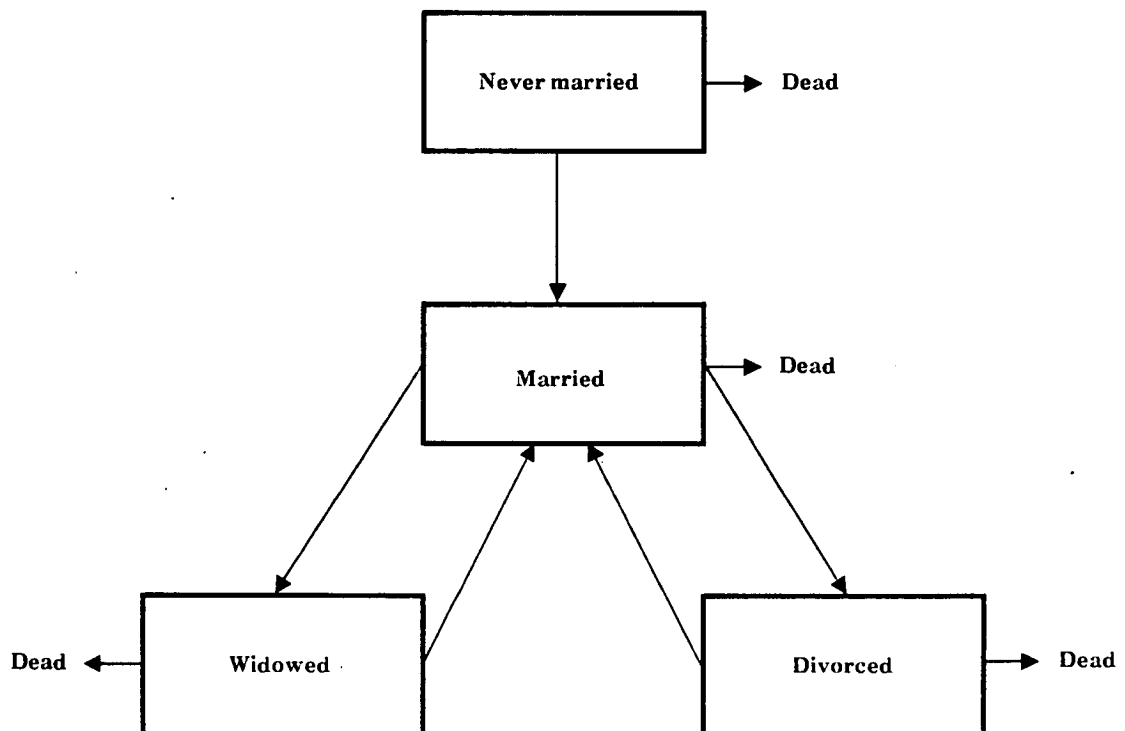


Figure II

The Marital Status Life Table Model



CANADIAN TRENDS 1971-1985

Life Before Marriage

Whether it is a reluctance to give up the single life, a disinterest in marriage, or a more cautious search for a suitable partner, Canadians are waiting a while longer before deciding to marry. For a man who marries, single life now lasts an average 28 years. For a woman, it lasts 26 years. These figures are three years higher than in 1971. At the same time, more and more Canadians are staying legally single for a lifetime. In fact, while in 1971 10% of the population would never marry, by 1985 that figure had risen to 17% for men and 14% for women.

These changes mean that the "average" Canadian (this includes everyone, whether single or married) can expect to live seven years longer as "single." So, in 1985, the average man would remain single 33 years while the average woman would remain so for 32 years.

TEXT TABLE I. Summary Statistics for the Never-married State, by Sex, Canada: 1970-1972 and 1984-1986

	Men		Women	
	1970-1972	1984-1986	1970-1972	1984-1986
Average age at first marriage	25.0	28.3	22.8	25.7
Percentage of population never-marrying	10	17	8	14
Average time spent single (for total population)	26.3	33.2	25.0	31.8

Getting Married

There's no doubt that marriage is still very popular. Though down somewhat from the 1971 figure of 91%, 1985 figures show that about 85% of Canadians can still expect to marry sometime during their lives (See Text Table II). Nevertheless, a marriage does not last as long as it did in the past. In 1971, for instance, the average couple could expect to stay married for 35 years; by 1985, that figure had fallen to 31 years.

