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LONE PARENTHOOD: CHARACTERISTICS AND DETERMINANTS

RESULTS FROM THE 1984 FAMILY HISTORY SURVEY



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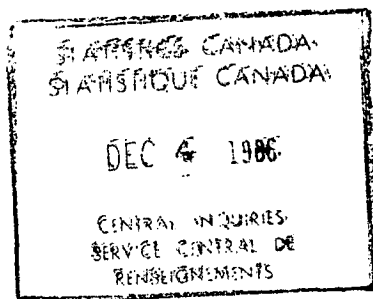
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RESULTS FROM THE 1984 FAMILY HISTORY SURVEY

by Ian Pool and Maureen Moore

Housing, Family and
Social Statistics Division

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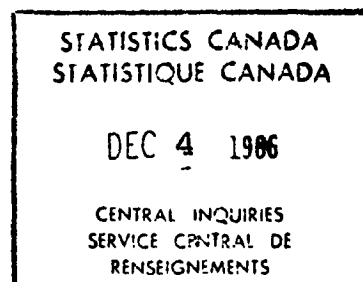
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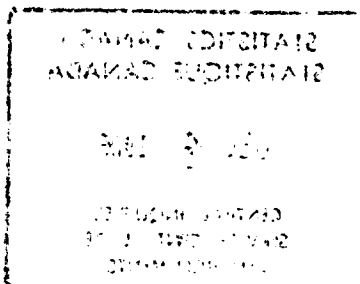
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All standardized percentages have been calculated with quinquennial age groups. This is true even in tables where data are presented by broad age groups.



PREFACE

This report, one of a series of studies using retrospective data from the Family History Survey, carried out by Statistics Canada in 1984, examines lone parenthood from the longitudinal perspective. Most other data on lone parenthood published by Statistics Canada have been based on cross-sectional sources, such as the Census or household surveys. This report provides new insights into the timing of events that lead to lone parenthood, including childbearing, union dissolution and divorce. Other events, such as union formation, entry into the labour force and work interruptions, are also examined.

The study suggests that there are three types of lone parents: those who have never been in a union, those who are separated or divorced and those who are widowed, and that each type prevails at different age groups. The study points out that lone parenthood is often a transitory situation followed by entry into a union.

Lone parents are a frequent target population for social policy initiatives. This study, with its longitudinal data, provides an interesting and useful new perspective for policy analysis.

I.P. Fellegi,
Chief Statistician of Canada.

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Gordon E. Priest, Director of the Housing, Family and Social Statistics Division at Statistics Canada, originated the Family History Survey and proposed the topic for this study. Some other individuals at Statistics Canada must be acknowledged: Gary Catlin and Rita Nesich for their survey methodology expertise; Boriss Mazikins for his knowledge of FHS concepts and survey statistics; Brian Hamm for his acquaintance with the FHS data base and data retrievals; Georgette Gaulin for preparing the manuscript for publication; and Lucie Lamadeleine for typing the manuscript in all its drafts.

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HIGHLIGHTS

- . The Family History Survey showed that in 1984, of four million families with children under the age of 25, 16% were lone-parent families.
- . At the time of the survey, just over three quarters of lone parents were female.
- . About seven in ten female lone parents were separated or divorced from a common-law or marital partner.
- . The survey showed that there is not a strong link between participation in common-law unions and propensity to become a lone parent.
- . In comparison with wives, female lone parents had a greater tendency to enter unions at younger ages, they were more likely to have had their first birth before the age of 20, and they were more likely to have had their first birth before or during the year they entered their first union.
- . One quarter of female lone parents had achieved some post-secondary education. The proportions for husbands, wives and male lone parents, in comparison, were about one-third.
- . For both female lone parents and wives, early childbearing appears to block the attainment of post-secondary education.
- . Childbearing was more likely to delay the first work-force experience of lone-parent women than of wives.
- . Female lone parents were more likely to have begun work at a later age than wives but were less likely to have interrupted their work for one year or longer.

Chapter I: INTRODUCTION

Recent research has shown an increase in the number of lone-parent families in Canada. Moreover, these families are providing support, it seems, for a growing proportion of Canada's dependent children. Yet there is evidence that these families suffer many social and economic disadvantages, as in the case of housing. Overwhelmingly, lone-parent families are headed by women (almost four-fifths in this study) and these women are likely to be younger than were the heads of lone-parent families in the past.(1)

Translated into policy terms, this information leads to two conclusions. First, it can be argued that along with widowhood (a function of another process, that of the aging of the population) lone parenthood and its attendant disadvantages is leading to a "feminization of poverty" in Canada. Second, there is concern that this situation could become entrenched. If lone parents are socially and economically underprivileged, there is a chance that their children might suffer and become over-represented among the disadvantaged parents of the next generation. They are therefore an important target for social policy.

Beyond this, lone parenthood is a poorly explored domain in demography. In the past, many lone parents, if not the majority, were widows so that lone parenthood was a common feature of later middle age when risks of mortality, particularly among men, increased. Today, widowhood is still important but lone parenthood is becoming more interrelated to demographic variables other than mortality, that is, to fertility and nuptiality.(2) These new interrelations have an important consequence. Demographically, lone parenthood has shifted from being a biosocial and vital sequence coming late in the family life cycle(3) when widow(er)hood was the modal form of terminating a union, to being more frequently either the first (and sometimes only) stage of family formation, or a stage between union dissolution and subsequent formation of a new union.

For much of this century births "outside marriage" or "ex-nuptial births"(4) constituted a small minority of confinements. A recent rise in the proportion of such births has coincided, broadly speaking, with major transitions in four other aspects of Canadian family life:

- a decrease in the proportion of individuals married by 25 years of age;
- an increase in the social acceptance of cohabitation; indeed the social (as against legal) "legitimation" of this form of union;
- a rapid decline in fertility (in the early to mid-1970s); and
- a significant increase in the number of separations and divorces.(5)

- (1) Statistics Canada, **Canada's Lone Parent Families**, 1981 Census of Canada, Census Content Series, Ministry of Supply and Services, Ottawa. May 1984; and, G.E. Priest, "The Family Life Cycle and Housing Consumption in Canada: A Review Based on 1981 Census Data", **Canadian Statistical Review**, September 1984.
- (2) Nuptiality relates to the patterns and trends in unions and in forms of union dissolution such as divorce, separation and widowhood. It may refer, as in this paper, to both legitimate and mutual consent unions (i.e., **de facto** or common-law unions). For further discussion of this see Basavarajappa, K.G., **Incidence of Divorce and the Relative Importance of Death and Divorce in the Dissolution of Marriage in Canada, 1921-1976**, Statistics Canada, Ottawa, June 1979.
- (3) The stages in the development and disintegration of a family (a couple and their children). They are **Formation**, **Extension** (through childbearing and/or adoption), **Contraction** (through children leaving home) and **Dissolution** (through divorce or the death of a spouse). Lone-parent families may be in these stages at specific points in time but do not follow this normative sequence.
- (4) Sometimes termed "out of wedlock". In the past they were termed illegitimate but most provinces have attempted to remove this distinction from the law.
- (5) A. Romaniuc, **Fertility in Canada: From Baby-boom to Baby-bust**, Current Demographic Analysis, Statistics Canada, Ministry of Supply and Services, Ottawa, November 1984.

These shifts have resulted in a different profile of lone parenthood and a different set of inter-relations between it and other demographic phenomena than in the past. While mortality continues to be a determinant of lone parenthood, fertility and nuptiality are the predominant influences today through the mechanisms of ex-nuptial childbearing and marital separation, divorce or common-law union dissolution.

Background to the Study of Lone Parenthood

The term "lone parenthood" unfortunately carries with it the connotation of a status with some degree of permanence. But frequently, lone parenthood is a transitory situation, often falling between unions. The converse is also true: many husbands and wives have been or will be lone parents, and sometimes marriage and common-law unions are merely transitory situations between phases as a lone parent.

This idea is central to the interpretation of the data presented here and it has both methodological (see Chapter II) and substantive implications. Essentially, studies of lone parenthood must start from some definitional base. Definitions in this study, as in censuses, are based on the situation which the respondent reported at the moment of the interview, but these are not necessarily the same as those that existed prior to the interview. Detailed longitudinal analyses can take cognizance of these changes; in this introductory study though, definitions of lone parents, husbands and wives are all based on current status, even in the analysis of antecedents.

Borrowing the notion of a "family career" from family sociology, Figure 1 demonstrates through illustrative sequences how statuses can change throughout the family career. The sequences show that the distinction between lone parent and partner in a husband-wife family may be true only at the time of the interview because both types of respondents can have had very similar careers up until some time before then. For example, two 24-year old never-married parents could retain essentially the same status until the day before the interview when one marries while the other remains a lone parent. Whereas most census statistics relate only to this current status, the Family History Survey (FHS) relates also to past events and their timing.

Recent studies of lone parenthood⁽⁶⁾ employ census data which permit the analysis of patterns and comparison between census years. But they tend to reinforce the notion of status because of a missing element: the study of antecedents to lone parenthood; that is, the attempt to trace its roots. The FHS provides data on these roots and also permits a more detailed review of the characteristics of persons currently in this situation. This analysis is based almost entirely on FHS data.

The analyses presented in later chapters imply the transitory nature of the lone-parent situation, and they relate to its antecedents. But they do not directly explore family career differentials between lone parents, and husbands and wives. This must await more detailed secondary analyses. The accent is on adults who have dependent children living with them and who are currently lone parents, husbands or wives. There is no discussion of their children except about the number they have borne or fathered, and those for whom they are presently responsible through natural parenting, step-parenting or adoption.

This study relates to individual lone parents, husbands and wives but not to families. The use of the family as a unit of analysis is difficult since the sampling units of the FHS were individuals: men and women in specific age groups from 18 to 65. This poses little problem for lone parent families where by definition there is only one parent per family. It, however, becomes critical if husband-wife families are used as a control group. In the FHS sample design husband and wives were selected as individuals from different households. Thus, for husband-wife families the probability of being represented in the sample was double that of lone-parent families. Estimates of the number of husband-wife families from both sexes would be inaccurate unless further weighting adjustments were carried out.

It is therefore individual lone parents, husbands and wives with children (rather than lone-parent- and husband-wife families) and their frequencies by age and sex that are compared. Lone parents are defined as respondents not living with a spouse who have at least one child under the age of 25, regardless of marital status, still at home; and husbands and wives are defined as respondents living with a common-law or marital partner, with at least one child under the age of 25, regardless of marital status, still at home.

Where the number of families is estimated (see Table 1) an approximation is employed:

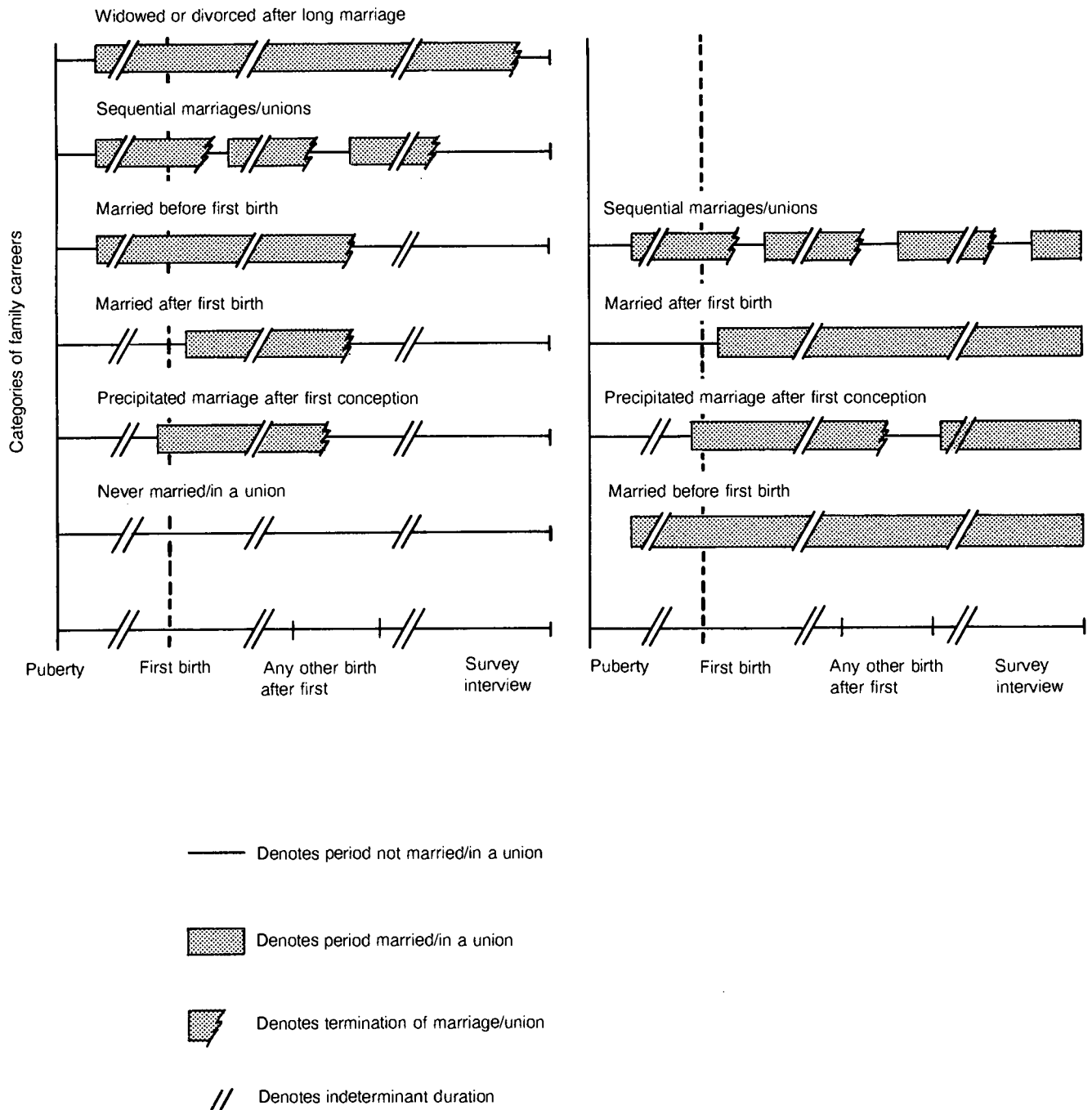
⁽⁶⁾ See for example G.E. Priest, *op. cit.*, 1984; and Statistics Canada, *op. cit.*, 1984.

