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Toward an HRSDC Family Research Framework

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**Toward an HRSDC Family
Research Framework**

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Executive Summary

Within the context of Human Resources and Social Development Canada's Knowledge Plan 2005-2008, this paper presents:

- an overview of recent changes in the family, their interpretation and implications;
- a proposed framework for research on families based on the concepts of "caring, earning, and learning," "the life course" and "constrained decision making";
- a summary of findings for each of the broad life course stages; and
- implications for policy considerations and for further research.

Family Change and Its Macro-Level Consequences

Like many Western countries, Canada has undergone two demographic transitions: a long-term change (from about 1870 to 1950), which brought smaller families and a more rapid change (from about 1960 to the present), known as the second demographic transition. This transition is characterized by a continuing trend of below replacement fertility, increasing age at marriage, a high divorce rate, the proliferation of common-law unions, an increasing proportion of births to non-married women and an increasing proportion of births to women at age 30 or older.

The second demographic transition has especially been linked to the increased flexibility in modes of entry and exit from families, increased variability across families, including the promotion of the values of diversity and tolerance, and promoting marriages and families as self-made rather than conforming to an external norm. Some implications for individuals and society arising from this transition include delays in establishing durable relationships, as people first need to "find themselves," fewer children and the acceptance of having no children, as other things take precedence over children as a means of self-fulfilment, difficulties in relying on the family as a basis for social cohesion, given the flexibility, variability and diversity in families, and greater difficulty in formulating policies that support families as a means of enhancing individual well-being, since different kinds of families have different interests. Awareness of these changes can point to certain at-risk groups, including persons in less stable families, those not living in a family context or lacking the support of kin due to unavailability or distance.

Constrained Decision Making in Caring, Earning and Learning Over the Life Course

For the framework, we propose the use of the concepts of caring, earning and learning as these represent the core activities of families, the structure of the life course as it represents an obvious context within which to view family questions and constrained decision making as it applies to various family-related behaviour.

The general theoretical orientation based on the tension between caring and earning provides a useful way to understand much of contemporary family life and family policy.

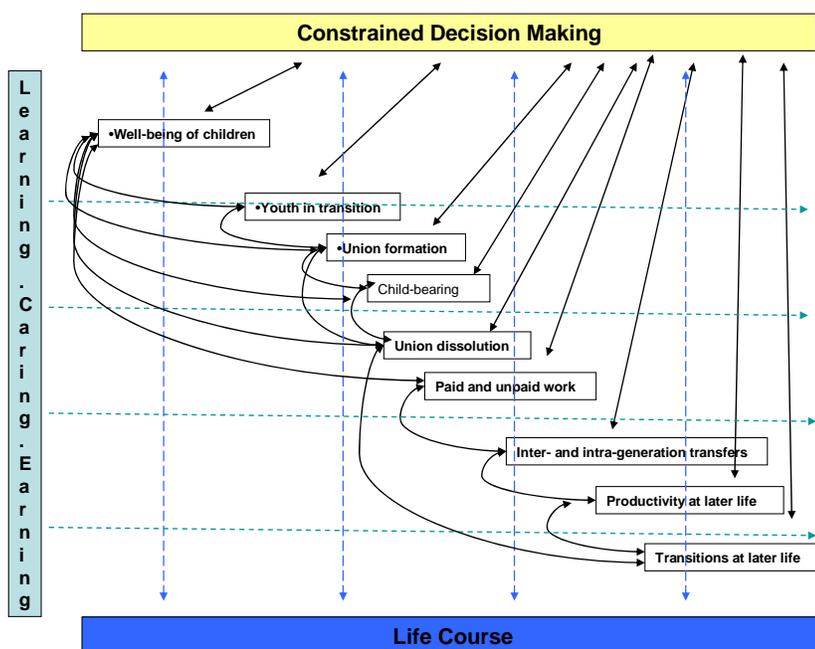
As earning and caring are both forms of productive work, they need to fit together as a means of supporting families. Gender can be highlighted in the analysis, including the varying time-use patterns of men and women over the life course, and the unbalanced responsibility for the meshing of production and reproduction. The concepts of earning and caring are tightly connected as a worker needs care to earn, and needs to earn to be able to provide care; families having difficulties in one of these domains typically have difficulties in the other. Earning and caring pay particular attention to economic questions and maintaining life, but learning is also a central activity of families. It includes learning the skills needed to earn and to care and passing on the cultural values and ethics through which resource sharing and caring for each other occur in families and beyond families.