TEXT TABLE II. Summary Statistics for the Married State, by Sex, Canada: 1970-1972 and 1984-1986

	Men		Women	
	1970-1972	1984-1986	1970-1972	1984-1986
Percentage of population marrying	90	83	92	86
Percentage of lifetime lived as married	58	48	52	43
Number of marriages per person marrying	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3
Average age of the married population	49.2	51.5	46.3	48.5

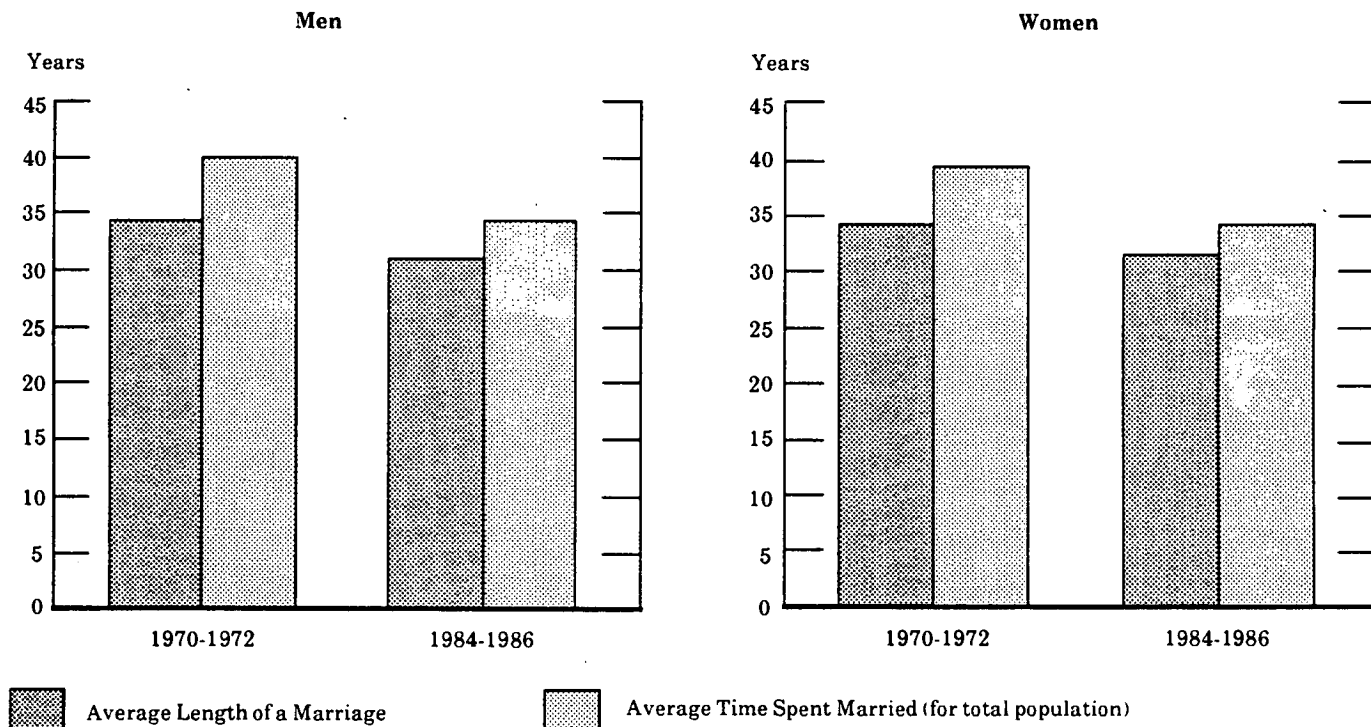
As Figure III illustrates, the total time the "average" Canadian spends married (which includes both those who remain single their entire life as well as those who marry several times) has also declined by six years; in 1985, both men and women would spend 34 years of their life married, a decline from 40 years in 1971.

Why has the total time we can expect to remain married declined? First of all, since the statistic applies to the entire population, a rise in the number of Canadians staying single will have an impact. However, another significant factor is that an increasing proportion of marriages end in divorce.

Divorces are discussed in the following section "Till Divorce Do Us Part".

