

PART ONE

*Conceptualizing
Families*

Definitions, Cultural Variations, and Demographic Trends

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INTRODUCTION

Most of us have been raised within a family, which tends to make us think that we are knowledgeable about the sociology of the family. Yet, if we generalize from our experience in our own family and those of our friends, we have a poor basis for research and theory. It is tempting to assume that others behave the way we do and share our values and lifestyles. However, when we discover that other societies prefer arranged marriages, allow more than one spouse, offer men the best food, or practise female circumcision, it is easy to become moralistic and judgmental.

Sixty years ago, social scientists talked about “maternal instincts” and “natural sex differences.” Now, they are more likely to argue that while personality and aptitudes may be affected by physiology and genetic inheritance, they are also influenced by gendered and cultural practices within families, as well as socio-economic constraints. Earlier biological theories of instincts and current theories of the genetic basis of human behaviour suggest that altering it would be very difficult. In contrast, sociological theories argue that behaviour is largely learned and therefore can be modified. Valuable insights about the relativity of behaviour can be gained from an understanding of variations in family structure and relationships throughout history and within different cultures. These variations also illustrate the importance of socialization and culturally-based learning in the development of personal identity.

The fact that families are ancient institutions with so many structural variations provides sociologists, anthropologists, and historians with an opportunity to note patterns and trends over time and to uncover the socio-economic factors leading to change. Social scientists have tried to understand how behaviour inside families has been influenced by economic trends, such factors as the separation of home and work during industrialization, the expansion of the service sector of the economy to include women workers, and the trend toward non-family childcare. Further, they have studied how these changes have led to the development of public discourse about “proper” family behaviour. The analysis of relations between families and the economy encompasses a variety of topics, including changing perceptions of childhood and adolescence, the importance of domes-

tic labour to society, variations in birth rates by social class, and the development of family policies.

The study of variations in family life may provide us with important but disturbing insights. If change is possible and values are culturally specific, then our own way of life could be challenged. If monogamy is not universal, for example, maybe it is not intrinsically “wrong” to have more than one spouse despite the fact that our laws prohibit it. It is difficult not to take the study of family sociology personally, not to think of our own lifestyle and moral values while reading about others. Furthermore, our own ethical or moral beliefs may interfere with attempts to study personal relationships and family life as objectively as possible. Nevertheless, we may be pressured to rethink the biological limitations of human behaviour as well as the strength of cultural prescriptions and social control.

In this chapter, we will define *family* and *household*, discuss some cultural variations, and then outline several trends occurring in family life in Canada and other industrialized countries.

DEFINING FAMILIES

Many different definitions of “family” have been used in academic research, census taking, social policy, and the delivery of social programs. Most include single parents and couples sharing a home regardless of their marital status, but not all definitions include similar caring relationships between same-sex couples. Most definitions include parents and their children, while some also involve couples who have never reproduced or no longer live with their children. Others extend the definition of family to three generations sharing a household, referred to by academics as the “extended family.” Still others broaden the definition to include those considered related, whether or not they really are.

Most definitions of family focus on its structure and legality as well as the functions the unit is assumed to provide for individual members and for the larger society. For example, anthropologists and sociologists from the 1940s to the 1970s provided definitions that sounded overly idealistic by today’s standards. They stated that “the family” was both an economic and social unit, and was the basic institution of society. According to these early definitions, the family consisted of two adults of the opposite sex who shared economic resources, sexual intimacy, labour, accommodation, reproduction and child rearing, and provided each other with companionship, assistance, love and respect, heirs, and social status (Murdock, 1949; Goode, 1964). As families have changed over the years, this definition has been challenged as ideological and less representative of today’s reality.

The most prevalent definition used in Canadian research and policy making is Statistics Canada’s “census family.” This unit includes a married couple with or without never-married children or a single parent living together with never-married children. These “children” may be any age as long as they have never been married. According to the government, cohabiting couples living together for longer than one year are considered to be married, although separate statistics are kept for legally married and cohabiting couples. Legally, only heterosexual couples may marry in this country, so same-sex couples have been omitted from this definition. Statistics Canada also uses the term

“economic family” to refer to people who are related by blood ties, marriage, or legal adoption and are sharing a dwelling.

Some people argue that these government definitions do not encompass the group that most people consider as their family, either through blood relationships, legal adoption, marriage, or feelings of closeness. Many have questioned why the government includes in their definition of family adult children who have never married but excludes divorced children who have returned to live with a parent. Cultural groups who prefer to live in extended families argue that these definitions have negative implications for sponsoring relatives as immigrants and misrepresent sources of caring and social support. Gays and lesbians claim that these definitions make the assumption that their family relationships are different and less valid, and consequently the definition sometimes deprives them of family benefits. Yet a common definition must be agreed upon when taking a national census, designing a research project, or establishing eligibility for family benefits.

The Canadian government also uses the term “household” in gathering statistics relating to family and personal life. By household, the government refers to people sharing a dwelling, whether or not they are related by blood ties, legal adoption, or marriage. For example, a boarder might be part of the household, but not necessarily part of the family. Similarly, a same-sex couple would be considered to be a household rather than a family.

Increasingly, researchers and advocacy groups are arguing that definitions of family should be broadened to encompass caring and enduring intimate relationships regardless of legal or blood ties (Eichler, 1997a; Jamieson, 1998; Smart and Neale, 1999). In other words, they argue that the structure of the unit or its legality is less important in defining family than the functions fulfilled by the unit or the services provided. In certain kinds of research such as comparative policy analysis, however, it may not be possible to define family in such a subjective way. Certainly, governments would not be willing to allow us to use our own definitions of family when they decide who is eligible for benefits.

Despite varying definitions, it is necessary to clarify the unit to which we are referring. Throughout this book, we will use the term “families” in the plural to indicate that there are many family structures and acceptable definitions. We will also use qualifying words such as “remarried families,” “commuter families,” “extended families,” “lone-parent families,” and “same-sex families” to clarify our concepts. Without these qualifying words, family will refer to cohabiting or married couples with or without dependent children, who share a home and are assumed to be sexually intimate, as well as lone parents or related adults raising children.

CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN FAMILIES

Nuclear versus Extended Families

Cultural groups tend to organize their family life differently depending on traditions, religious beliefs, socio-economic background, immigrant or indigenous status, and historical experiences. Most Canadians who live in families create households comprised only of couples or parents and their children, which academics call nuclear families. Extended families remain important in Canada and elsewhere as both living arrange-

ments and as support groups. An extended family unit may contain several brothers and their wives and children but often involves grandparents as well. In many societies, brides are brought to the groom's family home to live with his parents and unmarried siblings. In other cultures, widowed parents are invited to live with one of their children. Southern Europeans, Middle Eastern people, and Asians living in Canada and abroad often maintain close ties with siblings and parents after marriage. Even when they do not share a residence, relatives may live next door or in the neighbourhood, visit regularly, telephone daily, assist with childcare, provide economic and emotional support, and help find employment and accommodation for one another (Paletta, 1992). When relatives do not share a household but still maintain close contact, this has been called the "modified extended family."