The basic stages of the family life cycle have become inadequate to describe families transformed by cohabitation, divorce, post-marital cohabitation and remarriage. In place of a family lifecycle, a life-course perspective provides a more appropriate structure to study individuals, typically embedded within family or families. A life-course perspective considers the importance of timing of transitions, particularly the entry into and exits from family and work roles; trajectories, or series of linked transitions across successive years, wherein early life transitions impact on subsequent ones; and the influence of historical, social and cultural contexts on life-course transitions and trajectories. Its concept of linked lives provides a basis for examining the dependence and transfers within families defined by common residence, within broader extended family networks and in communities and society. It provides a structure within which to consider learning, earning and caring, the nature and relative importance of which vary over the life course.

In terms of policy issues, consideration of caring, earning and learning over the life course is particularly useful for identification of persons now at risk or likely to be at risk later in life, determining when interventions would be most required, and providing a structure for comparing earning and caring across generations, gender, space and culture.

The third component of the proposed framework is an overarching decision-making theory that considers the constraints at both the micro and macro levels involved in behaviours related to life-course events, including those associated with education, work and family. It retains the central economic notion of constrained choice, recognizing that humans are not able to choose anything they want but invariably must choose within constraints. Our options are limited, often in ways that go far beyond the limits suggested by the economic model.

The concepts of caring, earning and learning, the structure of the life course, and the theory of constrained decision making provide a framework through which research findings could be organized. It could also be useful in structuring plans for future research on families.



Trends in Caring and Earning Over the Life Course

Family transformations have affected everyone, but impacts vary by life-course stage.

Children benefit from many of the behaviours of adults, especially later childbearing, fewer children and dual incomes, but they sometimes suffer from the greater flexibility of adults in restructuring their relationships. In cases of lone- and step-parenthood, many of the difficulties faced by children relate to diminished transfers of financial, human and social capital. The differential investment in children may lead to greater disparity in the parenting and life chances of children. On the one hand are children born to parents who married late, and brought up in intact families by parents with a high education and income. On the other, are children born to women at a young age, raised with inadequate resources and with fathers absent.

Youth have been delaying the transition to adulthood, as seen in an older age at leaving the parental home, a longer period of education, later entry into regular work and later entry into union and parenthood. Not only have these life-course transitions been delayed, they are also more fluid (or less precisely defined) and more variable from case to case, making it less possible to speak of a standard model of movement into adulthood. There are two contrasting views of marriage: one model based on complementary roles and the other, a career-entry model based on two earners. In the latter model, the disadvantaged economic status of young workers and recent entrants to the labour force, is a crucial matter. The delayed entry into marriage could be attributed to the complexity of achieving two rewarding jobs and a stable relationship.

Cohabitations take on a variety of forms ranging from those that are equivalent to marriage to those that might better be seen as an alternative to living single. Cohabitation delays marriage, it is twice as likely as first marriage to end in separation and the level of childbearing is lower than in marriage.

In **mid-adulthood**, there are trends associated with earning and caring. For instance, while the trends in labour force participation for women and men are converging, parenthood still has the opposite average effects: women with children at home are less likely to work full time and the younger the child the less likely they are to be working full time; men are more likely to work full time if they have children at home. In contrast to the view that an efficient household would involve at most one person in the market and another in home production, many couples seek to optimize on considerations other than efficiency, like reducing vulnerability to risk or maximizing on mutuality. Several factors push men toward more domestic work, including the rising women's share of family incomes, normative changes in the direction of equality and sharing, and the family changes of later marriages, more cohabitation and more remarriages prompting alternate models of the division of work.