Figure III

Average Length of a Marriage, and Average Length of Lifetime Spent in the Married State, by Sex, Canada, 1970-1972 and 1984-1986



Notice that the "time spent married" (34 years) is higher than the average length of "a marriage" (31 years). The reason for this difference is that while most people marry once, some will marry twice, and a few even three times or more. Statistically speaking, for every man marrying, there are 1.33 marriages; for every woman marrying, there are 1.25 marriages. Another way to look at it would be to say that about one out of every four people who marry will marry more than once.

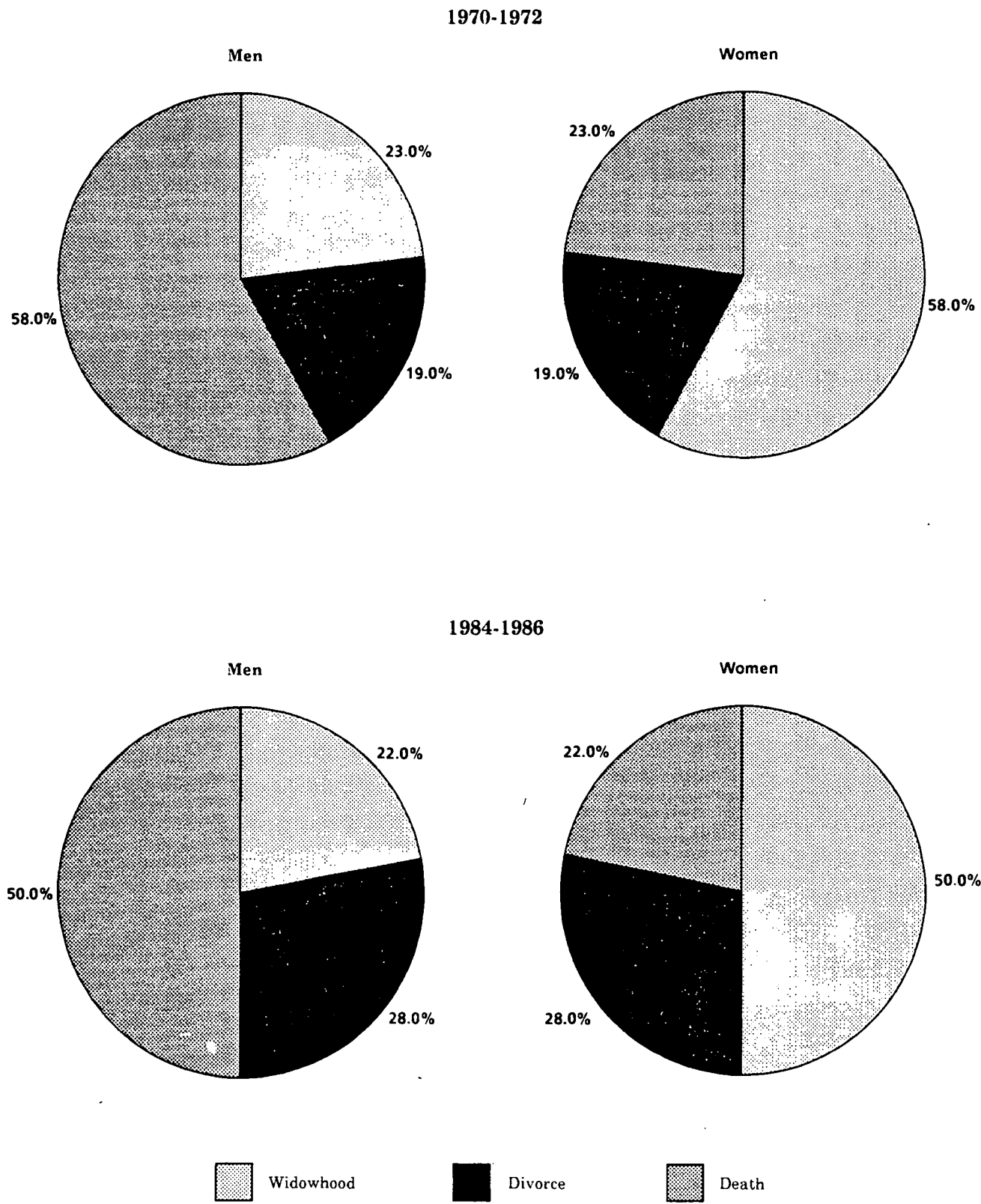
The figures we have seen on marriage so far have shown remarkable similarities for men and women. But a look at the percentage of life lived as married, shows significant divergence between the sexes. While the typical Canadian man would be expected to live nearly half his lifespan in marriage, the typical Canadian woman would be expected to live just 43% of her life in marriage. This is the result of women outliving men. Consequently, most women who stay married well into their senior years can also expect to spend some of those years alone after their husband has died.