Sociologists in the 1950s lamented the isolation of the modern nuclear family, implying that extended families used to be more prevalent and closer prior to industrialization (Parsons and Bales, 1955). Historians have argued that nuclear families were always the most typical living arrangements in both Europe and among the European settlers to North America (Laslett, 1971; Goldthorpe, 1987). Nett (1981) contended that it had never been a widespread practice for married couples to live with their parents at any time in Canadian history. Extended family living, however, was more prevalent among certain cultural groups such as some First Nations People, and continues to be practised by many immigrants, such as some Southern Europeans, middle Eastern people, Caribbeans, and Indonesians. As well, recently married couples sometimes share a residence with their parents for financial reasons, and many couples provide short-term accommodation for a parent if they become widowed and frail.

Statistics Canada collects data on the percentage of "multi-family households," which somewhat approximates the academic concept of extended family. Despite the fact that many immigrants come to Canada from countries in which people live in extended families, and that widowed parents sometimes live with their married children, the percentage of such households actually declined from 6.7 percent in 1951 to only 1.1 percent in 1986 (Ram, 1990:44). This decline was explained by the fact that most Canadians consider living alone more acceptable and feasible both for single persons and elderly widow(er)s. Furthermore, many immigrant groups alter their traditional practices after coming to Canada. Nevertheless, the percentage of three-generation households increased by 39 percent over the last decade, mainly as a result of increased Asian immigration. Yet only 3 percent of Canadian households included three generations in 1996 (Che-Alford and Hamm, 1999).

Monogamy versus Polygamy

In the 1900s, anthropologists and sociologists collected considerable information about comparative family and marriage structures. When George Murdock completed his *World Ethnographic Sample* in 1949, he concluded that the nuclear family was the basic family unit, although several nuclear families often lived together in larger households. Murdock also noted that only about 20 percent of the 554 societies he studied were strictly monogamous. Since then, there has been a rise in monogamy as more countries have become "westernized." In Canada and most industrialized countries, monogamy or

having one legal spouse at a time is both social custom and law, yet many Canadians marry more than once over their lifetime, referred to as serial monogamy.

In Murdock's study, 75 percent of the societies permitted polygyny, or having more than one wife at a time, and were characterized by a mixture of polygyny and monogamy. In some Moslem countries, for example, polygyny continues to be practised by wealthier men who can afford to support more than one wife. Polygyny could involve sisters or unrelated women, but husbands are expected to treat each wife fairly and equally. Wives in polygynous marriages may resent their husband taking a new wife, but they may also welcome her companionship and help with household duties, childcare, and horticulture (Leslie and Korman, 1989: 27).

The term "polygamy" refers to the practice of having more than one spouse at a time, but polygyny is much more prevalent than polyandry, or more than one husband married to the same woman. Only one male is needed to impregnate several wives, but paternity could be questioned in marriages with more than one husband. Identifying the father is important because obligations and rights tend to flow from lineage, or to whom a child is related, and most societies give priority to the father's side of the family. In recent years, the laws have prohibited polygamy in all westernized countries. This is due, in part, to the assumed difficulties of providing adequate financial and emotional support for more than one partner as well as religious ideas of sexual exclusivity. In the nineteenth century, some cultural communities in North America practised polygamy, including Mormons in Utah (and Alberta) and the Oneida Community in New York. Now, this is against the law, although polygyny continues to exist clandestinely in some communities in Utah.

Arranged versus Free-Choice Marriage

In many parts of the world, marriages continue to be arranged in order to enhance family resources, reputation, and alliances, and because parents and older relatives feel that they are more qualified than young people to make such decisions. Some marriages are arranged in Middle Eastern and Moslem African countries, and in parts of Indonesia and Pakistan. The family of either bride or groom may make initial arrangements, but marriage brokers or intermediaries are often used to help the family find a suitable mate for their offspring. This intermediary may be a family friend or relative, an acquaintance with an extensive network of contacts, or a professional marriage broker charging a fee for service.

Immigrants living in Canada sometimes participate in arranged or semi-arranged marriages. For example, some Middle Eastern and East Asian immigrants return to their home country to marry a partner selected by marriage brokers or family members still living there. Others are introduced in Canada and encouraged by their kin to marry. Increasingly, young people expect to have veto power if they strongly object to their parents' choice, but considerable pressure remains to abide by the judgment of elders, especially in their home country (Nanda, 1991: 238).

A dowry is sometimes used to attract a husband and to insure that women retain a measure of financial security in case of divorce or premature widowhood in societies practising arranged marriages. Under the dowry system, families with marriageable daughters must show families with eligible sons that they can provide property or money

upon their daughter's marriage. If a woman has a large dowry, she can find a "better" husband, which usually means one who is wealthier, healthier, highly educated, and from a more respected family. The dowry system places a great financial burden on poorer families, especially if they must provide money or property for several daughters. The dowry system also encourages families to prefer sons to daughters. Males perpetuate the family name and can more easily find jobs, support themselves, and acquire property through marriage. In some cases, female infants, children, and adults are neglected or mistreated because of this preference for males and the economics perpetuating it. For

Exhibit 1.1 Arranging a Marriage in India

In India, almost all marriages are arranged. So customary is the practice of arranged marriage that there is a special name for a marriage that is not arranged: It is called a "love match."

As a young woman anthropologist in India for the first time, I found this custom of arranged marriage oppressive. It was contrary to everything I had been taught to believe about the importance of romantic love and individual choice as the only basis of a happy marriage.

At the first opportunity, I questioned young people I met on how they felt about the practice of arranged marriage. One of my first informants was Sita, a college graduate who had been waiting over a year while her parents were arranging a match for her.

"How can you go along with this?" I asked her. "Don't you care who you marry?"

"Of course I care," she answered. "That is why I must have my parents choose a boy for me. My marriage is too important to be arranged by such an inexperienced person as myself."

"But how can you marry the first man you meet? You will miss the fun of meeting a lot of different people and you will not give yourself the chance to know who is the right man for you," I countered.

"Meeting a lot of different men doesn't sound like any fun at all," Sita answered. "One hears that in America girls spend all

their time worrying whether they will meet a man and get married. Here we have the chance to enjoy our life and let our parents do this work and worry for us."

"I still can't imagine it," I said. "How can you agree to marry a man you hardly know?"

"But of course he will be known," she replied. "My parents would never arrange a marriage for me without knowing all about the boy and his family background. Naturally we will not rely on what the family tells us. We will check the particulars ourselves and through our friends and relatives. No one will want to marry their daughter into a family that is not good."

"But Sita," I protested, "I don't mean know the family, I mean know the man. How can you think of spending your whole life with someone you don't love or may not even like?"

"If he is a good man, why should I not like him?" she replied. "With you Americans, you know the boy so well before you marry, where is the fun to get married? There is no mystery and no romance. Here we have the whole of our married life to get to know and love our husband. This way is better, is it not?"

Source: From Serena Nanda, "Arranging a Marriage in India," in Philip R. DeVita, ed. *The Naked Anthropologist: Tales From Around the World* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1991)



Canadian society today encompasses both free-choice and arranged marriages. This couple met for the first time on the day of their wedding in Montreal.

this reason, the dowry system has been outlawed in some countries such as India, although it continues to operate clandestinely in rural areas.

