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Have Income, Will Marry

A recent study, published in the *Canadian Studies in Population*, added its voice to the debate about marriage's falling popularity and how it relates to women's rising education and labour force involvement – a debate fuelled largely within the socio-economic literature, by reactions to Nobel Prize winner Gary Becker's celebrated *Treatise on the Family*, published in 1981.

According to Becker, the attraction of marriage lies in the complementary roles played by men and women in the traditional, male breadwinner type of family. Women's rising wages and labour force participation, coupled with falling fertility, make this sexual division of labour within families less advantageous, and reduce the appeal of marriage.

Zenaida Ravanera and Fernando Rajulton find the opposite to be true in their study of marriage in Canada during the 1990s - higher earnings make women **more** rather than less likely to marry. Using Statistic Canada's Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) data, accessed at the UWO Research Data Centre, these researchers examined how education and family background, work and income influence the marriage patterns of young Canadian men and women over a six-year period.

They found that investment in education was central to the probability of later age at marriage. Although approximately 10% of Canadians still marry young, early marriage is significantly less common among young men and women who continue their education, particularly postsecondary education.

	Age Group in 1992			Total
	17-19	20-22	23-25	
Men				
%	10.6	26.0	39.2	23.0
Weighted N	527	411	324	1262
Women				
%	8.1	26.2	36.4	22.9
Weighted N	469	462	404	1335

Source: SLID Panel 1

For men and women in their mid twenties, income takes over from education as the most important economic factor in the decision to marry: the higher their income the more likely they are to marry.

These findings are more in line with hypotheses put forward by opponents of Becker's thesis, such as Valerie Oppenheimer, a sociologist at the University of California at Berkeley. Oppenheimer starts from a very different, more "modern" view of marriage: a union between equals, where both partners are able to fulfill the crucial earning *and* caring roles and can benefit from the extra security and flexibility this interdependence gives.

In this "symmetrical" style of marriage, economic factors work the same for men and women. Improved education will delay marriage for women as it does for men, but it will also make them more likely to marry. The better job prospects and earnings that result from education will increase a woman's desirability as a marriage partner, as it does a man's.

This theory reflects the Canadian experience more closely than Becker's does. Clearly, young Canadians are moving away from the traditional, complementary family type towards a more symmetrical one in which husbands and wives do approximately the same amount of paid and unpaid work. As the authors hasten to point out, however, this move is far from complete, and may reflect expectations of young couples rather than the reality.

Summary by Heather Juby, Knowledge Transfer Officer of the Research Data Centre National Coordinating Committee, based on the paper: Ravanera, Zenaida R. and Fernando Rajulton. 2007. Changes in Economic Status and Timing of Marriage of Young Canadians. *Canadian Studies in Population*, 34(1): 49-67.

*Note: Data for this study came from the Panel 1 of Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID). The analysis was conducted at the UWO Regional Statistics Canada Research Data Centre. The Research Data Centre program is part of an initiative by Statistics Canada, SSHRC, CIHR and university consortia to strengthen Canada's social research capacity.