Till Death Do Us Part

Of all the couples who marry, 7 out of 10 keep their vow to remain with their spouse "till death do us part". (The other 3 out of 10 divorce.) Most often it is the husband who dies first. In fact, half of all marriages end with the death of the man while only one-fifth end with the death of the woman (See Figure IV).

Beyond the fact that most wives outlive their husbands, grooms are, on average, two years and one-half older than their brides. It should not be surprising, then, that the "average" woman (which includes all women, widowed or not) spends four times longer in the widowed state than does the average man - 8 years versus 2 years.

Figure IV
Percentage of Marriages Ending in Widowhood, Death and Divorce by Sex,
Canada, 1970-1972 and 1984-1986



TEXT TABLE III. Summary Statistics for the Widowed State, by Sex, Canada: 1970-1972 and 1984-1986

	Men		Women	
	1970-1972	1984-1986	1970-1972	1984-1986
Average time spent widowed (for total population)	2.0	1.9	9.7	8.4
Average length of a widowhood	7.8	8.1	14.5	15.4
Average age at widowhood	68.6	72.7	67.0	69.4
Percentage of widowed persons remarrying	24	14	9	5
Average age of the widowed population	72.3	75.3	73.4	75.3
Average age at remarriage	60.5	63.8	56.5	58.1

Compared to 15 years ago, a smaller proportion of today's marriages will end in widowhood because more end in divorce. The average length of a widowhood, for instance, has gone up only slightly, hovering at just over eight years for widowers and 15 years for widows.

While a longer life expectancy for Canadians might be one reason for the slight increase in the length of a widowhood, another is that widows and widowers are less inclined to remarry. In 1971, 1 in 4 widowers would eventually remarry. In the 1980s, fewer than 1 in 5 could expect to do so. For widows, the decline has been even sharper: 1971 figures show 1 in 10 would remarry, in comparison with 1 in 20 in 1984. Expressed another way, the likelihood of remarriage for widowers and widows has dropped by over 40%.

Prospects for remarriage are better for younger widows and widowers. On average, women are now widowed at age 69 and men at 73. But the widow who remarries is 11 years younger than this average, while the widower who remarries is 9 years younger.

Till Divorce Do Us Part

"Most Canadians probably feel that marriage is for life, that it is inviolable in the face of all but the most extreme difficulty. Yet ... a significant proportion of them will experience a family breakdown and divorce sometime in the course of their lives."

(Statistics Canada, *Divorce: Law and the Family in Canada*, Ottawa, 1983, p. 236.)

Marriage has traditionally been perceived in Canada as something that binds people permanently, regardless of whether they remain happily or unhappily bound. But today, people disenchanted with their marriages are more apt to consider divorce.

The Divorce Act came into force on July 2, 1968. This act expanded the grounds upon which divorces could be granted. Since then, divorce has been the chosen solution to marital breakdown for a growing number of Canadians. And so, while in 1971 about one in five marriages was expected to end in divorce, by 1985 this figure was nearly one in three (See Figure IV).

But many people for whom marriage has failed are still willing to risk marrying again. In 1985, for example, in 27% of marriages at least one spouse was remarrying from the divorced state*. This suggests that many divorcees are not so much disillusioned with the institution of marriage as they were with their particular marriage.

Nevertheless, divorcees are somewhat less likely to remarry today than in 1971. A divorced man's likelihood of remarrying has dropped from 85% to 76% while a divorced woman's chance has gone down by almost twice as much, from 79% to 64%.

* Statistics Canada, *Marriages and Divorces*, 1985, (Ottawa, 1986).