In other societies practising arranged marriages (such as eastern Indonesia), the groom's family was expected to pay the bride's parents a bride price as permission to marry their daughter. If the bride was beautiful or came from a wealthy or well-respected family, the price would rise. When the groom and his family were short of cash or property, the groom could pay the bride price through his labour. Dowries and bride prices are disappearing as both men and women become more educated and westernized, and as women gain more opportunities to enter the labour force and become self-supporting. Yet free-choice marriages have retained some symbolic remnants of dowries and bride prices in wedding traditions. For example, the trousseau or the clothing and household items collected for the wedding, the honeymoon, and the marriage itself are symbolic of dowries. In addition, the engagement ring and gold wedding band given to the bride are remnants of bride prices.

In arranged marriages, more importance is placed on financial security, potential heirs, and extended family solidarity than on sexual attraction, love between the young people, or personal gratification (Nanda, 1991: 237-239). Potential marital partners are urged to respect their family's wishes and each other, and it is hoped that love will develop after they marry and share a home. Both families have a stake in the stability of

the relationship, and therefore arranged marriages are often more stable than free-choice unions. In addition, divorce is often legally restricted and women cannot always support themselves outside marriage. Nevertheless, urbanization, westernization (including the prevalence of foreign films, popular music, CDs, the Internet, and advertising), as well as university education and international travel have encouraged young people to anticipate “falling in love” and to seek a more intensive marital relationship (Nanda, 1991).

Patterns of Authority, Descent, and Inheritance

All societies develop rules or practices guiding behaviour within and between families. Most family systems designate a “head” to make major decisions and to represent the family to the outside world. In both Western and Eastern societies, the oldest male is typically the family head, a system referred to as patriarchy. An example of extreme patriarchy could be found in ancient Roman families before the Punic Wars, in which the father had the power of life and death over his children and held all legal and political authority on behalf of his wife (Leslie and Korman, 1989: 160).

An authority system in which women are granted more authority than men is called matriarchy. Matriarchal systems are rare, although American anthropologist Margaret Mead referred to the Tchambuli people of New Guinea as matriarchal (Mead, 1935) and some Black families in the Caribbean and the United States have also been referred to in this way (Queen et al., 1985). In both these examples, women hold considerable control over the economy as well as decision-making power within their families. Canadian families used to be overtly patriarchal, but men and women have acquired equal legal rights, and men no longer are considered by government to be heads of families. In practice, however, remnants of patriarchy linger within many aspects of Canadian family life. One example is the practice of fathers “giving away” their daughters during a traditional Christian marriage ceremony.

Patterns of descent may determine where newly married couples live, how they address members of each other’s family, what surname their children will receive, and from whom they inherit. When Canadians marry, they usually consider their primary relationship to be with each other rather than with either set of parents or siblings. In most cases, the newly married couple is still considered to be a part of both kin groups, called a bilateral descent pattern. The couple is expected to maintain contact with both sides of the family and to participate in family gatherings. They are permitted to inherit from either side of the family.

In other cultures, the bride and groom are considered to be members of only one kin group. If they belong to the groom’s kin group, we call this patrilineal descent, which is the most prevalent and has a long history in both Eastern and Western civilizations (Leslie and Korman, 1989: 48). The important kinship ties are passed from father to son to grandson. A wife would marry into her husband’s family, and their children would become members of his kin group. With matrilineal descent, relationships are traced through females and the female line, downplaying the importance of the father’s relatives. Matrilineal descent as well as matrilocality, or living with the bride’s kin group, were typical of the peoples of the Iroquois Confederacy in North America at the time of European contact (Brown, 1988).

In Canada, both kin membership and inheritance are based on bilateral descent, but patrilineal descent has been used for surnames. Until the 1970s, the bride and the couple's subsequent children took the groom's family name. Canadian brides were expected (but not always legally required) to take their husband's name because he was considered to be the "head" of the household and because having one family name was a symbol of their legal and social union. In Quebec, married women are now legally required to keep their birth names but may add their husband's surname to it. In Ontario, brides may choose either their (father's) surname or the groom's without going through a legal name change.

If the newly married couple moves into the community or household of the wife's kin, we say that the marriage system is matrilocal. If the couple moves into the husband's kin group or family, the marriage system is patrilocal. Often, matrilineal family systems are also matrilocal, but this does not mean that women have more authority than men within the community or the family. More often, it means that the maternal uncle or the wife's brother is the authority figure.

Most North American marriages are neolocal, which means that the newly married couple establishes a new place of residence separate from both kin groups. Most young couples prefer to establish a separate residence and lifestyle from their family of origin even if it means accepting a lower living standard or forgoing live-in childcare services. Although the couple may reside with either set of in-laws at some point during their marriage, especially if they are in financial difficulty, it is often defined as temporary and a hardship, except among certain cultural groups.

In the past century, family life has changed considerably, reflecting transformations in the larger society. Economic, demographic, legal, technological, and social changes have influenced occupations and earnings, the structure of households, the nature of intimate relationships, and individual aspirations. In the next section, we will discuss nine major trends in Canadian families, placing them within the context of other industrialized countries.

FAMILY TRENDS

Popular ideas about family life sometimes differ substantially from reality. Family demography helps us to understand how families differ by jurisdiction, ethnicity, income, and life cycle over the past decades. These trends are based on official statistics, which cannot tell us much about why families change or what these trends mean to individual members. Therefore, we will need to draw on more detailed research from social history and sociology in order to explain the reasons for the trends and to understand their implications for family and personal life. We will begin by discussing changes in life expectancy.

Rising Life Expectancy

Early in the twentieth century, infant mortality rates and maternal death rates declined in response to improvements in living standards, sanitation, diet, and housing. Health services also experienced major improvements, including the invention of antibiotics and

inoculations against contagious diseases. In addition, occupational health and safety regulations prevented some work-related deaths, and medical breakthroughs continued to prolong life for accident victims and people with acute and degenerative illnesses. Consequently, life expectancies at birth have gradually increased right through to the present. In 1931, for example, the average life expectancy in Canada was 60.0 years for males and 62.1 for females. By 1997, this had increased to 75.8 for males and 81.4 for females, as Table 1.1 indicates (Bélanger, 1999: 23).

The consequences of rising life expectancy are many. Fewer infant deaths contribute to a lower birth rate, as families no longer need to conceive more children than they want in order to ensure that some survive to adulthood. Fewer premature deaths among adults has created the potential for longer marriages, fewer orphaned children living in institutions or foster care, more generations per family, more grandparents seeing their grandchildren mature, and more parents caring for frail elderly parents while raising children. Longer life expectancy could also lead to an increase in the demand for more liberal divorce laws. Unhappy marriages in the nineteenth century typically continued because of feelings of duty, obligation to family, and lack of alternatives, but also because spouses knew that life was short and so assumed that their marriage would not last forever. Many married people became widowed and were consequently able to remarry. The decline in mortality rates prolonged unhappy marriages as well as happy ones, and was one of the many factors that accelerated the demand for more liberal divorce laws.

Extended longevity and declining birth rates also lead to population aging or an increase in the average age of the population. Although Canada's population has been aging noticeably since the 1960s, most European countries have experienced declining birth rates and a growing percentage of elderly people since the 1930s and 1940s. Many young Europeans emigrated leaving older people behind, and others were killed during the Second World War, which reduced subsequent marriage and birth rates. In addition, many Europeans were concerned about over-population, especially during the 1960s, and campaigned for more effective contraception and legalized abortions. With about 12 percent of the population sixty-five or older (Bélanger, 1999: 23), Canada's population is relatively young compared to Europe which has between 15 and 20 percent of the popula-

TABLE 1.1 Life Expectancy at Birth, 1931–1997, Canada

Date	Male	Female
1931	60.0	62.1
1941	63.0	66.3
1951	66.3	70.8
1961	68.4	74.1
1971	69.3	76.4
1981	71.9	78.9
1991	74.2	80.7
1997*	75.8	81.4

*Provisional

Source: Bélanger and Dumas, 1998: 17 (also Statistics Canada figures from earlier years).