Figure 1

Lone Parents, Husbands and Wives: Examples of Family Careers Spanning the Duration from Puberty to the Family History Survey Interview (status as at the time of the interview), 1984

Male and Female Lone Parents

Husbands and Wives



Families = Lone Parents (both sexes) + Wives

An alternative method was rejected because the normal differences in age at marriage (see footnote 3) produce an imperfect fit between husband and wife quinquennial age groups. It was:

$$\text{Families} = \text{Lone Parents (both sexes)} + \left(\frac{\text{Husbands} + \text{Wives}}{2} \right)$$

In general, both approaches show a similar pattern. At all ages for example, the proportion of families which are lone-parent according to the first equation is 16.0% and to the second it is 15.8%, a difference of 0.2%.

The study of determinants to lone parenthood is restricted to earlier events in the lives of the individuals themselves. There are no data on the contextual determinants, whether of their social environment or their families of orientation (e.g., there is nothing on whether lone parents have been raised in lone-parent families). Furthermore, the determinants analysed here are entirely proximate.⁽⁷⁾ There may be more causally remote variables, such as psychological attributes, that have shaped these proximate determinants, but there are no data on them and no attempt will be made to speculate about them.

Study Approach

As lone parenthood is a sensitive and complex area of policy research, it is preferable that the underlying approach to the analysis be spelt out so that readers can evaluate the validity of the explanations and conclusions.

It has been well documented⁽⁸⁾ that an important antecedent to lone parenthood is early child-bearing. This factor, in relation to nuptiality (especially cohabitation) and fertility (especially ex-nuptial parenthood) must be studied for its contribution to lone parenthood.

Lone parenthood must also be studied within the context of education and early labour force experience. These are keys to social differentiation in adulthood because they establish work-force skills and probably determine, in the longer run, occupation, income and labour force participation. There are no FHS data on income, but it is assumed that education, occupation and income are intercorrelated.

Thirdly, this analysis draws on family sociology for the theory of "conjugal power". A crude outline of this theory is that husbands and wives have access to resources of varying quantity and significance. These resources are brought into play in the "negotiating" or "bargaining" which usually occurs within marriage. Decisions can be reached by many routes, from the use of coercion and even force (physical strength may be seen as a resource) to consensus achieved from equal bargaining positions. Regardless of the mode of negotiation or decision-making, it is postulated that the partner who controls the most appropriate resources (material and non-material) is likely to exercise the most power. Education and occupation are factors in this domain because the spouse contributing most to family income is likely to play the key role. Chapter IV draws on the notion of conjugal power in discussing the propensity of unions to rupture.

Through education and early job experience, the theory of conjugal power is related to the "life cycle". There are three types of cycles: the human life cycle; the family life cycle (see footnote 3); and an individual's career cycle. The career cycle begins with education or training, passes through job experience, seniority and promotion, commonly includes work interruptions and resumptions, and ends with retirement.

The three cycles interact. For example, retirement normally occurs among the aging; one cannot legally enter a marriage until late adolescence; and education normally terminates about the beginning of adulthood before the career cycle starts (see Chapters IV and VI for further discussion of education). It is the successful passage through the career cycle, determined by education and job experience, which gives an individual material resources used in bargaining with a spouse.

(7) These are independent variables of immediate explanatory significance. In the present context they are events experienced by the respondents earlier in their adult lives such as first child-bearing and first marriage.

(8) See, for example A. Romaniuc, *op. cit.*, 1984; M.J. Murphy, "Demographic and Socio-economic influences on Recent British Marital Breakdown Patterns", *Population Studies*, 39, 3, November 1985, pp. 441-60.

For women in Canada, there has been a close conjunction between career and family-life cycles.(9) Traditionally, it was common for them to enter unions while employed in an early post-educational job, and with pregnancy, to interrupt their work at various points and for varying durations. The resultant bimodal distribution of female labour force participation, with peaks at late adolescence to early adulthood and late thirties to early forties, has, in recent times, taken a unimodal shape with the peak occurring in early adulthood but levelling off in later age groups. This change has occurred partly as a result of more career training for women, changing attitudes, improved maternity leave provisions and smaller family sizes, and also because many women raising children, both in lone-parent and husband-wife families, have had to work to support the family budget. On average, lone parents are likely to have fewer financial resources than couples,(10) and thus, may be in the labour market regardless of personal choice. This interaction is the subject of Chapters IV and VI. Chapter VI also examines the extent to which education and early work-force experience are frustrated by early childbearing.

The Broad Parameters

Of approximately four million families with children under 25 years of age in Canada, 16% are lone-parent families as estimated from the Family History Survey of February 1984.(11) This proportion accords with the corresponding 1981 Census figure, itself part of a continuing upward trend. The proportion of families headed by lone parents varies by age, as shown in Table 1. The distribution is U-shaped, with peaks at either end. These peaks reflect both the traditional tendency for lone parenthood to result from widow(er)hood and its more recent tendency to be the first stage in family formation. Lone parents, as already noted, are predominantly women but this also varies by age.

- (9) It must be stressed that this is a discussion of modal behaviour patterns, not of ideals. Until recently most women married at a young age and were subject to the career and family life cycle interactions noted here. See Denton, Frank I. & Sylvia Ostry, **Historical Estimates of the Canadian Labour Force**, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Ottawa, 1967; and Allingham, John D., **Women Who Work**, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Ottawa, 1967.
- (10) Although among husband-wife families, there are low-income or single-wage earner families who may have as few or even fewer resources.
- (11) Because of: some minor definitional differences, the way in which the sample relates to individuals rather than families, and the weighting necessary to extrapolate to the national level, the figures quoted here relate only to lone parents and wives (no estimate can be obtained from the survey of the number of couple families, because in the survey there is no linkage of husbands and wives). They can be used as general indications only, not as exact estimates.

TABLE 1. Lone-parent Families as a Percentage of All Families With Children and Female Lone Parents as a Percentage of All Lone Parents, by Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Families with children(1)	Percentage of families headed by lone parents	Lone parents	Percentage of lone parents who are female
All ages	4,287,453	16	687,068	78
18-24	298,088	22	66,273	99
25-29	647,440	14	93,608	84
30-34	833,172	14	118,684	75
35-39	844,424	14	115,761	73
40-44	603,433	15	88,254	79
45-49	459,813	18	84,849	77
50-54	341,200	15	51,794	82
55-65	259,883	26	67,845	57

- (1) Because the Family History Survey is based on a random sample of individuals of each sex it is impossible to obtain an exact estimate of the number of husband-wife families with children. Here the figures on women in such families are taken as a proxy, and probably give a fairly reliable estimate. Thus, families with children (N) = lone parents (both sexes) + wives, all with children under 25 years of age at home, regardless of their marital status.

Figure 2

**Women in Families with Children: Percentage Distribution
by Current Union Status Within Broad Age Groups, Canada, 1984**

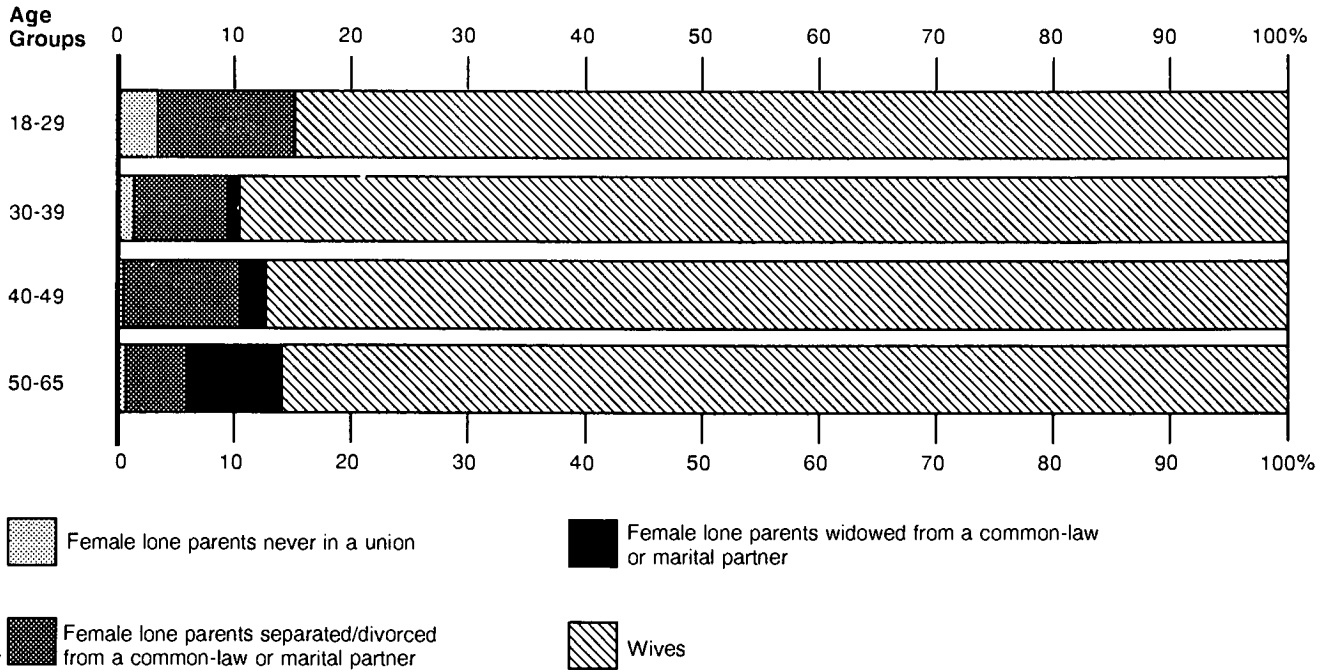
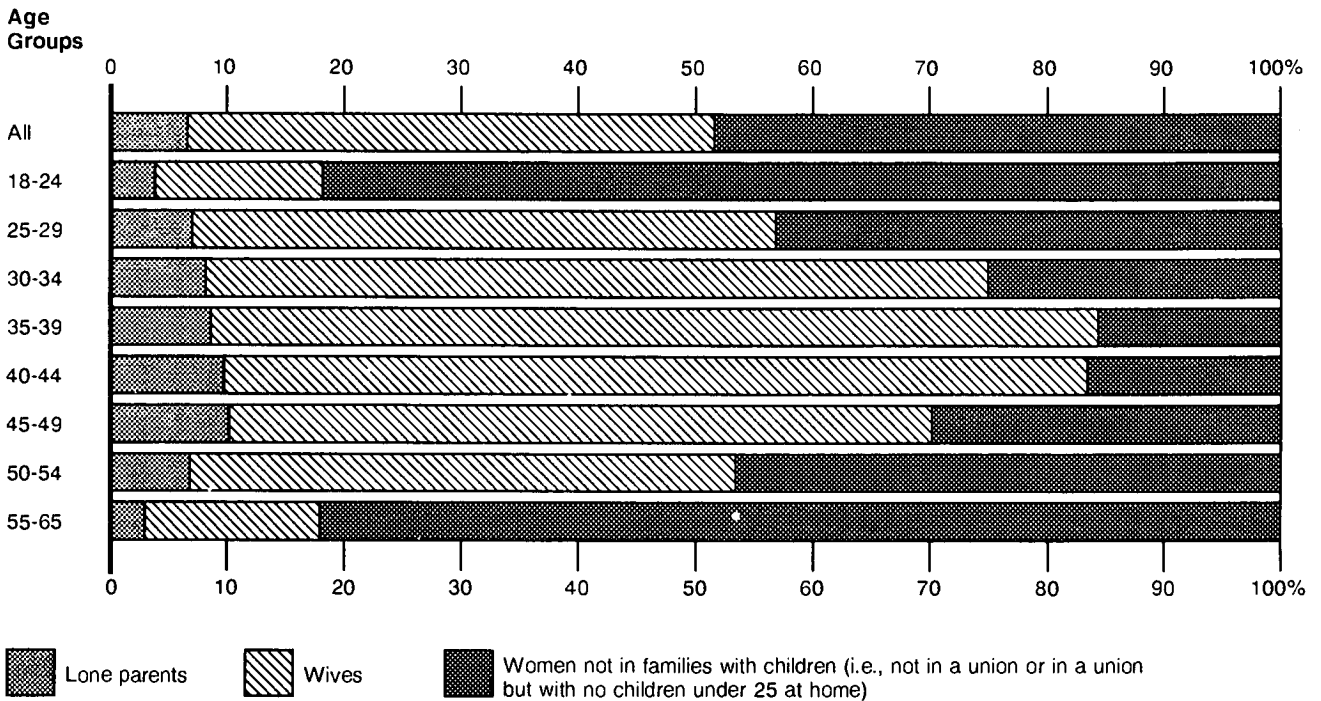


Figure 3

**Women by Family Status: Percentage Distribution
Within Age Groups, Canada, 1984**



Lone parent women are not a homogeneous group. Figure 2 shows the distribution of women in families with children and identifies three types of lone-parent women: those who have never been in a union; those who are separated or divorced; and those who are widowed. The relative importance of the three types varies with age: the incidence of those who have never cohabitated or married is higher among younger women; the incidence of the separated and divorced higher among younger and middle aged women; and the incidence of the widowed higher among the elderly. The needs of the three groups differ by their life-cycle stages, an important factor for policy consideration.

Figure 3 shows the percentage distribution of women in Canada by their family status within age groups. Most women in the youngest and oldest age groups are without children and most women between these age groups are wives with children. The remaining proportion, women who are lone parents, remains low but increases gradually until it peaks in the late forties (10%), and then declines to 3% in the eldest age group.

At ages 18-24 years only 4% of all women are lone parents. Yet in that age group, these lone-parent women account for almost 22% of all families with children (Table 1). This contrast shows that to gain an adequate perspective on lone parents one must study those who have been as well as those who are currently lone parents, and relate their number to all women so as not to exaggerate the prevalence of lone parenthood.

This study is divided into seven chapters. Chapter II is about problems of data collection and analysis, particularly those which are a function of the survey technique employed in the FHS; Chapters III to VI identify and attempt to interrelate the major characteristics and determinants of lone parenthood; and Chapter VII is an agenda for future work. This study should be seen as exploratory rather than definitive - as providing some postulates for further analyses rather than firm results. In World Fertility Survey terminology it is one of the first reports in anticipation of "secondary analyses".