TEXT TABLE IV. Summary Statistics for the Divorced State, by Sex, Canada: 1970-1972 and 1984-1986

	Men		Women	
	1970-1972	1984-1986	1970-1972	1984-1986
Percentage of divorced persons remarrying	85	76	79	64
Average time spent divorced (for total population)	1.1	2.6	2.2	4.9
Average length of a divorce	4.9	8.3	10.0	15.8
Average age at divorce	41.5	41.6	38.6	38.8
Average age of divorced population	51.5	53.9	56.8	57.5
Average age at remarriage	42.8	43.8	40.6	41.1

In 1971 men waited just over a year, on average, before remarrying. This figure has risen to over 2 years by 1985. Women wait an average of 2.3 years to remarry, as of 1985, up slightly from 2 years in 1971.

The increasing proportion of marriages ending in divorce and the decline in the likelihood of remarriage means that people are spending more years in the divorced state. Time spent divorced has doubled since 1971, reaching nearly 3 years for men and 5 years for women.

THE REGIONS: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Canadians marry, divorce and remarry at uniform rates from one end of the country to the other. But some statistical variations from the national average are worth a closer look.

In most parts of the country, Canadians can expect to stay single, on average, around 30 years. This is not so in Quebec. There, both men and women will remain single nearly five years longer than in any other province. And while the national average shows roughly 15% of Canadians will never marry, in Quebec that figure is greater than 20%.

TEXT TABLE V. Selected Statistics on the Never-married and Married States: Canada and Regions, 1984-1986

		Canada	Atlantic	Quebec	Ontario	Prairies	British Columbia
Percentage never marrying	Men	17	16	25	13	15	16
	Women	14	13	23	11	11	11
Average time spent single (for total population)	Men	33.2	32.1	37.1	31.7	32.2	32.8
	Women	31.8	31.0	37.4	30.3	29.4	30.3
Number of marriages per person marrying	Men	1.33	1.28	1.25	1.34	1.35	1.41
	Women	1.26	1.22	1.18	1.27	1.30	1.33
Percentage of marriages ending in divorce	Men	28	24	28	27	31	33
	Women	28	23	28	27	31	33

Now to look at the other part of the population in that province: those who marry. At less than 13 marriages for every 10 men marrying and 12 marriages for every 10 women marrying, Quebec shows the fewest "marriages per person marrying" of any region. This is because, although the divorce rate in Quebec parallels the national rate, people from this province are less likely to remarry after a divorce or after their spouse has died.

British Columbia lies at the other end of the spectrum, with the highest number of marriages per person marrying. At 33%, B.C. has the highest proportion of marriages ending in divorce in the country. And the likelihood of remarriage is also slightly higher than the national average.

When it comes to marriage stability, the Atlantic provinces lead in most categories. Their rate of marriages per person marrying is almost as low as Quebec's because only one in four of marriages in the Atlantic region end in divorce. And at over 33 years for men and women, a marriage can be expected to last longer in Atlantic Canada than elsewhere in the country.

If we look just at remarriage statistics, more substance is added to the variations we have already seen, especially between Quebec and British Columbia. While widowers in Quebec are least likely to remarry, British Columbia widowers are the most likely to remarry (See Text Table VI). There is no regional variation, however, in the proportion of widows who remarry.

TEXT TABLE VI. Selected Statistics on Remarriage: Canada and Regions, 1984-1986

		Canada	Atlantic	Quebec	Ontario	Prairies	British Columbia
Percentage of widowed persons remarrying	Men	14	14	12	15	15	16
	Women	5	5	5	5	5	5
Average duration of widowhood	Men	8.1	8.1	8.3	7.9	8.4	7.9
	Women	15.4	15.3	16.9	14.9	14.9	14.5
Percentage of divorced persons remarrying	Men	76	77	62	82	76	78
	Women	64	67	46	69	68	68
Average duration of a divorce	Men	8.3	7.6	13.7	6.2	8.1	7.5
	Women	15.8	15.0	23.0	13.4	14.4	13.6

Remarriage figures for divorcees show that Quebec's rates of 62% for men and 46% for women are notably lower than the national average. Because fewer persons from Quebec are likely to remarry after a divorce, more will live out their lives as "divorced." This pushes up the time the average divorced person in Quebec spends in the divorced state by about one year above the national average.

In addition, divorced men and women in Quebec wait longer before remarrying. Although the age at which divorce occurs is similar to the figure for Canada, the average age at remarriage is three years higher.

THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

How Canada Compares

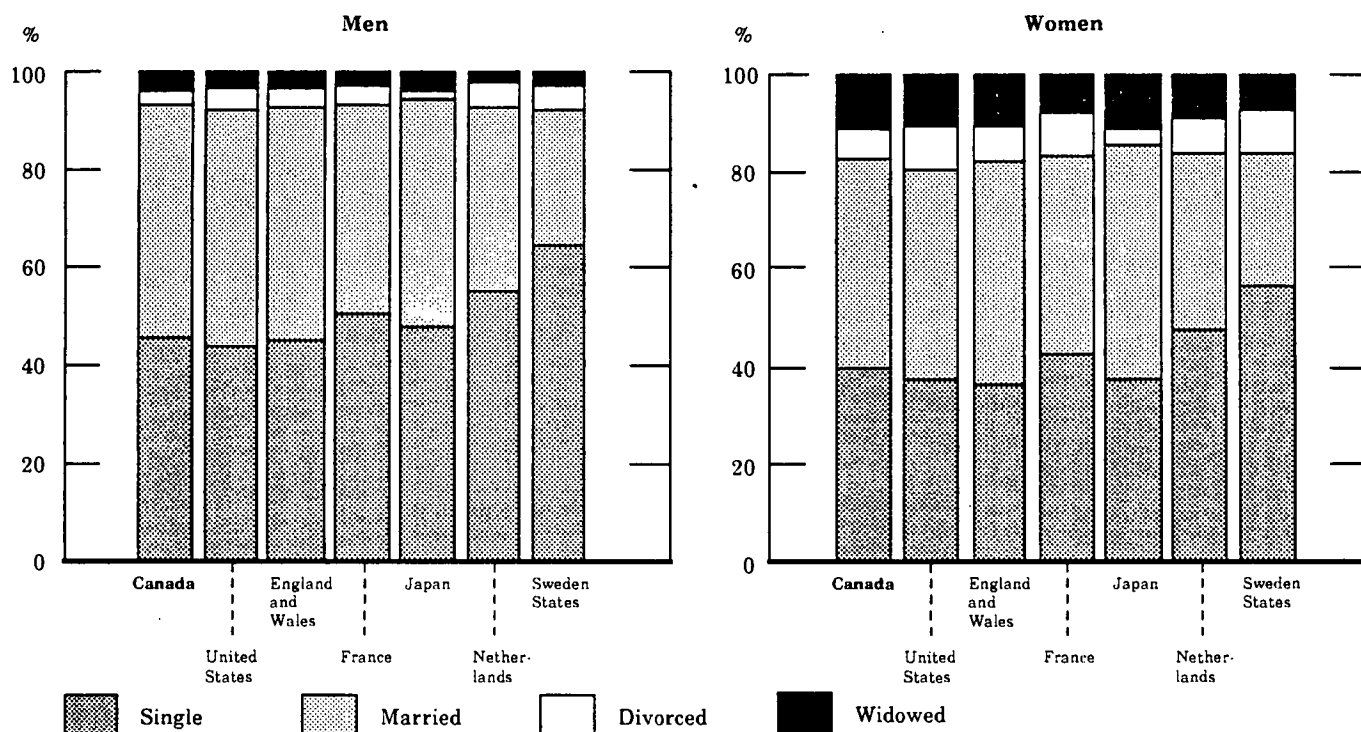
How do the marriage patterns of Canadians compare with those of other nations? Have international trends paralleled what has happened in Canada? This section explores these questions by looking at statistics from a number of developed nations.

Note that the data are from slightly different time periods. In addition, life expectancy varies slightly from country to country, which will affect the length of time persons spend as single, married, divorced and widowed.

Among the countries shown in Text Tables VII and VIII and Figure V, Canada's marriage statistics are most similar to those of England and Wales. For instance, the time the average man and woman will spend in each of the four civil states is almost the same. The average age at first marriage is the same for men (27 years) and similar for women (24 years in England and Wales and 26 years in Canada). England and Wales have a higher number of marriages per person marrying than Canada, reflecting their slightly higher divorce rate and higher probability that divorcees will remarry.