Increasing life expectancy rates mean it is no longer unusual to see three-generation families like this.

tion aged sixty-five and older. Nevertheless, compared to developing countries in South America, with only 3 percent of the population aged sixty-five and older, Canada's population is relatively old. These countries tend to have higher birth rates, more children per family, and fewer older people in the population (Desjardins, 1993: 109).

More elderly people in the population requires planning for different kinds of housing, health and social services, and expanded pension costs. Organizations catering to elderly persons may have to compete for the same scarce resources as agencies serving children and youth. On the other hand, as children become scarce, a greater social value might be placed on childbirth and child rearing because children represent the future labour force whose contributions will finance our future social programs. In several European nations, such as Sweden and Germany, concern about population aging has led to both stronger pension plans and more generous government benefits for children (Baker, 1995).

Declining Fertility

Since the late 1800s, birth rates have been falling in most industrialized countries. In the 1850s, the crude birth rate in Canada was forty-five live births per 1,000 population, but it

TABLE 1.2 Crude Birth Rates* in Canada, 1851–1998

Year	Live Births per 1,000 Population
1851–61*	45
1861–71	40
1871–81	37
1881–91	34
1891–1901	30
1901–1911	31
1911–1921	29
1921	29.3
1931	23.2
1941	22.4
1951	27.2
1961	26.1
1971	16.8
1981	15.0
1991	14.4
1998**	11.4

* birth rates from 1851 to 1921 are estimates

** provisional

Source: Statistics Canada. *Births and Deaths*. Catalogue 84–204 (annual). Ottawa; Bélanger, 1999: 21.

fell to about twenty-two after the 1930s Depression, as Table 1.2 indicates. After the Second World War, there was a twenty-year increase in Canadian and American birth rates, called the Post-War Baby Boom, which was not experienced to the same extent in Europe (Beaujot, 1991). After the mid-1960s, the crude birth rate fell to 15.0 in 1981 and then continued to decline to 11.4 in 1998 (Bélanger, 1999: 20).

Crude birth rates, as their name suggests, are not very accurate measures of fertility because they fluctuate annually with economic conditions and are influenced by the average age of the population and the sex ratio. The more accurate measure is the total fertility rate, which is the average number of children that women between the ages of fifteen and forty-nine produce. Yet the same declining trend is apparent for this measure as well. In 1921, each woman in Canada bore an average of 3.5 children (Ram, 1990: 82) compared to 1.55 in 1997 (Bélanger, 1999: 21). Fertility rates are also calculated for different age categories, called “age-specific fertility rates.” These statistics allow us to say that women in Canada are delaying childbearing and more are producing their first child after the age of thirty (Wadhera and Millar, 1991). Women are postponing both legal marriage and childbearing in order to complete their education and find paid work, but also because there is less pressure to marry before experimenting with sex. Furthermore, about 20 percent of Canadians are not producing any children, either through choice or infertility problems, but it is difficult to determine this percentage accurately until the baby-boom generation reaches the end of their childbearing years.

Canada is similar to other industrialized countries in experiencing declining birth rates, although our rates did not decline as early or as severely (except in Quebec) as some

European countries. There are many reasons why birth rates tend to decline with industrialization and urbanization. New jobs in manufacturing and services are created in towns and cities. People migrate to these towns to find work but then discover that the cost of housing and food is higher than in rural areas. Industrialization also creates the need for new technical skills and literacy, requiring a more educated and skilled labour force. Young people need more formal education in order to find work, and compulsory education laws are often created to keep children in school longer and out of the labour force (Gaffield, 1990). Wage labour tends to generate higher incomes than agricultural work or domestic service, and employed parents can better afford to educate their children. Eventually, children become economic liabilities to parents rather than assets.

As the cost of living rises and one wage is no longer enough to support a family, both husbands and wives need to enter the paid workforce. Childcare becomes problematic and expensive unless parents work in different shifts, or relatives or neighbours are available to care for young children. Consequently, couples tend to limit their family size, regardless of how many children they actually want. Producing fewer children is one way that couples reduce conflicts between earning a living and raising a family in urban conditions. The public demand for birth control then increases, family planning becomes more widespread and socially acceptable, and public discourse supports a more public role for women. Although this pattern has been prevalent in many industrialized countries, there are cultural variations within as well as between countries in the use of contraception, birth rates, and the encouragement of paid work for mothers.

Contrary to popular myth, immigrant women have traditionally experienced lower birth rates than women born in Canada. Many immigrants leave their homelands in order to improve their living standard, which often requires two incomes, and women's labour force participation has historically been associated with lower birth rates and smaller family size. In addition, immigrants tend to adjust to the lifestyle of the majority (Beaujot, 1991). Birth rates used to vary by religion, language, and culture in Canada. Catholics, some fundamentalist Protestant groups, and some orthodox Jewish groups historically had high birth rates, while mainstream Protestants and reform Jewish groups tended to reduce their family size. In addition, French Canadians, who were mainly Catholic and rural dwellers, used to have larger families (Kalbach and McVey, 1979: 107). Now, more similarities than differences exist among religious and cultural groups as well as between rural and urban dwellers, as Nancy Howell reports in Chapter Six. However, birth rates continue to be higher in Canada's North and among First Nations people than among non-aboriginal people living in the south. In addition, birth rates vary by provinces, and are now the lowest in Newfoundland at 1.27 births per 1,000 population (Bélanger, 1999: 20), as younger people migrate elsewhere to find work.

In the past thirty years, Quebec birth rates have declined considerably despite the Catholic background of most French Quebecers. Only two generations ago, Quebec women were still having large families in comparison to all Canadians. In 1959, for example, the total fertility rate in Quebec was 4.0 children per woman but it fell to 1.37 in 1987 before rising to 1.52 in 1997 (Bélanger: 20). The falling Quebec birth rate has been attributed to the sweeping cultural changes in the 1960s and 1970s known as the "Quiet Revolution." The Catholic Church lost much of its control over Quebec society, the education system became more secularized, young people placed more emphasis on

occupational success, and young women played down their traditional role as mothers (Lachapelle and Henripin, 1982: 116ff). Another reason for the lower birth rates relates to women's relatively high labour force participation in Quebec and their personal reactions against their mothers' experience in childbearing and child rearing, which many young women perceived to be emotionally and physically draining.

From 1988 to 1997, the Quebec government offered parents, at childbirth, cash payments that reached a maximum of \$8,000 for the third and subsequent child. After a small rise in the birth rate at the beginning of the 1990s, the rate continued to decline in Quebec as well as most of the rest of Canada (Baker, 1994b). Since the 1970s, fertility has declined in most industrialized countries, which are now experiencing rates below replacement level (Baker, 1995). Canada's fertility rates remain moderate compared to some European countries such as Spain and Italy, whose fertility rates are even lower than Canada's (Bélanger and Dumas, 1998: 23).