Chapter II: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Sources of Data

Because the social significance of lone-parent families was not recognized by policy makers and researchers until rather recently, there have been few systematic attempts to collect data on them. Past studies of this group have employed data of two sorts. The first sort, social casework data, have been used for small-scale studies of lone-parent families as "problem" families. These studies have analyzed specific accounts of lone parenthood, but without relating them back to the population at risk (all families or all adults). The second sort form a subset of a more general data set such as the Family History Survey (FHS) used in this study, or of an even more comprehensive file such as the census in which data on families constitute merely one of many components.

As noted in Chapter I, census data have been used in some recent studies on lone parents in Canada. From a statistical standpoint they have some distinct advantages:

- they relate to the entire universe or population (although a systematic underenumeration of any subpopulation counteracts this advantage);
- numbers are large and thus problems of "sampling error" are minimised; and
- they provide data not only on the subpopulation being analysed, but also on other subpopulations.

Because a census must meet demands from many subjects the attention given to any one topic is limited. It collects relatively few data for detailed analyses of structure or for longitudinal analyses. (Of course, since censuses take place every five years, they do provide data on one longitudinal dimension). For these reasons, census data have limited utility for this study although they are fundamental to many types of social, economic and demographic analyses, irreplaceable for small geographical analysis,⁽¹⁾ and essential for the construction of sampling frames for surveys such as the FHS.

The present analysis draws its data from the FHS, a survey in which parents (18-65 years of age) in families with children are a majority of adults interviewed (53%), but lone parents only a small minority (8%) of these parents. Indeed, lone parenthood was never perceived to be a primary focus of the survey but this policy area and others benefit from the initiative in two ways. First, there are now in-depth national data on some important family subjects. This study on lone parenthood is merely one of a number which can be undertaken. Beyond providing a useful insight into an area of policy concern, then, it can also be seen as demonstrating the utility of small-scale surveys of a "punctual" type that have been "piggy-backed" onto existing data collection modalities. Secondly, that the FHS was a "piggy-backed" component of the larger Labour Force Survey (LFS), a conventional Canadian data collection instrument, is itself important, because a number of the classical LFS questions are of utility in the analysis of the family life cycle; as noted in Chapter I, the family and career cycles interact.

It must be stressed that it is difficult if not virtually impossible to undertake surveys restricted to lone parents *per se*. The problems associated with sampling lone parents relate to the fact that their situation is often transitory. It would be difficult to determine beforehand who should be interviewed. With a massive preceding enumeration this might be possible, but even between the enumeration and the actual survey the situation of some people may well have changed.

For this study's purpose, an alternative approach to the FHS may have been to have also included in the sample persons identified in components of the LFS sample as lone parents a month earlier.⁽²⁾ Such an approach would have been feasible if lone parents were the only target group selected for the survey, but the FHS was designed to focus on the entire adult population.

- (1) The FHS cannot give the geographic breakdown for lone parents (e.g., by province) as provided in Statistics Canada, **Canada's Lone Parent Families**, 1984. With census data though, it would be possible, for example, to use indirect standardisation techniques to estimate regional/provincial rates from the national data employed here.
- (2) As one sixth of the Labour Force Survey sample is replaced each month, individuals remain in the sample for six consecutive months.

The lone-parent group must therefore be statistically defined as a subset of a larger multipurpose data set such as the FHS. This definition can only be **post facto** or based on data collected at the time of the survey interview. It may be a statistical artefact according to subjective measures since persons defined as "lone parents" might not, in their own self image, consider themselves lone parents just as persons defined as "husbands" and "wives" could consider themselves lone parents. However, a person living with children but no partner is in many important respects a lone parent regardless of how he or she thinks of him/herself. Moreover, it is probable that the gap between the statistically defined group and the group truly possessing the status at the time of the survey is slight.

The Family History Survey: Analysis and Methodological Concerns

Given the constraints inherent in lone-parent data collection the FHS is a highly satisfactory source. However, there are some concerns over methodology, sample size, response and interpretative bias, that present themselves. This section outlines these concerns and the strategies adopted to overcome them. Below are the FHS sampling details:(3)

- The survey was conducted during the period February 27 to March 7, 1984 as a supplement to the LFS.
- Interviewing was by telephone.
- The sample was based on two of six LFS rotation groups, "three" and "six". Males were drawn from the former and females from the latter.
- The FHS sampled persons 18-65 years. Individuals were selected on the basis of age reported when they first joined the LFS cycle: males in September 1983 (rotation group 3), and females in December 1983 (rotation group 6). In tabulations, respondents who turned 66 just prior to the FHS are included in the age group 55-65. Conversely, the younger age group 18-24 excludes those 18 years old who were 17 years of age when first included in the LFS sample.
- In all, 16,042 persons were selected to be interviewed. There were 14,004 successful interviews giving a very high completion rate of 87%. At the time of the survey 10,606 were family members (lone parents, husbands and wives), and 7,477 among them had children under 25 years of age (natural, step or adopted) living with them.
- In the FHS there are 7,256 females and 6,748 males; in the "family" component there are 5,756 females and 4,850 males; and in the "parent" component there are 4,022 mothers and 3,455 fathers.(4)

As a supplement to the LFS, the FHS shares some of the LFS variables, thereby extending its data files without having had to repeat the same question or questions slightly rephrased during the survey interview. The FHS also used work history questions similar to LFS current labour force questions to take advantage of a standardized and well-tested format and to guard comparability with other LFS-based studies. It is nevertheless arguable whether LFS definitions, essentially formulated with economic analyses in mind, are sociologically meaningful.(5)

The issue of sample size is critical for the lone parent group, who account for only 4% of the FHS sample. Secondary analyses will not be restricted by this factor if they adopt robust probability techniques (i.e., techniques that are not so greatly affected by small cell sizes, such as life-table techniques). For example, these could be used to determine the probability of a member of a cohort becoming a lone parent. By contrast, subgroup structural studies will be restricted by sample size.

- (3) These and a number of the comments to be made here are drawn from Statistics Canada internal memoranda. Some critiques are, however, those of the authors who are alone responsible for such comments. For more detailed description of FHS Methodology see I.K. Burch, **Family History Survey: Preliminary Findings**, Statistics Canada, Ottawa, 1985.
- (4) This results in a masculinity ratio of 93 (males per 100 females) for the survey as a whole, but only 86 for parents with children at home. The largest factor accounting for the difference is that females are overrepresented in the lone-parent group (it has a masculinity ratio of only 23). This is partially because in the event of marriage breakdown custody of children is usually awarded to the female parent. Beyond this, there are also age differentials at time of marriage. Women marry and become lone parents at younger ages than men.
- (5) It has been shown that a small definitional difference can have a significant effect. See Denton and Ostry, **op. cit.**, 1967. The sociological implications of this issue are also explored in I. Pool, "Changes in Female Labour Force Participation: Some Possible Implications for Conjugal Power", **Journal of Comparative Family Studies**, Spring, 1978.

This study is more akin to structural than to probability analysis. It focuses on subgroups in the sample that in turn must be categorized by age so that results can be inferred as real differences rather than as artefacts of age composition. The division of the sample into subgroups renders some statistics unreliable, especially those for lone-parent men. Some strategies are adopted to minimise this disadvantage:

- Quinquennial age groups are analyzed except at 18-24 years and 55-65 years. Where estimates for these are unreliable, ages are grouped into broader ranges.
- In order to gain the advantages of using the entire sample (all ages) while holding age differences constant, a direct standardization technique(6) is used. In this technique, age-specific rates are applied to a standard population - in this analysis, the population of wives - and summed. The resulting summary rates reflect the same age composition and, thus, differences due to age are controlled. In practice this often proves to be unnecessary because standardised and crude rates are usually similar. As shown in Table 3, the age distributions of lone parents and spouses are not very different.
- More importantly, interpretations are drawn from systematic and general patterns rather than from isolated results, however spectacular they may seem. An exception to this rule comes in Chapter V where parents of "baby-boom" children are studied.
- Following Statistics Canada guidelines, the coefficient of variation (CV) is used to estimate levels of reliability. Cells with high CVs - greater than 33.3% - are identified with asterisks (*) on tables. Where sample size for such cells is less than 100, counts are not shown; such cells are identified with a double asterisk (**). A dash (-) is used to identify the cells for which the sample yielded no observation.
- Percentages are rounded to whole numbers to ensure that the reader does not infer a level of exactness not inherent in the data.

Analyses of past life-cycle events must consider effects of "truncation". Truncation occurs when the range of values for a certain variable is restricted. Using fertility as an example, a woman's reproductive period is usually between the ages of 15 and 49. For women currently 30, say, fertility data can only account for half their reproductive period. These data truncate a process which is as yet incomplete, a factor which has to be considered when comparing fertility rates. In this analysis truncation bias is removed in comparisons of groups (where cell sizes permit) who have been exposed in the past to the same truncated series of experiences (e.g., having a birth before 25 years of age for those currently 25 years and over).(7)

A final issue is non-sampling error. This is often overshadowed by sampling error which is more conducive to statistical analysis but may, in fact, be less significant. The division of the sample into lone parents, couple parents and adults not in families is based on respondents' evaluation of their situation and this could be affected by a misunderstanding of the questions, differences in attitudes about what are "acceptable" and "unacceptable" forms of cohabitation, or even a desire to mislead the interviewer. For example, that few older respondents reported participation in a common-law union could reflect a reticence to discuss unions they might see as unconventional. However, it is also arguable that this more likely represents real intercohort differentials, since for most variables the differences by age are systematic and intuitively reasonable.

(6) See Shryock, H.S. and J.S. Siegel, **The Materials and Methods of Demography**, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Washington, 1971; and T. Pullum, **Standardization**, World Fertility Survey, London, 1978, for further explanation and methods of calculating direct standardization.

(7) It is more difficult to isolate truncation in longitudinal analyses interrelating fertility with other demographic variables. To carry the same example further, a woman's fertility will also depend, among other factors, on the timing and duration of unions (women who marry or enter unions younger have a longer exposure time to risk of pregnancy). Interrelations with nuptiality can become complex as in the sequences illustrating the entry and exit from unions in Figure 1. These are not as simple as the deterministic sequences of parity (see definition below) progression. Furthermore, the study of lone parenthood is a new domain without the rules and conventions available to the study of fertility. However secondary analyses can probably eliminate most of these biases by using multiple decrement techniques and by drawing on event-specific tables where all groups (e.g., lone parents, wives, other women) are exposed to the same risks.

"Parity" refers to the number of children already born. A woman of "0 parity" has no births and a woman of "1 parity" has had one live birth. This progresses in a deterministic way: only women of first parity can have a second order birth and so on.

Perhaps more importantly in the case of retrospective data, one is dependent on the respondent's recall and their personal judgement about what constitutes a union: a brief encounter for some may be a union for others. The "spouse" of that time may have a different perspective, but the interview can record only one version of the history.

Discussion

The strategies outlined in this chapter minimize a number of statistical problems. It would be prudent to recognize that these notwithstanding, the sampling and non-sampling errors inherent in the data require that results be interpreted with care. The interpretation of the passage of events prior to the survey must take into account the impact of truncation. There are still some clear indications which should be of interest to policy makers, even if the data do not fully match the criteria of confidence demanded by the most rigorous statisticians. Questions of statistical refinement must be put into context.

This study attempts to systematize and analyze social relationships that are often ambiguous and dynamic. For some lone parents there will be entry into unions, just as many husbands and wives have at some time been lone parents. "Legal" marriage and "legal" divorce provide clear boundaries for categorization but do not always characterize what are perhaps the more fluid relationships of today. The analysis must remain imperfect since even for the actors themselves definitions are sometimes difficult or may vary from one period to the next.

Fortunately, the richness of human experience cannot be reduced into simple social science models. Novelists often come closer. The model presented here approaches but cannot completely reproduce reality. Nevertheless, some of the results are very strong and systematic and thus have policy import. It is along this dimension that social science perhaps exceeds art in reporting human experience.

Chapter III: CURRENT AND CUMULATIVE DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

This chapter seeks to identify any important differences in demographic characteristics of lone parents, and husbands and wives. These characteristics are of two types: those which relate entirely to the current situation in which respondents find themselves (as of the time of the survey); and those which are cumulative up to the survey date and depend on the past experiences of the respondent. This distinction is important in longitudinal analysis since past and present situations may differ. Persons currently lone parents may have been in previous unions and persons currently husbands and wives may have been lone parents.

Age and Sex Distribution

Table 2 gives the age and sex distribution of lone parents and couple parents (husbands and wives). These are all quite similar although there is a higher concentration of female lone parents (12%) than other types of parents, and a complete absence of male lone parents, in the youngest age group. The proportion of male lone parents in the eldest age group is almost twice that of husbands, a function of the transition of men to lone parenthood through separation and widowhood as against early parenthood.

TABLE 2. Age Distribution of Lone Parents, Husbands and Wives, Canada, 1984

Age group	Lone parents		Husbands		Wives	
	Male	Female				
		%		%		%
All ages	152,910	100	534,158	100	3,748,455(1)	100
18-24	**	0	65,628	12	100,466	3
25-29	**	10	79,072	15	461,525	12
30-34	29,337	19	89,347	17	707,744	19
35-39	31,158	20	84,603	16	731,723	20
40-44	**	12	69,400	13	530,152	14
45-49	**	13	65,125	12	482,764	13
50-54	**	6	42,455	8	347,891	9
55-65	29,317	19	38,528	7	386,191	10
Median age(2)	39.7		36.4		38.6	

- (1) In a real population of currently married husbands and wives the ratio is 100:100. Here it is lower for reasons discussed in Chapter II.
- (2) Because of the sampling issues discussed in Chapter II and the limitation of the sample to 65 years, age comparisons cannot be made between husbands and wives: in a random population sample of currently married couples without an upper age limit the median age for each sex might well be different from that shown here.

Table 3 shows that lone parenthood is characterised by low masculinity ratios (males per 100 females) across all age groups. There is, however, a difference between the exceptionally low ratio at age group 18-29 years (10*) and the much higher ratios at the 30-49 year (32) and 50-65 (48) age groups. These ratios further indicate that lone parenthood among men is more likely to occur in the middle or late years of life, after marital break-up or the death of a spouse. At younger ages lone parenthood is predominantly a female situation. One reason is that after a terminated marriage, the custody of children is usually awarded to the mother. Another is related to ex-nuptial births among young women.