Figure V

Percentage of Total Lifetime Spent in Each of the Four Civil States, Canada and Selected Countries, Mid-1980's



The country most different from our own is Sweden. The seemingly high proportion of persons from Quebec never-marrying – 25% of men, 23% of women – is small compared to Sweden's 40% figure for men and 33% for women. On average, then, Swedish men and women remain single 15 years longer than Canadians. This substantial difference may be explained, in part, by a higher incidence of common-law union in Sweden than in Canada. Although they might be single longer, the statistics do not necessarily mean that Swedish people are more likely to live alone.

Sweden and Japan show the lowest remarriage rates among the countries studied: only 4 out of 100 widowers and 1 out of 100 widows (See Text Table VII). For divorcees, remarriage is more common, but still remains well below our own. Thus, if we look at the proportion of lifespan spent in each of the four states, we see marked differences between Sweden and the other countries.

We might suppose that since we share the same continent and some of the same cultural influences as Americans, U.S. statistics would be similar to our own, but they differ in some important areas. For instance, because of a high rate of divorce, the U.S. has a substantially higher number of marriages per person marrying. While in Canada there are roughly 13 marriages for every 10 people marrying, in the United States the figure is almost 16 for women and almost 17 for men.

Also, while getting married is popular in the United States (almost 90% marry), remaining married for life doesn't have as much appeal as it does in Canada. In fact, at 44% the United States has the highest divorce rate of the countries shown – more than 50% higher than our own. And the average marriage lasts 24 years, compared to 31 years in Canada.

Nevertheless, Americans can expect to live almost as long in the married state as can Canadians, though they will marry more often to do so. Text Table VII shows remarriage rates among the divorced and widowed. These rates are higher in the U.S. than in Canada for both men and women.

TEXT TABLE VII. Selected Statistics on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage: International Comparisons by Sex, Mid 1980's.

	Canada	United States	England and Wales	Netherlands	Sweden	France	Japan
MEN							
Percentage never marrying	17	16	16	30	40	24	20
Percentage marrying	83	84	84	70	60	76	80
Average age at first marriage	28.3	26.8	26.6	28.2	31.6	27.9	28.8
Number of marriages per person marrying	1.3	1.7	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.1
Percentage of marriages ending in divorce	28	44	33	27	34	23	13
Average length of a divorce	8.3	6.0	7.3	14.7	18.4	14.8	10.9
Percentage of widowed persons remarrying	14	19	15	7	4	7	4
Percentage of divorced persons remarrying	76	85	83	58	44	60	67
WOMEN							
Percentage never marrying	14	12	11	23	33	19	10
Percentage marrying	86	88	89	77	67	81	90
Average age at first marriage	25.7	24.5	24.4	26.1	29.2	25.8	26.2
Number of marriages per person marrying	1.3	1.6	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.1
Percentage of marriages ending in divorce	28	44	33	28	34	24	13
Average length of a divorce	15.8	11.8	12.4	23.2	25.8	24.2	22.7
Percentage of widowed persons remarrying	5	7	5	2	1	1	0
Percentage of divorced persons remarrying	64	76	74	46	40	48	50

TEXT TABLE VIII. Comparisons of Life Lived in the Four Civil States: Selected Countries, Mid 1970's to 1980's.

	Canada		United States		England and Wales		Netherlands		Sweden	
	1975-1977	1984-1986	1975	1983	1975	1980-1982	1976-1980	1984	1973	1983-1984
MEN										
Percentage of lifetime lived										
Single	41	46	38	44	41	45	47	55	58	64
Married	54	48	55	48	54	48	47	38	35	28
Widowed	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2
Divorced	2	3	4	5	2	4	3	5	5	6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
WOMEN										
Percentage of lifetime lived										
Single	35	40	33	37	33	37	39	47	48	56
Married	48	43	48	43	51	46	45	36	36	28
Widowed	12	11	12	10	12	10	11	9	9	7
Divorced	5	6	7	9	4	6	5	7	7	9
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

In contrast to the higher divorce rates and shorter marriages in the U.S. are the figures from Japan. There just over 1 in 10 marriages ends in divorce. As a result, the average marriage lasts 40 years, 9 years longer than in Canada.

Global Trends

Text Table IX shows what has happened in the selected developed nations over the past few years. Clearly, the trends in all countries indicate the same thing: people are spending more time single, less time married, more time divorced and about the same time widowed.