The consequences of declining fertility are not necessarily the same for women, families, and governments. For women, fewer children may mean greater opportunities to participate in the labour force or self-development activities, more time to devote to each existing child, and a higher standard of living (Eichler, 1988: 312). Therefore, women's groups tend to see declining fertility in a positive light. For families, fewer children will mean less time devoted to childcare, easier residential mobility, more time to earn a living, and a higher per capita income. For these reasons, social workers and welfare administrators have encouraged low-income families to produce fewer children.

From the government's viewpoint, families with high birth rates and low incomes are a problem because these parents require higher levels of income support and social services. At the same time, falling birth rates lead to an aging population, which may increase concerns about how to fund future social programs with a shrinking labour force contributing to the tax base. In addition, governments may be concerned about the rising cost of medical care, which has been disproportionately costly for the "old elderly." Furthermore, rapidly declining birth rates among cultural minorities could be seen to have political implications, as in Quebec (Baker, 1994b). In addition, some economists have warned that declining fertility will lower economic productivity and prosperity, although this has not occurred in Germany or Sweden. In other words, various groups interpret the significance of declining birth rates according to their own political agendas.

Cohabitation versus Legal Marriage

More Canadians are now living together without being legally married compared to previous decades. In 1995, over 14 percent of all Canadian couples were living common-law (Dumas & Bélanger, 1997: 130) compared to 6 percent in 1981 (Stout, 1991: 18). Provincial variations are also apparent, and the figure has reached 25 percent in Quebec.

Statistics Canada's General Social Survey of 1995 found that 52 percent of first "conjugal relationships" of twenty- to twenty-nine-year-olds were common-law relationships rather than legal marriages, but the prevalence of common-law relationships declines for older age groups. For younger generations, common-law serves mostly as a prelude or alternative to marriage, while for older people it is a prelude or alternative to remarriage (Le Bourdais et al., 2000). When people use common-law as an alternative to marriage,

they often feel that their intimate relationships are their own business and the state or church has no right to intervene. Others feel that legal marriage involves gendered practices and expectations of behaviour that they would like to avoid (Elizabeth, 1997).

Common-law relationships used to be considered as temporary arrangements, but they are now becoming more like legal marriages. Statistically, however, they still differ from legal marriage, as their duration is shorter and their fertility rates are lower. Furthermore, researchers still find that legal marriages preceded by cohabitation have slightly higher rates of dissolution (Bélanger and Dumas, 1998: 41), perhaps because people who cohabit are less traditional and more likely to see divorce as an alternative to an unhappy marriage. As such relationships become more prevalent, differences between cohabitation and legal marriage seem to be diminishing.

The distinction between legal marriage and cohabitation is becoming blurred both legally and socially in many industrialized countries. Several nations (including Canada) now consider women to be married for social assistance purposes if they have cohabited in a heterosexual relationship for at least one year or produced a child within that relationship within a year. Furthermore, low rates of legal marriage used to be associated with low birth rates. Sweden is often used as an example of a country with a low rate of legal marriage, as the marriage rate (per 1,000 population) was 3.8 in 1996 compared to 5.2 in Canada (Bélanger and Dumas, 1998: 23). Nevertheless, the 1996 total fertility rates were 1.6 in both countries (Bélanger et al. : 15, 23). This indicates that the links between legal marriage and childbearing are becoming blurred (Bélanger et al.: 15, 23).

Mothers in the Labour Force

Before the Second World War, Canadian women usually left their paid jobs when they announced their engagement to be married. They were given a party by their co-workers and expected to retire from paid employment. During the Second World War, some married women were needed to work in the munitions' factories and other jobs vacated by men who were serving in the armed forces. Nevertheless, only 4.5 percent of married women were in the paid labour force in 1941 (Baker, 1990a: 8) compared to 62.3 percent in 1998 (Chaykowski and Powell, 1998).

By the 1960s, more married women were employed, but the income of husbands and the presence of children continued to influence their paid work. Married women were less likely than single women to be working outside the home, unless their husband was unemployed, underemployed, or a low earner. Similarly, the presence of preschool children and the absence of non-family childcare also kept mothers out of the labour force. Now, younger women are more likely than older women to be in the Canadian labour force regardless of marriage or the presence of children (Chaykowski and Powell, 1998). Canadian government statistics indicate that about three-quarters of mothers with children under fifteen are now working for pay. In addition, married women are almost as likely to be working for pay as single or divorced women, and much more likely than widowed women. In 1998, 74 percent of mothers in two-parent families were in the labour force compared to 67 percent of lone mothers (Chaykowski and Powell, 1998), as Table 1.3 indicates.

TABLE 1.3 Labour Force Participation Rates of Canadian Parents, by Marital Status and Age of Child, 1978, 1988, and 1998.

Marital Status and Age of Child	Females			Males		
	1978	1988	1998	1978	1988	1998
Spouse Present						
Child 0-2	37.7	60.0	67.2	Na	Na	Na
Child 0-5	40.9	62.3	69.0	Na	Na	Na
Child 0-15	47.4	67.6	73.9	Na	Na	Na
Lone Parent						
Child 0-2	40.3	41.3	44.4	90.0	85.2	81.1
Child 0-5	45.7	51.0	53.9	89.5	86.6	86.3
Child 0-15	56.6	63.7	67.0	89.4	87.5	88.0

Source: Statistics Canada. *Labour Force Survey*, Catalogue 71F0004XCB; Chaykowski and Powell, 1999: S7.

There are at least seven major reasons for the increasing presence of Canadian mothers in the paid workforce. First, the expansion of the service sector of the labour force in the 1950s and 1960s created a new demand for workers, and married women were enticed into these “clean” and indoor jobs that often required “feminine” skills. Second, the rising cost of living throughout the 1960s and 1970s encouraged married women and mothers to enter paid work to help pay for housing and daily expenses at a time when male wages were no longer keeping pace with inflation. Third, private firms created more part-time jobs, enabling mothers to earn money without relinquishing their family responsibilities. Fourth, more women entered full-time work as divorce rates soared in the 1970s and 1980s, and more mothers became family heads or foresaw the possibility of divorce. Fifth, laws relating to maternity and parental leave and benefits were amended to require employers to protect women’s jobs while they give birth. This allowed women to keep their jobs rather than quit and seek new ones later. Sixth, improvements in birth control since the 1960s enabled couples to plan women’s pregnancies to fit in with educational and work requirements. The seventh reason for the increasing presence of mothers in the labour force relates to changing gender roles. As women gained more formal education since the 1960s, they raised their expectations about using this education to work for pay in order to support themselves, contribute to the family income, or make some public contribution to society.

The implications of these trends are many. In the nineteenth century, men’s authority as family heads began to be eroded when they left the home and farm to find wage work. When more wives began to contribute their wages to the household, the gendered division of labour, with men deriving additional authority from breadwinning, was further challenged. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, earning is typically shared, and patterns of family authority are becoming more equitable. Nevertheless, government statistics still indicate that most husbands earn more than their wives and that wives accept more responsibility for family caring and housework (Marshall, 1994; Davies and Carrier, 1999; Baker and Tippin, 1999). Yet, laws, social policies, and public attitudes are

starting to acknowledge the marked change in earning patterns, and these changes are beginning to influence the organization of daily life within families.