TABLE 3. Sex Ratios Among Lone Parents (Males Per 100 Females), by Age Groups, Canada, 1984

	Age group											
	All ages	18-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-65	18-29	30-49	50-65
Ratio	29	**	**	33	37	27	30	**	76	10*	32	48

The incidence of lone parenthood among all parents is relatively low. Table 4 shows how this rate also exhibits a strong sex differential: it is more than two times higher for females than males within all broad age groups. There is a very weak relationship between broad age groups. For males rates increase only diminutively and for females there is a shallow U-shaped distribution.

TABLE 4. Rates of Lone Parenthood (Lone Parents Per 100 Parents), by Sex and Broad Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Male				Female			
	Lone parents	Husbands	Total	Rate	Lone parents	Wives	Total	Rate
				%				%
All ages	152,910	3,748,455	3,901,365	4	534,158	3,600,384	4,134,542	13
18-29	**	561,991	577,172	**	144,699	785,647	930,346	16
30-49	99,074	2,452,383	2,551,457	4	308,475	2,333,294	2,641,769	12
50-65	38,656	734,081	772,737	5	80,983	481,444	562,427	14

Patterns in Nuptiality

In this section, data on current union status and on common-law and marital histories are examined for their relationship to lone parenthood. Both de facto and de jure statuses, as reported, are distinguished. That is, "marriage" refers to legal marriage and a "common-law union" (also termed mutual consent union or cohabitation) is a relationship in which partners live together as husbands and wives without being legally married. The term "union" refers to either a common-law union or a marriage. Where the number of unions is shown, common-law unions which led into marriage are counted as one union. As noted in Chapter II, husbands and wives are defined as respondents with at least one child under the age of 25 still at home, who are currently in either type of union. Temporarily absent spouses of respondents were considered to be resident with the spouse.

There are two expected trends which can be observed in Table 5: the decreasing proportion of lone-parent women who have never been in a union, and the increasing proportion of lone-parent women who are widowed, as age increases. For all age groups combined, the distributions by union status are similar for men and women as are changes in status by age group. The modal status in the middle age group is separated or divorced and in the late age group it is widowed. In all categories women far outnumber men, but about half the women who have never been in a union are young and many will probably form unions in the future.

TABLE 5. Lone Parents by Current Union Status Showing Percentage Distribution and Sex Ratios Within Sex and Broad Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Sex/age group	Never in a union(1)		Widowed (from a common-law or marital partner)		Separated/divorced from a marriage		Separated from a common-law partner)		Total	
		%		%		%		%		%
Male										
All ages	**	**	28,751	19	77,771	51	**	**	152,910	100
18-29	**	**	-	-	**	**	**	**	**	100
30-49	**	**	**	**	62,263	63	**	**	99,074	100
50-65	**	**	**	47	**	26	**	**	38,656	100
Female										
All ages	67,455	13	86,922	16	314,377	59	65,404	12	534,158	100
18-29	33,620	23	**	0	75,848	52	34,588	24	144,699	100
30-49	29,944	10	39,056	13	214,415	70	25,060	8	308,475	100
50-65	**	**	47,223	58	24,114	30	**	**	80,983	100
Sex ratio										
All ages	**		33		25		**		29	
18-29	**		-		**		**		10	
30-49	**		**		29		**		32	
50-65	**		38		41		**		48	

(1) The distribution of male lone parents never in a union is not shown due to an unacceptable level of error.

As may be expected, a small minority of couple parents reported themselves as cohabiting rather than as married (Table 6). The proportions decrease by age and the differences are marked. Although some of this decrease may result from cohort differences in the likelihood of reporting common-law unions, the pattern seems strong enough to indicate that these are age-specific phases leading to marriage in later years, or that the recent trend toward common-law unions has not touched older cohorts.

TABLE 6. Husbands and Wives by Type of Current Union Showing Percentage Distribution Within Broad Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Husbands			Wives		
	Common-law	Married	Total	Common-law	Married	Total
All ages	136,015 %	3,612,440 96	3,748,455 100	214,679 6	3,385,705 94	3,600,384 100
18-29	49,577 %	512,414 91	561,991 100	84,574 11	701,073 89	785,647 100
30-49	79,909 %	2,372,474 97	2,452,383 100	123,365 5	2,209,929 95	2,333,294 100
50-65	** %	727,552 99	734,081 100	** %	474,703 99	481,444 100

The first cumulative data are presented in Tables 7, 8 and 9. These tables relate current parents to any marriages or common-law unions they experienced in the past or are currently experiencing. Regardless of past unions, husbands and wives are by definition currently in a union and, therefore, 100% of them will have been in at least one union (Table 8). Some lone parents, by contrast, will have never been in any type of union. Similarly, although few respondents have been in two or more marriages or two or more common-law unions, far more have been in two or more unions of either or both types (Table 9).

As might be expected, the average number of unions by type and age group is very similar for husbands and wives (Table 7). In comparison, lone parents have had slightly fewer marriages or unions of any type on the average. There is no difference between age-standardized and crude averages for lone-parent women. Both are slightly lower than averages for wives, a gap that can probably be explained by current status. These results seem to show that the average number of past unions bears no relationship to current parent status.

TABLE 7. Average Number of Marriages, Common-law Unions and Total Unions(1) Among Lone Parents, Husbands and Wives, by Broad Age Groups, Canada, 1984(2)

Age group	Husbands			Female lone parents			Wives		
	Mar- riages	Common- law unions	Total unions	Mar- riages	Common- law unions	Total unions	Mar- riages	Common- law unions	Total unions
N	3,748,455			534,158			3,600,384		
All ages	1.0	0.2	1.1	0.9	0.2	1.0	1.0	0.2	1.1
Standardized	(1.0)	(0.2)	(1.1)	(0.9)	(0.2)	(1.0)	(1.0)	(0.2)	(1.1)
18-29	1.0	0.4	1.1	0.6	0.4	0.9	1.0	0.4	1.1
30-49	1.1	0.1	1.1	1.0	0.2	1.0	1.1	0.2	1.1
50-65	1.1	**	1.1	1.0	**	1.1	1.0	**	1.1

- (1) Common-law unions which led into marriage are counted as one under Total unions. By definition, husbands and wives must have been in at least one marriage or common-law union. By contrast, some lone parents have been in NO union of any type. Because respondents can have been in both marriages and common-law unions it is purely a coincidence if the sum of these equals the total.
- (2) Data are not given for male lone parents due to small sample size.

Table 8 shows the percentage of lone parents, husbands and wives who have been in at least one common-law union, marriage or union of either type. It is not surprising that within all ages groups, more husbands and wives than lone parents have ever been married since about 95% of them are currently married (Table 6). For female lone parents, though, there is a noticeable difference between those currently 18-29 of whom five in ten have ever been married and those currently 30-65 of whom nine in ten have ever been married. This reinforces the view that the family careers of younger lone-parent women are as yet incomplete and will quite likely lead into future unions.

A definite relationship between age and ever being in a common-law union is also present in the data from Table 8: rates are more than twice as high for husbands and female parents at ages 18-29 than at ages 30-49. Again, this may reflect a time trend toward such unions. Relatively more female lone parents in all age groups have been in at least one common-law union but the difference is not large. Given that this behaviour has been especially frequent among younger lone-parent women however, of whom 40% have been in a common-law union, it is of interest to know the extent to which common-law unions have become conventional stepping stones to marriages among couple parents.

The first part of Table 10 shows that about two thirds of couple parents ages 20-65 who were ever in a common-law union are currently married to a common-law partner. This rate varies from less than

one-half among husbands and wives 40-44 years of age to almost four-fifths among husbands 25-29 years of age, but remains near two-thirds for most age-sex groups.

TABLE 8. Percentage of Female Lone Parents, Husbands and Wives Who Have Been in at Least One Marriage, One Common-law Union, and One Union of Any Type(1), by Broad Age Groups, Canada, 1984(2)

Age group	Husbands			Female lone parents			Wives		
	Mar- riages	Common- law unions	Total unions	Mar- riages	Common- law unions	Total unions	Mar- riages	Common- law unions	Total unions
N	3,748,455			534,158			3,600,384		
	per cent								
All ages	98	14	100	79	22	87	98	17	100
Standardized	(97)	(17)	(100)	(82)	(21)	(88)	(98)	(17)	(100)
18-29	93	36	100	54	40	77	93	33	100
30-49	99	13	100	88	17	90	99	14	100
50-65	100	3	100	91	**	95	100	**	100

(1) See Table 7, footnote 1. Since respondents can have been in both marriages or common-law unions it is purely a coincidence if the sum of these percentages equals the percentage for Total unions.

(2) Data are not given for male lone parents due to small sample size.

TABLE 9. Percentage of Lone Parents, Husbands and Wives Who Have Ever Been in Two or More Unions, by Type of Union, Canada, 1984

Type of union	Male lone parents	Husbands	Female lone parents	Wives
	per cent			
Marriages	**	6	5	6
Common-law unions	**	1	**	1
Total unions	14	9	11	10

As an estimate of conjugal stability Part 1 of Table 10 falls short since it does not account for previous common-law unions now dissolved. Parents could have been in two or three common-law unions before marrying their current partner. This is a rare occurrence in the FHS, but nevertheless there is a second part to Table 10 which shows the same rates, excluding couple parents who have been in more than one union. As can be seen, these cases are few and the rates remain virtually the same. The results show that common-law unions are more frequently determinants of marriage than of lone-parent status. However, the one third of parents who experienced common-law unions that did not result in their current marriage may have at one time accounted for a disproportionate share of lone parents.

TABLE 10. Husbands and Wives Currently Married to Their Most Recent Common-law Partner of Those Ever in a Common-law Union and of Those Ever in Only One Common-law Union, by Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Husbands			Wives		
	Ever in a common-law union	Married common-law partner	Rate(1)	Ever in a common-law union	Married common-law partner	Rate(1)
Ages 20-65	540,648	362,468	67	598,738	364,020	61
20-24	48,668	**	49	86,131	53,700	62
25-29	154,092	121,640	79	169,792	115,326	68
30-34	158,268	107,256	68	158,747	101,553	64
35-39	97,836	63,886	65	93,854	53,129	57
40-44	33,913	**	43	53,065	**	43
45-49	26,226	**	66	**	**	**
50-54	**	**	62*	**	**	61
55-65	**	**	69*	**	**	**

	Husbands			Wives		
	Ever in only one common-law union	Married this one common-law partner	Rate(2)	Ever in only one common-law union	Married this one common-law partner	Rate(2)
Ages 20-65	498,234	329,729	66	564,157	347,417	62
20-24	40,451	**	55	82,262	52,260	64
25-29	142,291	109,839	77	159,838	109,784	69
30-34	147,799	98,515	67	150,573	97,080	64
35-39	90,680	57,514	63	86,040	48,569	56
40-44	30,947	**	39*	48,295	**	46
45-49	25,931	**	66	**	**	**
50-54	**	**	62*	**	**	61
55-65	**	**	**	**	**	**

(1) Rate = $\frac{\text{Married common-law partner}}{\text{Ever in any common-law union}}$

(2) Rate = $\frac{\text{Married this one common-law partner}}{\text{Ever in only one common-law union}}$

Such unions as determinants of lone parenthood or of conjugal stability are further analyzed in Table 11. This table relates to those parents - the overwhelming majority (82%) - who have been in only one union (marital or common-law). The first half of the table shows the rate of parents who are still with or who married a common-law partner (husbands and wives) to all parents ever in only one common-law union. Rates in the second part of the table relate parents still married to their first spouse (husbands and wives) to all parents who have been in only one marriage. Both rates show that overall about nine in ten parents ever once married are still married and about eight in ten ever in one common-law union are still with or married to their first common-law partner.

TABLE 11. Rate of "Intact" Common-law Unions and Marriages Among All Parents Who Have Been in Only One Common-law Union and One Marriage, by Sex and Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Sex and age group	All parents ever in only one common-law union	Still with first common-law partner (Husbands and wives)	Married to first common-law partner	Total "intact" common-law unions	Rate	Ever married once only		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(2) + (3) (4)	(4) (1)	All parents ever in only one marriage	Still with first marital partner (Husbands and wives)	Rate (6) (5)
Male								
Ages 20-65	512,416	124,655	329,729	454,384	89	3,585,118	3,405,586	95
20-24	40,451	**	**	39,501	98	72,078	69,511	96
25-29	142,743	**	109,839	133,681	94	433,972	421,432	97
30-34	152,950	29,498	98,515	128,013	84	683,577	644,197	94
35-39	94,252	26,403	57,514	83,917	89	712,358	668,264	94
40-44	30,947	**	**	24,972	81	512,198	487,468	95
45-49	27,040	**	**	25,304	94	464,285	439,330	95
50-54	**	**	**	**	91	337,523	327,952	97
55-65	**	**	**	**	**	369,127	347,431	94
Female								
Ages 20-65	670,518	194,002	347,417	541,419	81	3,693,779	3,176,246	86
20-24	103,702	30,002	52,260	82,262	79	201,311	177,524	88
25-29	185,997	45,030	109,784	154,814	83	561,441	481,589	86
30-34	169,289	38,876	97,080	135,956	80	722,404	629,072	87
35-39	103,829	37,204	48,569	85,773	83	732,966	638,693	87
40-44	57,878	26,270	**	48,295	83	541,092	454,520	84
45-49	25,089	**	**	**	69	406,082	340,925	84
50-54	**	**	**	**	89	315,409	271,141	86
55-65	**	**	**	**	**	213,074	182,781	86

Rates in Tables 10 and 11 can only be accepted as broad estimates of conjugal stability for two reasons. First, they may be affected by truncation bias. For example, younger parents have had less exposure to risk of union dissolution and their future behaviour could lower the rates. (The effects of this are removed when the same age groups, who have the same duration of exposure to risk, are compared.) Second, a select group of the FHS respondents are analyzed in these tables. All of them are responsible for children but since most of them are by definition currently in a union these rates are bound to be high.

Nonetheless two inferences can be drawn. First, it appears that lone parenthood constitutes a minor outcome of participation in either common-law unions or marriages. Table 12 further supports this inference. For each sex, it compares the incidence of lone parents among all parents, all parents ever in a common-law union and finally, all parents ever in a marriage. Lone parents are somewhat underrepresented among the ever married and lone-parent women are somewhat overrepresented among those ever in a common-law union but there is a remarkable degree of concordance between the distributions.