Interestingly, Canada, the U.S., and England and Wales – all countries with high first marriage rates in the mid-seventies – have seen those rates decline only slightly. Meanwhile, Sweden and the Netherlands, countries whose marriage rates were already low, have seen their rates fall at a sharper pace (See Text Table IX).

TEXT TABLE IX. Trends in Marriage, Remarriage and Divorce: Selected Countries, Mid 1970's to 1980's

	Canada		United States		England and Wales		Netherlands		Sweden	
	1975-1977	1984-1986	1975	1983	1975	1980-1982	1976-1980	1984	1973	1983-1984
MEN										
Percentage ever marrying	88	83	91	84	88	84	80	70	66	60
Percentage of marriages ending in divorce	27	28	43	44	28	33	20	27	27	34
Percentage of widowed persons remarrying	21	14	29	19	18	15	10	7	5	4
Percentage of divorced persons remarrying	84	76	88	85	90	83	66	58	47	44
WOMEN										
Percentage ever marrying	90	86	93	88	93	89	86	77	76	67
Percentage of marriages ending in divorce	26	28	42	44	28	33	21	28	26	34
Percentage of widowed persons remarrying	7	5	10	7	8	5	2	2	1	1
Percentage of divorced persons remarrying	75	64	83	76	81	74	53	46	43	40

As for divorce, Canadians and Americans show the smallest increase in the time, on average, they stay in the divorced state. For people in both countries, the jump in time spent divorced has come about because divorcees are not as likely to remarry now as before.

The sharpest drops in the rate of remarriage are in Canada, the United States and England and Wales. In sum, in all the countries shown, fewer divorced and widowed people are remarrying than a decade ago.

A POSTSCRIPT ON MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

We've seen the trends: Canadians are spending somewhat less time in the married state, despite an increase in life expectancy. They are also less likely to get married and more likely to get divorced. We've also seen that what is true for Canadians is not unique, it is also true in varying measure for people in other developed nations.

Many factors, such as shifting mores, different expectations of marriage and revamped divorce laws have altered the role of marriage in our society. Attitudes toward sexual conduct provide one example. More couples now live together before getting married. While most of these couples will eventually marry, the fact that some of them live together first – something quite rare several decades ago – attests to a change in the way we view marriage.

Divorce has also become a more acceptable way to end a marriage. To accommodate this change in attitude, the legal process of divorce had been made easier. As the latest step, a revision of Canadian divorce law came into force in 1986 that saw the separation time prior to divorce reduced from three years to one year. This legal change may well influence future divorce rates.

And finally, because we live longer than our parents, to be married for life means being married considerably longer than ever before.

In Canada, it would seem that lifetime marriage will continue to be less likely and divorce more likely, but we cannot be certain of the long-term trend. Indeed, the number of divorces began falling after 1982, then jumped considerably following the introduction of the revised divorce legislation in 1986.

Only in the past two decades has divorce become an acceptable and available means to end an unsatisfactory marriage – a remarkably short period considering the stability of lifetime marriage over many centuries. As a society, we are only now beginning to cope with the changes brought about by a higher divorce rate.

At this point we cannot foresee how society's accumulated experience – experience that weighs the cost and benefits of marriage and divorce, will influence future rates. Perhaps the children of divorced parents will be reluctant to marry to avoid experiencing what their parents have experienced. Or perhaps future generations will be better able to build marriages that accommodate the economic and social realities of their day.

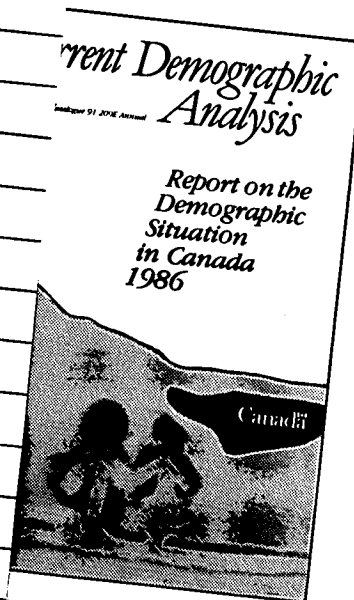


1010013955



BIRTH, DEATH MARRIAGE DIVORCE

DATE DUE			
1988	FEV 15	1989	
1988	JUN 15	1989	
1988	163	1989	
1988	AUG 15	1989	
1988	JUN 19	1992	
1988	NOV 23	1992	



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