The participation rates of Canadian women have increased faster than in some other industrialized countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom (Baker and Tippin, 1999; O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver, 1999). This trend can be explained largely by inflation during the 1970s and 1980s that forced Canadian wives into the workforce, lower male wages in Canada, the expansion of the service sector of the Canadian labour force, and higher expectations about living standards. In the other countries, ideologies about "good mothering" and social policies that encouraged financial dependence for women also kept mothers at home.

Rising Rates of Separation and Divorce

Separation and divorce rates have increased in many industrialized countries, especially since the late 1960s. The Canadian divorce rate rose from 6.4 divorces per 100,000 population in 1921 to 355.1 in 1987, before falling gradually to 225 in 1997 (Bélanger, 1999: 38). After the Canadian divorce law reforms in 1968 and 1985, the rate rapidly increased. The 1968 change added "marriage breakdown" to the existing grounds for divorce based on matrimonial fault, and the 1985 law redefined marriage breakdown as only one year of separation. The decrease in divorce rates at the end of the 1980s reflected a declining marriage rate and a slower economy in which legal divorce was considered to be too expensive for many couples.

Despite the rise in divorce throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Canada's divorce rate remains moderate compared to many industrialized countries, as Table 1.4 indicates. It is much lower than the American rate, for example. The divorce rate in the United States was 4.3 divorces per 1,000 population in 1996 (Bélanger and Dumas, 1998: 23). This may reflect many years of more liberal divorce laws and continuing high rates of legal marriage. At the same time, Canada's divorce rate is higher than some European countries because of the lower average age in the Canadian population. Divorces tend to occur at younger ages. Also, the higher Canadian rate may reflect the higher marriage rate than in some European countries as well as the liberalization of Canadian laws in 1985.

TABLE 1.4 One-Parent Families and Divorce Rates, Mid 1990s

Country	One-Parent Families as % Of All Families Children	Divorce Rate (Per 1,000 Population)
Australia	18	2.9
Canada	20	2.4
Japan	5*	1.7
New Zealand	24	2.7
Sweden	18	2.4
United States	29	4.3

*1990

Source: Bélanger & Dumas 1998: p. 26; Bradshaw et al., 1996; Statistics NZ 1998b: 28.

As we will discuss in Chapter Ten, there are many reasons for rising separation and divorce rates. The growing secularization of society has encouraged people to view marriage as a contract that can be broken under certain circumstances, just like business contracts. In addition, growing individualism, including the idea that people deserve happiness in their personal relationships, has discouraged couples from staying together out of duty or concern for family reputation. Furthermore, the logistics of divorce become easier with fewer children per family. Now that more women are working for pay and government income support is available, divorce is more economically feasible for both men and women wanting to leave unhappy marriages. Consequently, many individuals and advocacy groups lobbied governments, resulting in legal reform in 1968 and 1985. These legal reforms further contributed to rising Canadian divorce rates. As with declining fertility, rising divorce rates upset many conservatives, who saw this as an indication of “the death of the family.” At the same time, others viewed this trend as an exemplification of greater choice and personal freedom, and an opportunity to create a better life after an unfortunate marriage.

Societal changes may encourage the prevalence of divorce, but certain social and psychological conditions also tend to increase conflict within marriage. If unresolved, this conflict could lead to separation and divorce. Researchers have found, for example, that those who marry well below the average age, especially if the bride is pregnant, have greater chances of marital discord and divorce (McDaniel and Tepperman, 2000: 348). This suggests that emotional and social immaturity, an incomplete education, inability to be self-supporting, and lack of opportunity to adjust to marriage before the strains of pregnancy tend to jeopardize the stability of marriage. Studies have also found that the previously divorced and those with divorced parents are also more likely to terminate unsatisfactory marriages (Rodgers and Pryor, 1998). This may simply suggest that people with previous family experience of marriage dissolution see divorce as a viable alternative to an unhappy marriage. They know from personal experience that there is “life after marriage” or that a smooth transition from marriage to a single life is possible. They may also be familiar with the legal procedures involved. On the other hand, this correlation may indicate that people learn unhealthy ways of resolving marital conflict from their parents or from previous relationships. Since more Canadian young people now come from families with divorced parents, this will likely contribute to high divorce rates in the future.

Large age discrepancies, differences in cultural, religious, or socio-economic background of marriage partners, as well as the absence of religious affiliation have also been correlated with high divorce rates. More marriages now take place between people from different social and cultural backgrounds with urbanization, high rates of immigration, greater geographic mobility, and more people attending colleges and universities away from their home communities. In addition, attending religious services has declined throughout North American society. All these trends may influence future divorce rates.

Rates of childlessness appear to be rising in Canada, and couples without children have higher probabilities of divorce (Baker, 1993: 150). This should not imply that childless couples are not as satisfied with their marriages as parents, but rather that it is easier to obtain a legal divorce and survive economically afterwards if couples do not have to agree on the custody and financial support of their children. There is also evidence that

employed married women consider divorce as an option more often than homemakers (Huber and Spitze, 1980; Albrecht and Kunz, 1980). Women who can support themselves financially initiate the decision to separate more often than women who are financially dependent on their husbands. Ambert (1983) further concluded that once divorced, high-income women felt less social and financial pressure than low-income women to remarry.

These and other studies suggest that although all marriages experience conflict, some may experience more conflict than others. Furthermore, the way in which this conflict is resolved relates to conflict resolution skills, parental role models, social circumstances, and opportunities to leave the marriage. Whether or not separation is legalized in the form of a divorce, however, further depends on laws, social values, and economic circumstances.

Most divorced people remarry but lone parents have higher remarriage rates than those without children. Furthermore, never-married parents have higher marriage rates than previously married parents. While 77 percent of lone mothers who were separated or divorced remarried after being on their own for an average of 5.6 years, 97.4 percent of lone mothers who had never been married entered into legal marriage after an average of 4.4 years as a lone parent (Lindsay, 1992: 18). The high marriage rates of never-married lone mothers may reflect their youthfulness but also indicates the financial and emotional difficulties of lone parenting.

The Increase in Lone-Parent Families

Lone-parent families were prevalent in the nineteenth century when parental death rates were higher but declined throughout the first part of the twentieth century. As divorce increased in the 1970s, lone-parent families increased as a percentage of all families with children, from 11 percent in 1961 to 20 percent in 1991 (Lindsay, 1992: 15). As a percentage of all families, lone-parent families increased from 11.3 percent in 1981 to 14.5 percent in 1996 (Statistics Canada, 1998a: 188). We should keep in mind that lone-parent families may have been just as prevalent in the 1930s Depression as in recent years, but reliable historical statistics are not readily available (Ram, 1990). While the most prevalent path to lone parenthood used to be the death of a partner, it is now is separation and divorce.

The increase in lone-parent families, most of which are headed by women, has occurred in all countries since the early 1970s. The majority of countries in the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have experienced an increase of between 30 percent and 50 percent, and lone parents typically constitute between 10 and 20 percent of all families with children (Bradshaw et al., 1996: 12). The percentage in the United States is closer to 29 percent (Bradshaw et al., 1996: 12). Many policy-makers and researchers have focused on one-parent households led by mothers because of their rising numbers, high poverty rates, and heavy reliance on social assistance.