A second inference relates to overall conjugal stability. Marriages are more likely to remain intact than are common-law unions, especially for male parents, but in all cases stability rather than

mobility is the rule. Four fifths or more of the parents in all but one age-sex group who have ever been in a common-law union or marriage are still in that union or marriage (Table 11). Taken together, results from Tables 8 to 12 do not support the view that lone parenthood and common-law union participation interact to produce instability in Canadian family life.

As in research on geographical mobility, there is a group of people referred to as "chronic movers", who contribute disproportionately to overall levels of conjugal mobility. This minority comprises lone parents who have ever been in a union (some never have) and husbands and wives who have been in two or more unions. Table 13 shows that lone parents are definitely overrepresented among them. They comprise 26% of male "chronic movers" and 56% of female "chronic movers". Both these proportions are more than four times higher than the contribution of lone parents to all parents (Table 12).

TABLE 12. Lone Parents as a Percentage of All Parents; All Parents Ever in a Common-law Union; and All Parents Ever in a Marriage, by Sex and Broad Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Parents		Parents ever in a common-law union		Parents ever in a marriage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
N	3,901,366	4,134,542	561,011	722,034	3,806,295	3,943,058
	per cent					
All Ages	4	13	3	16	3	11
18-29	**	16	**	18	**	10
30-49	4	12	**	14	3	11
50-65	5	14	**	**	4	13

TABLE 13. Percentage of Lone Parents Who Have Ever Been in a Union to All Parents With at Least One Union (Common-law or Marriage) Termination,(1) by Sex and Broad Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Male				Female			
	Lone parents ever in a union	Husbands ever in two or more unions	Total	Rate(2)	Lone parents ever in a union	Wives ever in two or more unions	Total	Rate(2)
All ages	117,792	331,327	449,119	26	466,705	367,773	834,478	56
18-29	**	47,657	53,302	**	111,080	73,917	184,997	60
30-49	80,804	224,971	305,775	26	278,532	265,518	544,050	51
50-65	31,343	58,699	90,042	35	77,093	28,338	105,431	73

(1) Common-law unions which led into marriage are counted as one union.

(2) Rate = $\frac{\text{Lone parents ever in one or more unions}}{\text{Lone parents ever in one or more unions} + \text{Spouses ever in two or more unions}}$

A qualification should be made here. Lone parents who have ever had one union are combined with husbands and wives who have had at least two unions, and one or more periods of lone parenthood if their children were born before or during a previous union. This may exaggerate the contribution of lone parents, but equally, lone parents who have already been in one union have the potential to enter a second union.

A final note on nuptiality is that the individuals being compared here have one characteristic in common: all are parents. A majority will have shared this task with someone at some time during their family career, but a minority, even by the time they reach their thirties and forties remain alone (Table 5).

Fertility

In the analysis of the fertility of lone parents there are two contradictory factors. Lone-parents are defined as not living with someone and, thus, have less opportunities for regular intercourse. The risk of conception for lone-parent women and the risk of procreation for lone-parent men is reduced during the period they are alone. However, the pressure of having and raising children, particularly a large number, could be a mechanism that triggers marital separation, most often leaving a woman alone with the children.

The action of both these factors can be inferred from the fertility data presented in the next two tables. Overall, they seem to cancel each other out, so that lone-parent fertility differs little - it is slightly lower - from that of couple parents (Table 14).

TABLE 14. Average Number of Natural Children Ever Born to Lone Parents, Husbands and Wives, by Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Male		Female	
	Lone parents	Husbands	Lone parents	Wives
N	152,910	3,748,455	534,158	3,600,384
All ages	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.6
Standardized	(2.1)	(2.3)	(2.5)	(2.6)
18-24	**	1.4	1.3	1.4
25-29	**	1.6	1.5	1.8
30-34	1.6	1.9	1.9	2.1
35-39	1.9	2.2	2.2	2.3
40-44	2.3	2.6	2.4	2.6
45-49	3.4	2.9	3.4	3.6
50-54	3.2	3.2	4.7	3.8
55-65	3.4	4.0	4.8	4.5

For age groups in the range 18-44, cumulative fertility levels are not very different, increasing marginally with age. But for women in older age groups who are beyond their fertile period, a different pattern emerges. Lone-parent women currently 50-54 have borne an average 4.7 children compared to 3.8 for wives. At ages 55-65 these rates are 4.8 and 4.5 respectively. Higher cumulative fertility rates among female lone parents at ages 50-65 is highlighted further in Table 15. Family sizes in excess of three natural children generally characterise female lone parents (60%) more than wives (54%). These higher rates among older lone-parent women are notable considering their presumed lower risk of pregnancy. If higher fertility is an antecedent to divorce or widowhood, or if it shows selection in terms of early childbearing, then it could have been a contributing factor to their current lone-parent status.

TABLE 15. Percentage of Older Lone Parents, Husbands and Wives Who Have Ever Had Four or More Natural Children, by Broad Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Male		Female	
	Lone parents	Husbands	Lone parents	Wives
N	38,578	1,012,916	134,525	890,143
40-49	% 23	22	25	29
N	38,656	734,081	80,983	481,444
50-65	% 30	44	60	54

Total Children

The data in Tables 16 and 17 relate to another demographic aspect that has social and economic policy implications: the degree to which lone parents have responsibility for all children, whether natural, step or adopted.(1) These data unambiguously measure parents' responsibility for raising, as opposed to just bearing or fathering, children.

Table 16 shows that the pattern of children ever raised follows that of children ever born for all types of parents. This is because adopted and step children constitute only a small proportion of children ever raised. Similarly, it can be seen in Table 17 that it is female lone parents who are more likely than other older parents to have reared three or more children.

(1) This does not only imply children currently dependent on lone parents, husbands and wives, but also those who at other times have been dependent on them, however temporarily.

TABLE 16. Average Number of Natural, Adopted and Step Children Ever Raised by Lone Parents, Husbands and Wives, by Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Male		Female	
	Lone parents	Husbands	Lone parents	Wives
N	152,910	3,748,455	534,158	3,600,384
All ages	2.5	2.6	2.6	2.7
Standardized	(2.1)	(2.5)	(2.6)	(2.7)
18-24	**	1.5	1.3	1.4
25-29	**	1.7	1.5	1.9
30-34	1.6	2.1	2.0	2.2
35-39	2.1	2.4	2.3	2.4
40-44	2.3	2.8	2.6	2.8
45-49	3.4	3.1	3.7	3.7
50-54	3.3	3.4	4.7	3.9
55-65	3.7	4.3	5.0	4.7

TABLE 17. Percentage of Older Lone Parents, Husbands and Wives Who Have Ever Raised Four or More Natural, Adopted and Step Children, by Broad Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Male		Female	
	Lone parents	Husbands	Lone parents	Wives
N	38,578	1,012,916	134,525	890,143
40-49	% 23	26	27	30
N	38,656	734,081	80,983	481,444
50-65	% 35	47	61	55

Summary and Discussion

This chapter has pointed out that lone parents share many characteristics in common with couple parents. Age distributions are similar, the number of unions in which they have been a partner do not differ greatly, the proportions who have been in common-law unions are fairly close, and overall fertility does not diverge markedly. It has been suggested that there is not a strong causal link between common-law unions and lone parenthood. Indeed, many persons defined as husbands and wives are either in a common-law union or have married a former common-law partner, and the majority of lone parents have been in at least one marriage.

At the same time, some differences have been demonstrated. The most important is that lone parents are more likely to be women. This is not a simple uniform fact because the ratio of males to females increases with each age group until age group 55-65, where it approaches parity.

A different pattern of family building has been suggested for lone parents as compared to husbands and wives, despite similar overall fertility levels. It is the lone-parent woman who stands out as different, to some degree, from her male counterpart and from wives. She is more likely to have begun parenting at a young age, and at the end of her childbearing years, to have had a large family. This may result from differentials in patterns of early childbearing, or from different rates of marital dissolution by cumulative fertility. The former point is explored further in Chapter V. The latter cannot be analysed here but might be the subject of a secondary analysis.

Finally, although it may be true that lone parents are disproportionately represented among those who have suffered union dissolution, as with couple parents, most have been in only one union. But most lone parents have experienced a union dissolution whereas relatively few husbands and wives have seen a first union dissolve or re-entered a subsequent union.

Chapter IV: SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS AND DETERMINANTS

Interaction Between Family Career, Education, Occupation and Labour Force Participation

In Chapter I, the socio-economic situation of lone parents was briefly discussed. This chapter takes the discussion further in the analysis of relationships between lone parenthood and education, occupation, labour force participation (or labour force status) and some antecedents of these.

Education can be viewed as a "life-time" characteristic: it is possible only to add to levels already achieved. For most people, it is a process which terminates prior to both marriage and childbearing, and is usually completed by late adolescence or early adulthood. But the attainment of any given level of education may itself be prevented or delayed by precocious childbearing and/or the formation of a union. In this chapter, lone parents and couple parents are compared in terms of education. Although it will be shown that differentials exist, no attempt will be made at this point to examine causal sequences, of which two might be:

- education —————> propensity to become a lone parent;
- early parenthood —————> attainment of education.

Education is a determinant of job prospects. Current occupation and labour force participation as well as early job history and interruptions to work are studied in this chapter. Previous studies based on census data, perforce synchronic, have not been able to analyze retrospectively the interrelation between labour force participation and family formation.

Education, occupation and labour force participation are interrelated with family type and the underlying features are well documented in the literature on the sociology of family life. Persons who are better educated generally have more resources available to them when they enter the labour market. The more privileged the point of entry, the greater the chances of success as measured by the financial rewards and job satisfaction gained from this participation. Conception and childbearing and/or marriage at young ages may minimise not only educational achievement, but also the capacity to enter and continue in the labour force in a reasonably rewarding way.

The resources obtained from labour force participation, education and occupation may impinge on two aspects of family life:

- the power of each spouse within a union (see Chapter I); and
- the financial capacity of a person or couple to cope with the economic burdens of parenting. There is a reverse side to this: a couple parent shares childrearing with a spouse and, thus, has a greater probability of being released from this task in order to participate in the labour force. This in turn enhances their capacity to contribute to the economic resources of the family. (A corollary to this - that single income families where the breadwinner has a low salary or wage may also find themselves in a precarious economic situation - cannot be studied here.)

Some young lone parents have never been in a union (Table 5) so that these postulated conjugal relations may have never been a feature of their lives. Moreover, in order to provide resources for their children, lone parents may not only be forced to work, but they may have to accept employment in those occupations, notably some service or clerical occupations, returning lower economic rewards. This lack of choice would result from either a situation in which the lone parent lacks educational and job qualifications because their training has been proscribed by early parenthood, or the added responsibilities of lone parenthood limit the time and conditions under which labour force participation may occur.

There is, however, another dimension. As shown in Chapter III, lone parenthood is not only a characteristic of young adults but often commences much later in the life cycle. Persons launched into lone parenthood at this stage will have had a greater opportunity to complete their education and to enter more skilled occupations than those who became lone parents at younger ages. Moreover, older lone parents may have resources which permit them to pattern a different set of conjugal relations from those posited above. Indeed, they may well be the active partner in seeking to terminate the union, and as lone parents, may have the means to sustain themselves financially.

It should be emphasized that the above comments are postulates. They provide, as it were, a framework for the analysis that follows in this and later chapters. There are no FHS data that permit analysis of conjugal power and other family relationships. It is possible merely to describe patterns and to speculate about their determinants.

Education

Lone and couple parents are categorized by educational level in Table 18. The key category comprises those who have attained some post-secondary education including, for example, community college as well as university attendance. In Canada, the overwhelming majority of parents (82%) have attended high school and about one-third have gone on to receive post-secondary education. The proportion with post-secondary education is greater than that with less than Grade 9 for all types of parents, overall. Among lone-parent women, though, the proportions are much closer.

The modal group, about half the respondents in each parent category, has high school education alone. This level of attainment has been the norm for several decades but, today, it is being challenged by post-secondary educational attainment. Among high school students, early parenthood can thwart aspirations for post-secondary education but only for a small minority since biosocial factors minimise risk of conception until late adolescence.

There is a relationship between post-secondary educational achievement and propensity to become a lone parent. Some individuals will have been able to achieve this level because they were not faced with the burdens of early parenting. Their achievement motivation may have been higher, and they may have been more efficient users of contraception, thereby avoiding early parenthood. Of course, there is also selectivity in terms of fecundity. Those who are more fecund at an earlier age, all other things being equal, face a higher risk of conception.

Between male lone parents and husbands, levels of education are almost the same in most age groups (where data are reliable) (Table 18). The 40-44 year age group stands out, as the proportion who are post-secondary educated is almost twice as high among male lone parents. Among women, lone parents have proportionately less post-secondary education than wives in all age groups. The incidence of parents with less than Grade 9 education increases with age. In the 50-65 year age group about half of female lone parents, in contrast to about two fifths of husbands and one third of wives, have not gone beyond primary school.

Occupation

There are some confounding factors that affect the occupation data presented in Table 19. First, females tend to cluster disproportionately in the clerical, sales and services occupations: just under two thirds of female parents classified as working are in these occupations. Second, by statistical convention, persons who have not worked in five or more years or who are permanently unable to work, for example students, persons performing "house duties", sickness beneficiaries and the retired, are normally excluded from occupational distributions. Such persons are put in the category "Not applicable". Table 19 examines two sets of distributions, one with the category "Not applicable", and the other without.

In Table 19, it can be seen that male lone parents are slightly more likely than husbands to be in professional/technical occupations and slightly less likely to be in clerical, sales or service occupations. With a larger sample, it might be possible to confirm or reject this difference and to speculate about what is potentially an interesting result.

There is less difference among women than might be expected. Proportions excluding the not applicable category are almost equal in the youngest and middle age-groups. But in the eldest age group there is a slight difference: about one third of female lone parents compared to about one fifth of wives in the labour force work in professional/technical occupations. Although this finding lacks statistical reliability, it might represent that group of women who became lone parents at a later age but had the opportunity earlier in their lives to build a career. For these and other lone parent women, paid labour is perhaps more of an imperative than it is for wives. In support of this, Table 19 shows that consistently fewer lone parents than wives are in the "Not applicable" category.