Other family trends, more common at mid-adulthood, relate to union dissolution. The determinants of marriage dissolution include both instrumental and expressive dimensions, that is, a decrease in the functions fulfilled by families has meant that there are fewer economic or other practical ties holding families together, and spouses expect more from families in terms of intimacy and interpersonal affect. The average economic consequences of union dissolution are declines in adjusted family income for women, particularly for those with children, and gains for men. Average gains are higher for those forming new unions after the separation, with men more likely to do so.

As for the **elderly**, they may be viewed as those in early old age and late old age. The delays in early life transitions imply that the participation in the labour force of persons in their 60s and 70s may need to be extended. This may include removing incentives to early retirement, along with forms of reduced responsibility. Informally, it may involve more orientation to caring and volunteer work. In the **fourth** age, disability and chronic conditions call for less involvement in production, but persons at these ages are not necessarily dependent. Some remain able to care for others, in their family and beyond. The dependent elderly are mostly taken care of by their family, despite the presence of public and institutional care facilities, but the availability and distance of kin are important considerations.

Policy Issues

Considering the three ways of handling risks — individual self-sufficiency, family support and a social safety net — a central question is the sharing between families, the state and the private sector in the care of people who are dependent because of age, disability or health. The state seeks to encourage family support of dependants and to encourage self-reliance but, the persons who look after dependants within families will

have less ability to be self-sufficient in the labour market. The challenge is to assist individuals and families, but in ways that also maximize self-reliance.

As we opt for a society with fewer inter-spousal dependencies and more equality between men and women, it is useful to take note of, and possibly aim to change, legal provisions that remain based on a traditional breadwinner model. Some issues that may be worth looking at are specific policies related to balancing work and family life, support for lone parents, intergenerational equity and the role of the private sector. More importantly, because the continuing trend of below replacement fertility has significant implications for society, policies that support childbearing deserve serious consideration.

Family Research: Themes, Priorities and Research Styles

Despite the advances made in family research, there is a need to understand the processes and mechanisms involved in the decisions we make.

- What are the goals, emotions, thought processes, expectations, social pressures, etc. that drive us?
- To what extent do we really choose our life paths, and to what extent are we programmed by family, peers, churches, government, popular culture and the media?
- To what extent are our choices severely limited by poverty, dysfunctional families or the labour market?

Answers to these and other questions require empirical research that will supplement and complement the sample survey research, but also the development of theories and models that can explicate underlying processes and mechanisms not easily captured in empirical data or statistical models. We identify important family research priorities in the last section of the paper.

1. Introduction

Our objective is to help evolve a family research framework at Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) that would inform the development of a medium-term research strategy on families. After setting the context within relevant aspects of *Knowledge Plan 2005-2008: A Discussion Paper*, we proceed to discuss:

- an overview of the recent changes in the family, seen mainly as a second demographic transition, and their macro-level consequences;
- the concepts of “caring, earning and learning,” “the life course” and “constrained decision making” to provide a conceptual and structural framework that shifts the focus from the macro-level to families and individuals;
- a summary of available research including comments on areas in need of further research for each of the broad life-course stages; and
- general policy considerations and specific family-related policy issues.

We conclude with some practical considerations about family research including a multi-disciplinary approach, data, methods and styles of social research.