Lone parents are not a homogenous group, but rather differ in economic and demographic characteristics as well as the circumstances that led them to lone parenthood. The major reason for the rise in lone-parent families in all countries is marital dissolution. Nevertheless, never-married lone parents constitute a growing percentage of the lone-parent population. Although 30 percent of Canadian children are born outside marriage, only about 9 percent live with only one parent at the time of birth (Marcil-Gratton, 1999). The rest live with both parents, even though their parents are not legally married.

Poverty rates for lone-parent families with children differ dramatically among industrialized countries for several reasons. First, jurisdictions vary in the percentage of lone mothers who are in the labour market and working full-time, and employed lone mothers are less likely to be poor than those relying on government benefits (Bradshaw et al., 1996). Second, countries vary in the availability and generosity of family benefits or social welfare programs, as well as the stigma attached to receiving these benefits. Some provide a pension for lone mothers or all mothers with young children, while others do not. Some nations encourage married mothers, but not lone mothers, to stay at home to care for their children. In addition, some welfare programs provide a strong disincentive for mothers to look for part-time work while receiving social benefits. A third reason for variations in child and family poverty rates relate to both male and female unemployment rates, which vary dramatically. Other aspects of the structure of the labour market vary as well, including the availability of part-time jobs, minimum and average wages, employment equity for women, and job training programs (Baker, 1995; Baker and Tippin, 1999).

Of all reasons for becoming a single parent (separation, divorce, widowhood, or premarital pregnancy), women who have a child outside a couple relationship are most vulnerable to poverty. This is especially true if the mother is an adolescent or has not completed her education (McLanahan, Astone, and Marks, 1991). Higher unemployment rates are associated with lower levels of education and less job experience in most countries. Low poverty rates among lone-parent families result from a combination of factors. These include generous income support packages for families with children, direct services such as childcare to enable mothers to enter the labour force during child-rearing years, high wages for employed mothers, and government-guaranteed support payments for children of divorced parents (Baker and Tippin, 1999). In most OECD countries (except Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom), a greater proportion of lone mothers than married mothers are in the labour force (Baker and Tippin, 1999).

Rise in Births Outside Marriage

More babies are now born outside marriage in most industrialized countries. In Canada, 37.2 percent of live births in 1994 were to women who were not legally married (Dumas and Bélanger, 1997: 20), compared to 4 percent in 1960 (Vanier Institute of the Family, 1994: 58). Many of these children, however, are born to couples in their 20s and 30s who are living in a permanent but non-legal relationship. In Quebec, 38 percent of all children and 48 percent of first births were classified as “out-of-wedlock” but 90 percent were born to couples living together outside legal marriage (Le Bourdais and Marcil-Gratton, 1994). In Europe, the rise in births to unmarried women is more an indication of the decline of legal marriage and increased numbers of cohabiting couples rather than the growth in numbers of lone mothers (Bradshaw et al., 1996). In the United States, more births outside of marriage are among women who are not living as part of a couple.

There are several reasons for an increase in births outside marriage. As society has secularized, attitudes have changed about the state’s right to be involved in personal life or moral issues. Sexual attitudes and practices have become more liberal since the 1950s, especially within committed relationships (McDaniel and Tepperman, 2000). Legislative reforms to protect women and children have made legal marriage and cohabitation, as

well as the rights of children born inside and outside of marriage, very similar. In most Canadian provinces, the concept of an illegitimate child, or one who has no legal rights to financial support or inheritance from the father, has been abolished (Baker and Phipps, 1997).

Compared to the United States where fertility rates are higher, relatively few births outside marriage are born to adolescent women in Canada. Of all births outside marriage, only 20 percent are to women under twenty years old, while 60 percent are to women between twenty and thirty (Vanier Institute of the Family, 1994: 58). Teenage birth rates have declined considerably in Canada since the 1950s with improved contraception, legalized abortion, public health insurance, and social assistance benefits which have enabled poorer women to receive medical attention and prescription drugs.

Low Adoption Rates

There have always been women who became pregnant outside marriage, but prior to the 1960s, this event was considered to be socially unacceptable and detrimental to the woman's reputation. Unmarried pregnant women used to be sent away to have their babies secretly with distant relatives or in maternity homes run by charitable organizations. Middle-class couples adopted these babies and the birth mothers sometimes were not even permitted to see or hold their babies immediately after birth. Other pregnant women obtained illegal abortions, while others gave birth and suffered social disgrace, struggling to raise their children with minimal public support. A few were fortunate enough to be offered emotional support, money, a home, or childcare from their parents or other relatives. Occasionally, fathers provided financial assistance, but it was often surreptitious. The law did not force an unmarried father to financially support his children unless he publicly declared that he was the father, or unless the birth mother's lawyer successfully proved his paternity in court.

In Ontario, about 70 percent of unmarried mothers had their children placed for adoption in 1968. By 1977, this figure had already declined to about 12 percent (Eichler, 1983: 281). Since that time, the percentage of unmarried mothers across North America who allow their children to be adopted has dwindled. In 1981, 3,399 infants were involved in domestic, non-relative, and non-native adoptions in Canada, but by 1990, this figure had fallen to 1,688 (Daly and Sobol, 1993). Birth rates for women of all ages and marital statuses have been reduced by the development of birth control technology and the legalization of abortion since 1969. Each year, about ten pregnancies are terminated for every 1,000 women aged fifteen to forty-four. This rate remained stable from 1981 to 1995 (Bélanger and Dumas, 1998: 16).

Changing attitudes towards sexuality and illegitimacy have permitted unmarried mothers to raise their own infants. Financially, more women are able to support themselves and their children outside of marriage through employment, and new laws and social benefits have been developed to protect all children from poverty and discrimination, regardless of parents' marital status. Social workers and psychologists now consider that giving up a child for adoption can be psychologically damaging for both mother and child. Consequently, they often advocate social assistance and special services to allow unmarried mothers to raise their own children. If the child is adopted, social workers

usually advocate pre-adoption counselling, open adoptions, and state assistance for post-adoption reunions.

A few mothers make a deliberate choice to reproduce outside marriage but most “unmarried” mothers are cohabiting with the baby’s father and are not parenting alone (Vanier Institute of the Family, 2000: 54). The social trend to raise children outside legal marriage has decreased the availability of children for adoption. Although most adopted children in the 1950s were from unmarried mothers, high divorce and remarriage rates and more blended families have changed this pattern. Sixty percent of Canadian adoptions in 1992 were by relatives or stepfamilies. The remaining adoptions occur when biological parents cannot look after their infants or children, from death, abuse, neglect, lack of willingness, or a shortage of resources (Daly and Sobol, 1993).

In all industrialized countries, the number of infants and children available for adoption dropped since the 1970s with declining birth rates and more social services for one-parent families. In many European countries, and to a lesser extent in North America and Australia, prospective parents are turning to war-torn or less-developed countries as the main source of adoptive infants. In addition, they are adopting young children rather than infants, out of humanitarian concerns, but also because too few infants are available. The shortage of infants may have led to a more child-focused attitude in adoption processes rather than emphasizing parental needs. However, the current trend toward international adoptions, which is predominant in Europe and subject to fewer regulations in many countries, may reverse this focus (Speirs and Baker, 1994). With the difficulties of finding infants to adopt, an increasing number of couples are turning to new reproductive technologies to help them to become parents (Donchin 1996; Daniels and Haimes, 1998).