TABLE 18. Level of Education of Lone Parents, Husbands and Wives: Percentage Distribution Within Sex and Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Sex and age group	Lone parents				Husbands/wives			
	Less than Grade 9	High school only(1)	With post-secondary	Total	Less than Grade 9	High school only(1)	With post-secondary	Total
Male								
N	29,747	68,117	55,046	152,910	730,459	1,707,157	1,310,839	3,748,455
	per cent							
All ages	19	45	36	100	19	45	35	100
Standardized	(17)	(48)	(36)	100	(17)	(47)	(36)	100
18-24	**	**	**	**	**	68	25	100
25-29	**	**	**	**	**	61	35	100
30-34	**	52	45	100	9	43	48	100
35-39	**	**	**	**	13	44	43	100
40-44	**	**	66	100	22	45	34	100
45-49	**	**	**	**	27	45	28	100
50-54	**	**	**	**	37	41	22	100
55-65	**	49	**	100	46	35	19	100
18-29	**	**	**	100	4	62	34	100
30-49	**	42	44	100	16	44	40	100
50-65	36	48	16	100	42	38	21	100
Female								
N	101,545	303,062	129,551	534,158	584,712	1,906,879	1,108,793	3,600,384
	per cent							
All ages	19	57	24	100	16	53	31	100
Standardized	(18)	(55)	(26)	100	(16)	(53)	(31)	100
18-24	**	80	**	100	**	78	14	100
25-29	**	70	25	100	7	63	30	100
30-34	**	49	40	100	8	49	43	100
35-39	**	51	27	100	15	49	36	100
40-44	**	63	28	100	21	46	33	100
45-49	**	62	**	100	26	55	19	100
50-54	53	**	**	100	30	49	21	100
55-65	50	40	10	100	38	43	19	100
18-29	**	74	17	100	7	67	26	100
30-49	15	55	29	100	16	49	35	100
50-65	51	30	**	100	33	47	20	100

(1) This category comprises parents who attended high school, regardless of whether they completed it, and who did not receive any further schooling.

TABLE 19. Percentage Distribution of Occupations Among Lone Parents, Husbands and Wives Within Broad Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group/ Occupation	Male						Female					
	Lone parents			Husbands			Lone parents			Wives		
N	152,914			3,748,452			534,158			3,600,384		
	per cent											
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)
All ages												
Professional, Technical	29	(26)	30	25	(25)	25	20	(21)	25	19	(19)	25
Clerical, Sales, Services	15	(16)	16	22	(22)	23	48	(47)	61	44	(44)	59
Semi-skilled, Unskilled	52	(56)	54	51	(52)	52	11	(10)	14	12	(12)	16
Not applicable	**	**		1	(1)		21	(21)		25	(25)	
Total	100		100	100		100	100		100	100		100
18-29 years												
Professional, Technical	**		**	18		18	16		18	13		16
Clerical, Sales, Services	**		**	22		22	58		65	57		68
Semi-skilled, Unskilled	59		59	60		60	15		17	13		16
Not applicable	-			**			**			17		
Total	100		100	100		100	100		100	100		100
30-49 years												
Professional, Technical	29		29	28		28	22		27	22		28
Clerical, Sales, Services	22		22	22		22	48		61	42		55
Semi-skilled, Unskilled	49		49	50		51	10		12	12		16
Not applicable	-			**			20			24		
Total	100		100	100		100	100		100	100		100
50-65 years												
Professional, Technical	**		**	22		23	18*		33*	12		22
Clerical, Sales, Services	**		**	25		27	28		50	33		59
Semi-skilled, Unskilled	**		67	48		50	**		**	10		19
Not applicable	**			5			44			45		
Total	**		100	100		100	100		100	100		100

(1) Including "Not applicable".

(2) Standardized.

(3) Excluding "Not applicable".

Note: "Not applicable" includes persons who have not worked in five or more years or are permanently unable to work, for example, full time students, persons at home, sickness beneficiaries, and retired persons.

Labour Force Status

Labour force status is a concept fundamental to labour force economics, and is based on employment in a reference week, usually the week preceding the survey week. Because 94% of male parents are currently employed, and the number of lone-parent men is, anyway, rather low, an analysis for male quinquennial age-groups would be inappropriate. Thus, Tables 20 and 22 relate only to women.

Labour force participation rates by age for female lone parents and wives follow a similar general pattern (Table 20). They rise steadily and then decline starting with the age group 45-49. While the wives' curve is almost symmetrical, the lone parents' curve is characterized by higher rates in younger age groups, and a sharp decline immediately following the peak participation at ages 40-44, to the levels reported by wives. In the 40-44 year age-group, about four fifths of lone-parent women compared to two thirds of wives are currently working. These data further imply a greater need to work among lone-parent women in this and younger age groups. Broader age groups in Table 21 also show a shift in age-specific differentials for women.

TABLE 20. Percentage of Female Lone Parents and Wives Reported as Currently Participating in the Labour Force, by Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Female lone parents	Wives
N	534,158	3,600,384
	per cent	
All ages	61	57
Standardized	(64)	(57)
18-24	45	37
25-29	59	54
30-34	67	61
35-39	74	64
40-44	83	64
45-49	58	60
50-54	46	46
55-65	34*	36

TABLE 21. Percentage of Lone Parents, Husbands and Wives Reported as Currently Participating in the Labour Force, by Broad Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Male		Female	
	Lone parents	Husbands	Lone parents	Wives
N	152,910	3,748,455	534,158	3,600,384
	per cent			
All ages	89	95	61	57
Standardized	(94)	(96)	(64)	(57)
18-29	96	95	53	49
30-49	96	97	71	62
50-65	68*	86	40	42

When the variable "Never worked" is studied for women (few men are in this category), lone parents have slightly higher levels in every age group (Table 22). This relationship is similar to that for current labour force status at most ages 25 and over, a paradox that results from different factors. Current status is affected by the fact that, in general, lone parents will not be currently exposed to risk of conception, and so at older ages (30 or more years), they are less likely to be rearing young children or to be on maternity leave. But the burden of childrearing must often be such that if they can afford it, they may decide to stay outside the labour force (as defined statistically). The question then arises of whether these women will remain outside the labour force until 65 years of age. Have older lone parent women who have never worked experienced a life-time of lone parenthood and non-participation in the labour force? Or did they become lone parents late in life, and were then less likely to seek work than their married peers?

TABLE 22. Percentage of Female Lone Parents and Wives Who Have Never Worked,(1) by Broad Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Female lone parents	Wives
N	534,158	3,600,384
	per cent	
All ages	15	11
Standardized	(12)	(11)
18-29	20	15
30-49	9	8
50-65	26	22

(1) Includes a few cases with work data not given.

Labour Force History

The next three tables throw some light on these questions, although no firm conclusions can be drawn. Table 23 gives the probability of having worked before age 20 for parents above that age who have ever worked. At all ages there is little difference between the four groups. In the oldest age group though, lone-parent men (81%) are more likely than husbands (66%), and wives (58%) are more likely than lone-parent women (42%) to have begun work before age 20. There are similar differentials in the female 35-39 and 20-24 year age groups. Among female parents and especially female lone parents there is a time trend: the older the parent, the less likely she will have begun work before age 20. A bulge at age groups 40-49 years disrupts this trend.

Table 24 looks at those who entered the labour force late, at 25 or more years of age. The results for women are sketchy but compliment those in Table 23. That is, lone parents are more likely than wives to enter the labour force at an older age. This may indeed be a function of forced entry into the labour force when the transition to lone parenthood occurs and when the financial support of a husband, if he has been the principal income earner, is lost.

This postulate is supported by data presented in Table 25. Whereas the two previous tables have taken persons who have ever worked as a baseline, or population at risk, in this table the base population is all women, and includes those who have never worked. Generally, in all but one age group (where comparisons are possible), lower proportions of lone-parent women than of wives have entered the labour force at an early age and higher proportions have entered at an older age (25 or more years).

In Table 26, another aspect of labour force history is studied: whether those who have ever worked have suffered interruptions to their work service of one year or longer. This table shows a clear sex differential in age-specific averages and crude and standardized summary averages (excluding male lone-parents for whom data are not reliable). Between female lone parents and wives differences are not large, but wives have had on average more interruptions to their work in all but the oldest age group.

TABLE 23. Lone Parents, Husbands and Wives Who Started Working at Less Than 20 Years of Age as a Percentage of Those Who Have Ever Worked,(1) by Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Male		Female	
	Lone parents	Husbands	Lone parents	Wives
Number	137,413	3,651,401	432,946	3,137,693
	per cent			
Ages 20-65	55	61	57	59
Standardized	(53)	(61)	(56)	(59)
20-24	**	78	73	82
25-29	**	72	69	63
30-34	49	54	60	54
35-39	62	52	45	57
40-44	54	59	52	56
45-49	**	65	63	59
50-54	69	69	45	53
55-65	81	66	42*	58

(1) Excludes a few cases with work history not stated.

TABLE 24. Female Lone Parents, Husbands and Wives Who Started Working at 25 or More Years of Age as a Percentage of Those Who Have Ever Worked,(1) by Age Groups (30-65), Canada, 1984(2)

Age group	Husbands	Female lone parents	Wives
N	3,108,529	322,253	2,480,756
	per cent		
Ages 30-65	12	25	17
Standardized	(11)	(24)	(17)
30-34	7	**	10
35-39	13	24*	13
40-44	10	29	23
45-49	12	30*	22
50-54	12	**	24
55-65	20	**	23

(1) Excludes a few cases with work history not stated.

(2) Data are not given for male lone parents due to small sample size.

TABLE 25. Percentage of Female Lone Parents and Wives Who First Started Working at Less Than 20 Years of Age, and at 25 or More Years of Age, by Age Groups, Canada, 1984(1)

Age group	Female lone parents		Wives	
	Less than 20 years	25 or more years	Less than 20 years	25 or more years
N	524,255	...	3,580,520	...
	per cent			
Ages 20-65	47	...	51	...
Standardized	(47)	...	(51)	...
N	389,458		2,814,738	
	per cent			
Ages 30-65	...	20	...	15
Standardized	...	(20)	...	(15)
20-24	46	...	64	...
25-29	66	...	56	...
30-34	54	**	50	10
35-39	40	21*	53	12
40-44	44	25*	50	20
45-49	50	24*	52	19
50-54	34	**	44	20
55-65	**	**	37	15

(1) The percentages refer to women who started working at less than 20 years and at 25 or more years out of all women (those who have ever worked and those who have never worked) in that age group. Those who started working at 25 or more years of age would have to be currently at least 25 and those who started working at less than 20 could be currently as young as 20. For this reason two totals are presented: for age group 20-65 and age group 30-65 (see Chapter II on truncation effects).

TABLE 26. Average Number of Work Interruptions(1) Among Lone Parents, Husbands and Wives Who Have Ever Worked,(2) by Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Male		Female	
	Lone parents	Husbands	Lone parents	Wives
N	143,566	3,716,543	455,475	3,190,540
All ages	0.2	0.2	0.8	1.0
Standardized	(0.2)	(0.2)	(0.8)	(1.0)
18-24	**	0.3	0.6*	0.6
25-29	**	0.1	0.6	0.8
30-34	**	0.2	0.8	0.9
35-39	**	0.2	0.9	1.1
40-44	**	0.2	0.8	1.1
45-49	**	0.2	1.0	1.1
50-54	**	0.2	1.0	1.2
55-65	**	0.2	1.2	1.1

(1) Defined as interruptions to work of one year or longer.

(2) Excludes a few cases with work history not stated.

Summary and Discussion

This chapter has described a number of characteristics that are often interrelated. The most notable finding, the lower level of education among lone-parent women in comparison with wives, points to an economic disadvantage noted in other studies (see Chapter I). Female lone parents are also likely to start working later than wives perhaps at the transition to lone parenthood or because early parenting precluded them from joining the labour force at a younger age. That parenting is for some a full-time task is suggested by the slightly higher proportions of lone-parent women who have never worked. At age groups 18-44, however, relatively more lone-parent women are currently participating in the labour force. Similarly, lone-parent women have had on average less work interruptions than wives. These results seem to show that once lone-parent women enter the labour force, there is a greater need for them, as sole breadwinners, to work continuously.

Finally, at older ages, these patterns are in some ways incongruous. In comparison with wives, relatively more female lone parents have not gone beyond Grade 9 education, relatively fewer are currently in the labour force, and on average, they had the same number of work interruptions, if not more. There is also evidence, though it lacks statistical significance, of a unique group of lone-parent women in the labour force who make up one third of the 50-65 year age group: those in professional/technical occupations. A reasonable hypothesis is that for these women, lone parenthood is a situation which came later in their lives after a process of career development.

The question then arises of whether lone parenthood is disproportionately a function of early parenthood and whether this, in turn, has been the factor which has tended to limit the education and ultimately the job opportunities of some lone parents. The next two chapters study this issue.

Chapter V: DEMOGRAPHIC ANTECEDENTS TO LONE PARENTHOOD

Predisposing Factors

The notion that some forms of behaviour predispose lone parenthood has been a pervasive theme, and was demonstrated for certain socio-economic variables in Chapter IV. There, female lone parents were shown to have a profile of education, labour force participation and early work history different from that of wives. It was postulated that these variables are intercorrelated with demographic antecedents in that some women are exposed earlier in their life cycle to the risk of conception (in its actuarial sense) and marriage. It was argued that both these antecedents might limit opportunities for education and the acquisition of marketable job skills and experience.

In this chapter, persons currently lone parents are studied for the way they entered their situation, which for most is the way in which their last union terminated. Lone-parent women and wives are then compared in terms of two antecedents, early marriage/entry into a union and early childbirth. Secondary analyses will be required to determine more precisely these antecedent factors for women variously wives or lone parents in the past. The present study focusses on the antecedent behaviour of those women who are currently lone parents or wives, and for whom, so it appears, there are some significant differences. Finally, the interrelationship between early entry into a union and childbearing is studied.

Most of the remainder of this chapter is on women because they comprise the vast majority of lone parents in the sample and data on male lone parents are restricted by sample size.

The analysis is grounded in a body of biosocial and demographic knowledge on conception, birth and marriage at young ages in developed countries such as Canada. In most OECD countries, and particularly with the advent of more efficient contraception in the 1960s and 1970s, a number of forces have counteracted fertility, but are now establishing some degree of equilibrium. This process could be summarily characterized as a shift from the "baby-boom" to the "post baby-boom" eras.