More Blended Families

More marriages now involve at least one partner who has been previously married. In 1967, only 12.3 percent of marriages involved one spouse who had been previously married, but by 1996 this had risen to 34.1 percent (Dumas, 1994: 29; Bélanger and Dumas 1998: 26). Men have always been more likely than women to remarry after divorce, but remarriage rates have been declining for both men and women as cohabitation becomes more socially acceptable.

Remarried parents bring their children into their new families but often find that they are different from families created from first marriages. Stepfamilies tend to involve a greater complexity of relationships, more permeable boundaries, and people living in different households. Adjustment may be complicated by the presence of the ex-spouse, by lingering hostility between formerly married people, and unresolved conflicts surrounding child custody and support (Rogers and Pryor, 1998). In popular mythology, the stepmother has been portrayed as unloving and punitive, while the stepfather is seen as somewhat more benign. Not surprisingly, some studies indicate that relations between children and their stepmother are more often contentious than with the natural parent of the same sex or with the stepfather (Cheal, 1996). This is probably because mothers spend more time in the home with responsibility for child supervision, but may also be affected by the negative stereotypes. The portrayal of both divorce and remarriage in social

science research also tends to be negative, especially when studying the effects on children (Sev'er, 1992: 243-245). This is exacerbated by research results generalized from clinical samples, or samples comprised of clients seeking marriage therapy and assistance with children's behavioural problems.

Lone parents often justify their remarriage decisions by saying that they are providing their children with a father or mother. Compared to children in lone-parent families, however, children in stepfamilies have been found to have higher rates of accidents, higher levels of bedwetting, more contact with the police, lower self-esteem, and earlier ages for leaving school without qualifications (Ferri, 1984; Elliott et al., 1993). Rodgers and Pryor (1998) argue that these experiences can be explained by the lower family aspirations and expectations that step-parents have for their stepchildren compared to their own biological children, as well as by family friction in these households. They also indicate that young children fare better than older children in stepfamilies because adaptation is easier at an earlier age, before allegiances are developed with the absent parent. A few studies have noted that remarriage provides a stabilizing influence for children and their parents. Furthermore, living in a blended family is much better for children than remaining in an intact family with conflicting parents or living in a one-parent household in which the parent is lonely and poor (Sev'er, 1992: 244).

In second and subsequent marriages, the age gap between spouses tends to be larger than in first marriages and men typically remarry women younger than their first wife. While the age gap averages about two years in first marriages, it is about four years in the remarriage of divorced people and seven years with widowed people (Baker, 1993: 236). With rising rates of remarriage, age-discrepant marriages will become more prevalent, which could have implications for spousal equality and for parenting.

Changing Canadian Families

Family life is always changing, largely reflecting, but also influencing, trends in the structure of the economy, social policies, and attitudes. Table 1.5 summarizes the most recent statistics we have discussed in this chapter. We have shown that life expectancies at birth are increasing, especially for women, and birth rates are declining. Recently, the prevalence of legal marriage has been declining but the percentage living as couples has been relatively stable since 1981 (Dumas, 1992: 25). Both families and households are becoming smaller, and two-income families are now in the distinct majority in Canada. Although childbearing tends to be completed earlier than several generations ago, many middle-class women are delaying first births until after their education is completed and their finances are more secure. In addition, families are becoming less permanent units with rising rates of separation and divorce but also high rates of repartnering. Most people eventually live in an intimate relationship and produce children and grandchildren. In addition, most people maintain close contact with their parents and siblings even when they move away or marry.

Raising children while earning a living has always been difficult, but now women tend to produce fewer children than they actually want because of the high cost of raising them in terms of time, money, and emotional investment. Furthermore, a great percentage of children are experiencing the divorce of their parents and are living in blended

TABLE 1.5 Summary of Statistics of Canadian Families, 1997

Life Expectancy at Birth	Male: 75.8 years Female: 81.4 years
Crude Birth Rate (1998)	11.4 births per 1,000 population
Total Fertility Rate (1997)	1.55 births per woman aged 15-49
Couple Living "Common-Law" (1995)	14% of all couple families
Rate of Pregnancies Terminated in Hospital (1995)	10.3 per 1,000 births
Partnered Parents in the Labour Force (with children aged 0-15)	73.9% of mothers not available for fathers
Lone Parents in Labour Force (with children aged 0-15)	67% of mothers 88% of fathers
Lone Parent Families	20% of all families with children
Divorce Rate	2.2 divorces per 1,000 population
Births Outside Marriage (1994)	37.2 per 100 births
Remarriages	34.1% of marriages involve at least one spouse who was previously married

Source: Bélanger, 1999: 20-23, 38; Bélanger and Dumas 1998: 15-17, 23; Dumas and Bélanger, 1997: 20.

families. At the same time, marriage to one person for life is becoming less feasible with the necessity to change jobs several times throughout one's working life, retrain, and perhaps move to a new location. Finding two new careers in the same place remains challenging, and maintaining long-distance relationships throughout these transitions is difficult even though it is more feasible than it used to be.

The stress involved in modern relationships and family life should not be seen as new or necessarily unfortunate. New ways of behaving typically evolve from stress and conflict. The two-earner family is in the process of encouraging less gendered practices in families. More options are now available for adults who do not see themselves as living within a heterosexual marriage or raising children. Children's lives in North America appear to be less stable than in the 1950s, but children still have many advantages not available to them in earlier eras or in other countries. Family and personal life is clearly changing, allowing more flexibility and choice for adults. How we evaluate these changes may vary with our age, gender, and cultural background, but certainly with our personal values.

In the following two chapters of Part One, we delve deeper into conceptualizations of family before discussing in Part Two the implications of historical changes in industrialization, migration, and work on family life. In Part Three, we examine empirical research and theories relating to family dynamics, sexuality, socialization, marital satisfaction, and caring for the elderly. In Part Four we discuss legal and policy changes, divorce, violence, and relations between families and the state. Part Five deals with the future of family life.

In the next chapter, Meg Luxton examines the various ways that social theorists have viewed and explained changing family life.

Suggested Readings

- Bélanger, Alain (1999). *Report of the Demographic Situation in Canada 1998-99*. Catalogue # 91-209-XPE. Ottawa: Ministry of Industry. This annual report from Statistics Canada includes a variety of statistics about families and population trends in Canada.
- Canadian Social Trends* (Catalogue 11-008-XPE). Ottawa. This journal from Statistics Canada includes articles about social trends written in everyday language.
- Jamieson, Lynn (1998). *Intimacy: Personal Relationships in Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Jamieson examines the research on families to question the thesis that relationships in “post-modern” society now involve more sharing of our innermost selves. She concludes that intimate relationships are still fundamentally shaped by power, gender, and economic considerations.
- McDaniel, Susan A. and Lorne Tepperman (2000). *Close Relations: An Introduction to the Sociology of the Families*. Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice Hall Allyn and Bacon Canada. An introductory textbook to family studies, designed for a Canadian audience.
- Vanier Institute of the Family (VIF) (2000). *Profiling Canadian Families II*. Ottawa: VIF.

Web Resources



- Statistics Canada in Ottawa provides a wide range of census documents and statistics relating to families and households: www.statcan.ca
- Vanier Institute of the Family in Ottawa is a privately funded organization providing educational material, news items, and research on Canadian families. They also publish a magazine called *Transition*: www.vifamily.ca