During the baby-boom, conception at young ages sometimes accompanied but more often preceded marriage. Indeed, it frequently precipitated marriage at a young age (especially for the bride). With improved contraception and the resort to induced abortion occurring at the same time as a shift in ex-nuptial parenthood norms, early nuptial parenthood following a precocious ex-nuptial conception has diminished significantly.

Acceptance of cohabitation within society has become more widespread. In fact, mutual consent unions are almost normative behaviour in some subpopulations. Nevertheless, there may be age differences in the frequency and acceptability of such unions and this may produce more reticence to report them among older respondents. These unions counteract fertility to the extent that they are entered without an intent to bear children.

For these reasons, fertility at younger ages (less than 25 years) has declined. The peak years of childbearing have shifted from the early to late twenties and there has been an increase in the proportion of births which are ex-nuptial. These themes affect the interpretation of data in the second part of the chapter. It is necessary first to look at how persons currently lone parents entered this situation.

It is worth noting that an important distinction is made between ex-nuptial fertility rates and ratios. The rate relates to ex-nuptial births to women specifically at risk of this event, that is, unmarried women. The ratio relates ex-nuptial births to all births and interpretation is confounded by the fact that variations may be due as much to changes in fertility in general as to the effects of ex-nuptial fertility *per se*.

The Transition to Lone Parenthood

In Chapter III, it was discovered that most lone parents have been in a union but find themselves currently alone because they have become widowed, separated or divorced from a common-law or marital spouse (Table 5). There are, however, sex and age differences in causes of union termination.

For both sexes there are clear differentials by age. The young are likely either to have never been in a union or to have had a union terminate; in the middle age range, separation or divorce predominates; and among older ages, widowhood is the major status. This threefold division shows that lone parents cannot be considered a single entity, a point raised in Chapter I. Instead, this situation arises from different circumstances and its origins are trichotomized by age. Yet the popular image of a lone parent is likely to be drawn from one or two subsets (young never-married women or divorcees, particularly the latter). These stereotypes could become the basis for prejudice or even social policy decisions, which would be inappropriate to the needs of many lone parents. As these data imply, policies directed to lone parents must be as diverse as their differing needs. In part, this is because the financial and emotional resources each category has at its disposal will be different and tied to age and availability of family support networks.

The sex ratios in Table 5 underline an issue first raised in Chapter III that the routes to lone parenthood differ markedly by sex. In some categories of age and immediate cause, lone parenthood is virtually a female phenomenon. By contrast, men do not appear as a majority in any category (where data are reliable), and cluster among the separated rather than among the widowed in the oldest age range.

Lone parenthood, particularly at younger ages, can arise without participation in a marriage or union (Table 5). The percentage of lone parents never in a union decreases rapidly from 23% of women at ages 18-29 years to 10% of women at the middle age group. In other words, by their thirties and forties, most lone parents have at some time in their reproductive span been a part of a husband-wife family.

There is, however, some caution in interpreting these data. Until more sophisticated analyses are undertaken (see Chapter VII), it remains impossible to determine whether the higher proportions of younger lone parents never in a union represent a transition phase through which all generations have passed or a new trend widespread only among the youngest generation. The latter pattern could have at its roots a situation in which one or a series of temporary liaisons leads to stable cohabitation or marriage, or it could be a reflection of changes in ex-nuptial parenthood.

There are three possible outcomes of ex-nuptial conception:

- fetal loss (spontaneously or through induced abortion);
- marriage and nuptial birth; and
- ex-nuptial birth.

In the past, ex-nuptial conception at a young age often precipitated marriage, a common pattern in the baby-boom. It has been shown for New Zealand (where appropriate data are available) that ex-nuptial conceptions followed by marriage and nuptial births (in the first seven months of marriage) have greatly declined, but that the rate for ex-nuptial conceptions followed by ex-nuptial births, has remained more or less stable since the early 1970s (in contrast to the ratio of ex-nuptial births to all births which has risen).(1) The same data are not available for Canada but the results in Table 27 imply a similar pattern.

(1) Carmichael, Gordon A., "Non-marital Pregnancies in New Zealand Since the Second World War", *Journal of Biological Science*, 17, 2, April 1985, pp. 167-84.

TABLE 27. Fertility Rates Among Women Ages 15-19 Years, Canada, 1960, 1970, 1980 and 1982(1)

Years	Ex-nuptial fertility rate (per 1,000 unmarried women)	Age-specific fertility rate (per 1,000 women)	Percentage of total births ex-nuptial
1960	12.3	59.8	18.3
1970	16.4	42.8	35.0
1980	16.6	27.6	56.5
1982	17.3	26.5	63.8

(1) From A. Romaniuc, *op. cit.*, 1984, pp. 36, 133-4, 146.

In the analysis of antecedents to lone parenthood these differences may be significant. That is, the precipitated early marriages in the past may not have been ideal bases for enduring unions, and may have constituted the antecedents of union breakdown and lone parenthood at older ages. With the recent shift to an older age at marriage, however, there may be a decrease in this antecedent to lone parenthood.

What appears to be emerging now is a trend where ex-nuptial births, the rates for which are not increasing in the key early age-group (Table 27), is followed by a decision to remain a lone parent. Such a decision has longer term implications for the parent and child concerned and is of major importance for social policy formulation. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to a fairly detailed analysis of the factors involved in early parenting: precocity of first marriage or union and precocity of first birth.

First Union

In Tables 28, 29 and 30, data are presented on the proportions of female parents who entered a marriage, common-law union or union of either sort (for the first time) by a given age. While, generally, lone parents had a tendency to enter unions at younger ages than women currently in husband-wife families, there are some interesting differentials which must be discussed. For all age groups combined, about one third of both lone parents and wives were married by age 20, but 79% of lone parents compared to 61% of wives ages 20-24 and 47% of lone parents compared to 32% of wives ages 30-34, were married before that age. The 25-29 year age group differs since the proportion of wives married by age 20 exceeds that of lone parents. But by age 25 relatively more lone parents than wives in all age groups except 40-49 were married (Table 28). Of women who participated in unions of either type, it is lone parents who were more likely to have entered such unions before 19 years of age at all age groups except 40-49 (Table 29).

TABLE 28. Of Ever-married Female Lone Parents and Wives, Cumulative Percentage Married Before Ages 20 and 25 Years, by Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Female lone parents		Wives	
	Before age 20	Before age 25(1)	Before age 20	Before age 25(1)
N	420,726		3,504,355	
	per cent			
Ages 20-65	33	88	34	83
Standardized	(34)	(90)	(34)	(83)
20-24	79	100	61	100
25-29	35	100	41	92
30-34	47	99	32	85
35-39	30	91	31	83
40-49	22	76	35	81
50-65	**	83	20	68

(1) Includes those married before age 20.

The 40-49 year old age group is a striking exception to the general pattern in that a higher proportion of wives had married or entered unions at younger ages than had lone parents (Tables 28 and 29). This cohort was born in the years 1935-44 and achieved high age-specific fertility rates at young ages even though the baby boom had passed its second peak (late 1950s) and a fertility decline was commencing.(2) They were parents of late "baby-boom" and immediately post "baby-boom" children.

(2) See table in A. Romaniuc, *op. cit.*, 1984, p. 133.

TABLE 29. Of Female Lone Parents and Wives Ever in a Union (Common-law or Marriage), Percentage in a Union Before 19 Years of Age, by Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Female lone parents	Wives
N	458,855	3,580,519
	per cent	
Ages 20-65	28	24
Standardized	(28)	(24)
20-24	80	53
25-29	47	31
30-39	25	21
40-49	14*	22
50-65	**	10

TABLE 30. Of Female Lone Parents and Wives Ever in a Common-law Union, Percentage in a Common-law Union Before Ages 20 and 25 Years, by Age Groups, Canada, 1984(1)

Age group	Female lone parents		Wives	
	Before age 20	Before age 25(2)	Before age 20	Before age 25(2)
N	109,167		598,738	
	per cent			
Ages 20-65	41	69	26	64
Standardized	(40)	(71)	(26)	(63)
20-24	85	100	72	100
25-29	56	97	35	84
30-49	**	50	12	46
50-65	**	**	-	**

(1) In interpreting this table, attention must be drawn to the fact that its base populations (those who have ever been in common-law union) constitute a minority of both lone parents and wives.

(2) Includes those in a common-law union before age 20.

Table 27 supports this point as it shows that women aged less than 20 years in 1960 (the critical family formation phase for the cohort aged 40-49 years in 1984) had exceptionally high age-specific fertility, yet their ex-nuptial rates and ratios were low.

Among lone parents and wives who have ever been in a common-law union about two-thirds entered their first such union before age 25. However, before age 20, 41% of lone parents compared to 26% of wives had been in a common-law union. Data for lone parents aged 30 and over are not reliable, but among younger women, proportions who had common-law partners before age 20 are relatively high for both types of parents but significantly higher for lone parents (Table 30).

Of the total population at risk it is statistically a highly selective group who at young ages married or entered unions and then became lone parents. In contrast, after the age of 25 most Canadian women (85%) will have married or been in a union and, thus, will have been exposed to the risk of becoming a lone parent from a terminated union. At these older ages, the lone parent category is more "widely representative" of the population at risk. The atypical behaviour among the youngest cohort invalidates comparison of their experience with that of older cohorts.

First Birth

Tables 31 and 32 deal with a corollary to precocious unions, early childbearing. Table 31 shows that for ages 20-65, 26% of lone parents compared to 20% of wives bore their first child before the age of 20. Lone parents at most ages are not only more likely to have had a child before adulthood but contribute disproportionately at each age to those who have been early parents (final columns of Table 31).

Again it is age group 40-49 years which deviates from this pattern, demonstrating *inter alia* that the data discussed earlier on age of entry into a union are not likely to have been in error. More significantly, across Canada and in other developed countries, this cohort at younger ages displayed a peculiar pattern of accelerated timing and spacing of pregnancies in comparison with adjacent cohorts.(3)

A problem in interpreting Table 31 is that many wives are former lone parents and *vice versa*, so that no definitive links can be established between early parenthood and lone parenthood. Nevertheless, there appears to be a strong association between the two, either because of interrelated patterns of demographic behaviour early in the reproductive span, or because early parenthood predisposes marital separation.

In an indirect way Table 32 supports this postulate. It categorizes early parents (women who had a first birth at less than 20 years) by their subsequent achieved live births. Cumulative fertility following an early first birth is a function of continued exposure to risk of conception. Lower levels of risk result either from efficient use of contraception or from irregular exposure to intercourse. Assuming that lone-parent women and wives have similar levels of efficacy (in the use of contraception) and fecundity,(4) fertility levels must be the same, unless exposure to intercourse has varied. Less exposure would seem to account for lower fertility among lone parents in the age group 20-24 (Table 32). If the higher proportions of early births among young lone parents (ages 20-24) demonstrate lower levels of efficacy (Table 31), then this point is strengthened because if exposure had been the same as for wives it would be expected that their cumulative fertility would have been higher rather than lower. Beyond age 30 there is no clear pattern, a reflection of that both categories are, in fact, a mixture of former lone parents and former wives.

Early Childbearing in Relation to Early Entry into a Union

The predisposing effect of early childbearing can have two dimensions:

- some lone parents who experienced early births may have never entered a union;
- some lone parents who experienced early births may have entered unions which were "at risk", i.e., entered more because of pregnancy than because of an emotional attachment.

(3) T.R. Balakrishnan, J.F. Kantner and J.D. Allingham, *Fertility and Family Planning in a Canadian Metropolis* (Toronto), McGill-Queen's University Press, Montréal, 1975, p. 37; Jacques Henripin, Paul-Marie Huot, Evelyne Lapierre-Adamcyk and Nicole Marcil-Gratton, *Les Enfants qu'on n'a plus au Québec*, Montréal, 1981, Chapter 3; Janet Sceats Pool, "Family Building in a Canadian City (Ottawa): An Analysis of the Timing and Spacing of Pregnancies", *Population Studies* (UK), 32, 3, November 1978, pp. 583-600. For Australia, Michael D. Bracher, *Are Australian Families Getting Smaller? A Study of Patterns and Determinants of Fertility in Melbourne*, Australian National University, Canberra, 1981, Fig. 4.3.1; Siew-Ean Khoo and S. Krishnamoorthy, "Changes in the Timing of Births in Melbourne, Australia", *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 17, 2, April 1985, pp. 235-48; and New Zealand, Janet Sceats, "Family Formation in New Zealand: An Analysis of the Timing and Spacing of Pregnancies", *New Zealand Population Review*, 7, 3, October 1981, pp. 29-47.

(4) Efficacy: Efficient use of contraception to prevent conception in any intermenstruum. Fecundity: The innate capacity to reproduce; here of a woman to conceive. Here, lone parents and wives have similar levels of fecundity because by definition both are already parents.

TABLE 31. OF Female Lone Parents and Wives With Live Births Ever, Percentage Who Had a First Live Birth Before Age 20; and Female Lone Parents as a Percentage of All Female Parents Who Had a First Live Birth Before Age 20, by Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Live births before age 20		Lone parents as a percentage of all female parents	
	Female lone parents	Wives	With a first live birth before age 20	All categories
N	517,299	3,526,724	832,369	4,104,775
	per cent			
Ages 20-65	26	20	16	13
Standardized	(24)	(20)		
20-24	65	41	29	21
25-29	33	25	16	12
30-34	19*	18	11*	11
35-39	20*	19	11*	10
40-49	16	18	12	13
50-65	23(1)	10	28	14

(1) Some of these lone-parent women would have been exposed to the general pattern of early child-bearing and widowhood of the war years. Some of them would have also been the first generation of parents of the "baby-boom" around the time when age at first marriage dropped dramatically immediately after the war.

TABLE 32. OF Female Lone Parents and Wives Who Had a First Live Birth Before Age 20, Percentage Who Then Had Two or More (Age Group 20-24) and Three or More (Age Groups 25-65)(1) Natural Children, by Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Natural children	Female lone parents	Wives
Number		135,341	696,928
		per cent	
Ages 20-65	3+	52	61
Standardized		(54)	(61)
20-24	2+	41	60
25-29	3+	**	40
30-39	3+	61	55
40-65	3+	83	84

(1) This distinction is made so as to allow sufficient duration for above average cumulative fertility to occur.

The important correlation here is between early childbirth preceding or occurring in the same year as the union(5), and lone parenthood. In Table 33, for almost every age group, lone parents were more likely than wives to have had a birth prior to or in the same calendar year in which they entered a union, denoting but probably underestimating ex-nuptial conception. In age group 18-24 years, just under one half of lone-parent women compared to about one fourth of wives had borne a child before or during the year they first cohabitated or married. This group had already compressed into their short reproductive span conception, a union, and its subsequent rupture.

(5) Probably indicating a precipitated union. This could be underestimated as many ex-nuptial conceptions might result in births during the first months of the union.

TABLE 33. Of Female Lone Parents and Wives Ever in a Union and Ever Having a Live Birth, Percentage Who had a First Birth Before or During the Year They First Entered a Union, by Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Female lone parents	Wives
N	460,041	3,545,847
	per cent	
All ages	26	16
Standardized	(25)	(16)
18-24	48	26
25-29	29	19
30-34	**	16
35-39	24	14
40-44	29*	17
45-49	**	15
50-54	40	11
55-65	**	12

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted some demographic events which appear to play a role in producing lone parenthood. These events are interrelated, and more importantly, may have frustrated the efforts of some women to achieve a satisfactory education and to gain skills which could have equipped them for the job market. In the longer run, this lack of job-related resources may have limited their power within a marriage or union and, thus, may have predisposed its termination. This postulate must remain speculative, yet regardless of age, those women currently lone parents have entered unions and bore children earlier than those women currently wives. As lone parents, these disadvantages could affect their capacity to respond to their new and often difficult situation. The next chapter explores this further by studying the relationships between the demographic antecedents discussed above and the socio-economic factors noted in Chapter IV.

This chapter signals that in making interpretations it would be wrong to formulate overly deterministic models. This is because lone parenthood cannot be represented by one sequence of events which all pass in singular fashion. Lone-parent statuses are commonly entered or existed via several different paths and on several different occasions over individual lifetimes.

Chapter VI: INTERRELATIONS BETWEEN SOCIO-ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS, DEMOGRAPHIC ANTECEDENTS, AND LONE PARENTHOOD

Early Reproduction, The Attainment of Education and Entry into the Work-force

From the last three chapters a profile of lone parents has emerged. The vast majority are women who currently are more disadvantaged than wives in terms of education and some aspects of work-force experience. Typically, they commenced childbearing at younger ages than wives, an occurrence often related to early entry into a marriage or union. This chapter provides a synthesis of these findings by relating the onset of childbearing, demonstrated to be a key predisposing factor, to the attainment of education and work experience.

In Chapter IV, education was conceptualised as a "life-time" variable, attained once and for ever. This remains true and as stressed there, the steps are partly deterministic in the sense that one cannot ever again have less education, only more.

By the 1970s a new dimension to the traditional pattern of education was becoming evident. Much of the growth in universities and of post-secondary education came from an increase in female students. While part of it centered around the traditional student groups - those entering directly from high school - there was also an increase in students who delayed entry and students enrolled in continuing education programs. Disproportionately, those taking advantage of "second chance" education have been women. This factor must be taken into account in the following analysis.

Reproduction and Education

Since an overwhelming majority of adolescents in Canada finish secondary school, educational differentials are likely to come about because of checks to the attainment of post-secondary education. Thus, tables 34 to 36 relate entirely to post-secondary education. As in the latter part of Chapter V, the analysis is solely of women for the reasons noted there. Due to sample size restrictions, data are not disaggregated by age group.

Table 34 gives the proportion of female lone parents and wives who, having had their first live birth before the age of 20, at ages 20-24 or at ages 25 or more, attained post-secondary education. For both categories of women early childbearing appears to be a block: the earlier the age at first birth, the less likely a woman will have gone on to achieve education at this level. Women who postponed childbearing to continue their education, if they were exposed to intercourse and were not sub-fecund, must have practiced efficient fertility regulation during that time. This practice may in turn have been a function of stronger motivation to achieve post-secondary education.

The proportions of lone parents and wives who had children at a young age (24 years or less) and achieved post-secondary education are about the same (Table 34). It is worth exploring how the career paths taken by lone parents and wives could lead to this result. Wives who have borne children at young ages are likely to have married or entered a union soon after the diagnosis of a pregnancy. This will have blocked or at least delayed their chances of attaining post-secondary education. Such wives are probably the group most at risk of becoming lone parents in the future and by the same token, women currently lone parents may have followed a similar sequence.

There is another phenomenon well known to college teachers of the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in the humanities and social sciences disciplines. It is the high proportion of women, many of them lone parents recently separated from their spouses, among their "mature students". The exact sequence leading to this delayed attendance is obscure. Perhaps it reflects a desire to resolve ambitions frustrated by early childbearing. For lone parents this may be coupled with the need to obtain a satisfactory level of education so as to enhance their job skills and improve their own and their children's livelihood.

Another sequence could be related to questions of conjugal power. The attempt of a wife to recuperate educational opportunities lost through early childbearing may provoke an unfavourable reaction on the part of a spouse, thereby triggering the rupture of the union.

TABLE 34. Prevalence of Post-secondary Education Among Female Lone Parents and Wives With Live Births Ever, by Age at First Birth, Canada, 1984(1)

Age group	Age at first birth					
	Less than 20 years		20-24 years		25 or more years	
	Female lone parents	Wives	Female lone parents	Wives	Female lone parents	Wives
N	135,342	696,925				
20-65	%	15				
Standardized	%	(17)				(15)
N			229,692	1,462,581		
25-65	%		25	25		
Standardized	%		(25)	(25)		
N					122,322	1,078,368
30-65	%				37	47
Standardized	%				(41)	(47)

(1) Data are not shown by detailed age groups due to sample size restrictions.

TABLE 35. Percentage of Lone Parents Among All Female Parents With Post-secondary Education, by Age at First Birth, Canada, 1984(1)

	Age at first birth		
	Less than 20 years	20-24 years	25 or more years
N	121,411		
20-65	%		
			16
N		429,709	
25-65	%	13	
N			550,377
30-65	%		8

(1) Data are not shown by detailed age groups due to sample size restrictions.

TABLE 36. Percentage Distribution of Female Lone Parents and Wives with Post-secondary Education by Age at First Birth, Within Broad Age Groups, Canada, 1984

	Age at first birth			
Age group	Less than 20 years	20-24 years	25 or more years of age	Total
Female parents				
N	121,411	457,861	639,386	1,218,658
	per cent			
Ages 20-65	10	38	52	100
20-29	13	48	40	100
30-39	9	34	57	100
40-49	10	42	48	100
50-65	9	26	64	100
Female lone parents				
N	**	59,969	49,010	128,821
	per cent			
Ages 20-65	15*	47	38	100
Standardized	(14)	(48)	(38)	(100)
20-29	**	54	**	100
30-39	**	47	44	100
40-49	**	51	**	100
50-65	**	**	62	100
Wives				
N	101,569	397,892	590,376	1,089,837
	per cent			
Ages 20-65	9	35	56	100
20-29	10	47	43	100
30-39	9	33	58	100
40-49	9	40	50	100
50-65	**	27	65	100

Among women who did not experience an early birth (before the age of 25) relatively fewer lone parents (37%) than wives (47%) achieved post-secondary education. For some of these lone parents the absence of any post-secondary education may have been an antecedent to union breakdown and in this way led to lone parenthood.

Table 35 shows that lone parents may be slightly overrepresented among all females parents ages 20-65 who had an early experience of childbirth (before age 20) and achieved post-secondary education. Among post-secondary educated female lone parents (Table 36) there is a higher proportion

who experienced early parenthood than is true for post-secondary educated wives. Nevertheless, Table 36 reinforces the general pattern in table 34: early childbearing appears to thwart the attainment of post-secondary education.

Reproduction and Workforce Experience

It will be recalled from Chapter IV that a higher proportion of lone parents than wives have never worked in the labour force. Table 37 permits an exploration of the degree to which this is generated by childbirth. The category "never worked" is added to the category of delayed entry into the work-force, contingent upon childbearing. The results show that at almost every age group first work-force experience was more likely to have been delayed or to not have occurred for lone-parent women than for wives. Table 38 complements this finding. Higher proportions of lone-parent women than of wives will have had their first work-force experience only after their first birth.

TABLE 37. Of All Female Lone Parents and Wives, Percentage Who Have Never Worked(1) or Who Had a First Birth Before They Started Working, by Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age Group	Female lone parents	Wives
N	534,158	3,600,384
	per cent	
All ages	39	26
Standardized	(37)	(26)
18-24	58	37
25-29	22*	22
30-34	31	20
35-39	39	21
40-44	37	30
45-49	36	31
50-54	47	32
55-65	58	42

(1) Includes a few cases with work data not given.

TABLE 38. Of Female Lone Parents and Wives Who Have Ever Worked(1) and Had a Live Birth, Percentage Who Started Working After Their First Birth, by Age Groups, Canada, 1984

Age group	Female lone parents	Wives
N	429,334	3,089,788
	per cent	
Ages 20-65	30	17
Standardized	(30)	(17)
20-24	**	15
25-29	21*	13
30-34	24	15
35-39	34	16
40-44	33	23
45-49	30	23
50-54	40	20
55-65	**	16

(1) Excludes a few cases with work history not stated.

Summary and Discussion

Postulates derived from the data analysed earlier are sustained in this chapter. A relationship exists between patterns of reproduction on the one hand, and education and early work-force experience on the other. In other words, the educational and labour force disadvantages noted in Chapter IV are interrelated with the demographic antecedents analysed in Chapter V. The key antecedent, early childbearing, appears to lead to early marriage or entry into a union (see Chapter V), to block education and to delay work-force experience.

While early childbearing has costs for all female parents, female lone parents must raise children while facing a double disadvantage: a lack of support from a spouse and less job skills by which to gain an income appropriate to the task. The society also suffers because it is denied the contribution these lone parents might have made to its social and economic life.

Against this outlook, there is a remarkable result of this analysis: the way in which a minority of lone-parent women who experienced early childbirth overcome their disadvantage and in the face of tremendous obstacles attain post-secondary education. This is all the more remarkable because of the emotional and financial burden they must encounter, over and above the disadvantages of lone parenthood.

Chapter VII: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

The data provide fairly compelling evidence on some of the characteristics and determinants of lone parenthood. Because of the sampling and non-sampling problems discussed in Chapter II there are still some questions of statistical confidence, but in the main, the results are intuitively reasonable and systematic.

Since most lone-parent families have a female head, the remainder of this chapter is devoted to a summary of the key findings for female lone parents.

There are three distinct age-related categories of lone parents: those who have never been in a union (mainly among the young); the separated and divorced (peaking in middle age); and the widowed (a slight majority at older ages, with separation and divorce still frequent). Female lone parents are more likely than wives to have been in a mutual consent union, but the differences are not marked. For both categories marriage has been the most important form of union, and there are no major differences in the number of unions (all types) participated in.

These similarities suggest that partnership in a common-law union is not of itself a factor predisposing lone parenthood. To the extent that people enter these unions without plans to bear children, they are less likely to become lone parents. Common-law partners may be more efficient users of contraception than those not participating in unions.

An important difference exists between female lone parents and wives in the domain of fertility. At older ages, lone parents, on the average, have had more children and have raised more children (natural, adopted and step) than wives. Moreover, childbearing will have commenced earlier among lone parents and this, in turn, seems to play a part in restricting education and early job experience. A minority of lone parents who commenced childbearing early, however, still managed to attain some post-secondary education, probably after their first birth.

The key factor of early childbearing appears indirectly related to the differentials found between wives and lone parents for some socio-economic characteristics reported at the time of the survey. Lone parents, especially in the oldest age group, have a lower level of education than wives. On the average, lone parents will have started work later than wives because of their greater tendency to bear children at an early age. Yet currently, more lone parents than wives will be in the labour force, probably because circumstances dictate.

The combination of child and job responsibilities means that lone-parent women have a disproportionately heavy burden to bear. A minority may have borne this throughout their adult lives without partners. Some will have placed yet another burden on themselves by pursuing the higher educational qualifications that precocious childbirths had prevented them from gaining earlier.

Through the factor of disproportionately higher levels of early childbearing, lone parenthood is interrelated with ex-nuptial conception at younger ages. The roots of this pattern of behaviour lie in non-demographic factors of risk which cannot be definitively determined from the present analysis. It is clear, however, that while many young lone parents have never been in a union, there are older lone parents who bore children at a young age, and who often married precipitately during pregnancy, only to encounter union dissolution later in life. Perhaps the shift in the late 1970s towards later marriage, accompanied by the other changes noted earlier, will signal a diminution in the determinants to lone parenthood of early childbearing and never marrying, or marrying and then separating. If so the early 1980s might be seen retrospectively to have been a peak period in Canada's history for lone parenthood of this sort. Against this one might set another scenario: later marriage and delayed childbearing could increase the prevalence of widow lone parents, women whose spouses have died but who still have dependent children.

Further Analyses

The present study has pointed to the significance of early childbearing as a determinant of lone parenthood. Before this determinant and its correlates can be conclusively established as proximate, some more detailed studies must be undertaken.

There is a need for probability modelling in which women are followed, as it were, through the sequences of childbirth, marriage, and lone parenthood, and all their permutations. This form of analysis will eliminate many of the interpretational difficulties resulting from truncation effects (see Chapter II).

Associated with this is a need to relate the lone-parent subpopulation to its population at risk, essentially the population at adult ages. For either sex, regardless of marital or union status, all persons are at "risk" of becoming lone parents through conception (or fathering) and separation or widow(er)hood. Thus, for example, in any cohort it is necessary to study the proportion of women becoming pregnant and then either remaining unmarried, marrying precipitately, or marrying later. Those who follow each of these paths form the population at risk of lone parenthood.

Such an analysis would permit more firm conclusions to be drawn about the transitory nature of lone parenthood. Of interest in this context are the mothers of late and post baby-boom children who are currently married, and who, it appears, married and bore children (in whichever order) earlier than their lone-parent counterparts.

The demographic factors just noted appear to be related to education and job history. With the FHS data set, it is possible to employ probability techniques to analyse temporally and sequentially these relationships.

The present study has also touched on socio-economic factors, but little of a socio-cultural nature. In this regard, there are limits to the FHS, although language used for the survey interview is one variable which could well be studied.

Finally, this study has looked at the fertility of lone parents, but not at its inverse: the children dependent on lone parents, compared to the children dependent on husbands and wives. From the data set there is a need to study further the childrearing responsibilities of Canada's lone parents.

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