Knowledge Plan 2005-2008: A Discussion Paper

The Knowledge Plan 2005-2008 seeks to “increase our understanding of the factors, determinants and evolution of Canadian’s well-being (from perspectives of material, personal and belonging) and their socio-economic participation (in learning, the labour market or economy, family life and community life)” (p. 5). One of the seven parts of the research agenda is entitled “Challenges for Canadian Families” where families are seen as “an essential building block of Canadian society, contributing to both individual and social well-being” and serving fundamental social and economic roles (“reproduction; parenting; nurturing and providing support for family members; caring for children, seniors and the disabled; earning income and consuming goods; and participation in communities and society” (p.21)). Family questions are thus related to other parts of this research agenda, especially the sections on child development, seniors and persons with disabilities. Since the life course relates considerably to family questions, the section on well-being and participation over the life course can be related to the learning, caring and earning activities of families, which have consequences for “social and economic inclusion.” Social cohesion can be discussed in terms of families as potential links between individuals and communities, and thus the relevance to the section on “inclusive communities, the voluntary sector and the social economy” (p. 33).

In the section on key knowledge gaps associated with the research agenda on Canadian families, the Knowledge Plan uses the following sub-titles (pp. 23-24):

- social and economic influences on family formation, family well-being and roles;
- income adequacy and low income;
- work–life balance, family roles and life transitions;

- parenting and intergenerational transfers;
- caregiving; and
- community participation.

While this Knowledge Plan expresses good coverage of available research, we take another look at the literature on families to suggest a framework for analysis, highlight research gaps, methodological and data issues, and policy considerations. Further discussions of these questions are important in view of HRSDC's mission to promote the well-being and participation of individuals and families, and in view of the key social and economic roles that families assume.

2. Family Change and Its Macro-Level Consequences

Changes in the Family: A Second Demographic Transition

Family change could be thought of in terms of two demographic transitions: a long-term change (from about 1870 to 1950), which decreased birth rates and a more rapid change (from about 1960 to the present), which increased flexibility in marital relationships (Lesthaeghe 1995; Beaujot 2000, pp. 85-96).

The first transition involved a change in the economic costs and benefits of children, along with a cultural environment that made it more appropriate to control family size. It also entailed an important change in surviving children, as mortality steadily decreased, such that a given number of surviving children required ever fewer births. In effect, this transition changed family dynamics surrounding fertility from an emphasis on child quantity to a focus on child quality.

The second transition focusses on changes with regard to the entry and exit from relationships, which show greater flexibility manifest especially through cohabitation and divorce. Besides this flexibility, the family change has involved greater diversity, and relationships that are defined to a greater extent by the partners themselves (*projet de couple*) rather than corresponding largely to an external norm. Lesthaeghe (1995) proposed that this second transition consist of three stages. The first stage, from about 1960 to 1970 involved the end of the baby boom, the end of the trend toward younger ages at marriage, and the beginning of the rise in divorces. The second stage from 1970 to 1985 saw the growth of common-law unions and eventually of children in cohabiting unions. The third stage since 1985 includes a plateau in divorce, an increase in post-marital cohabitation (and consequently a decline in remarriage), and a plateau in fertility due in part to higher proportions of births after age 30.

Table 1: Summary Statistics on Family Change, Canada, 1941-2002

	1941	1951	1961	1971	1976	1981	1986	1991	1996	2002
Total fertility rate (average births per woman)	2.8	3.5	3.8	2.1	1.8	1.7	1.6	1.7	1.6	1.5
Median age at first marriage										
Brides	23.0	22.0	21.1	21.3	21.6	22.5	23.9	25.1	26.3	27.0
Grooms	26.3	24.8	24.0	23.5	23.7	24.6	25.8	27.0	28.3	29.0
Divorces per 100,000 married couples	--	180	180	600	990	1,180	1,302	1,235	1,222	1,050
Common-law couples as percent of all couples	--	--	--	--	0.7	6.4	8.2	11.2	13.7	16.4
Births to non-married women as percent of all births	4.0	3.8	4.5	9.0	--	16.7	18.8	28.6	36.3	36.6
Births to women aged 30+ as percent of all births	35.6	36.2	34.1	21.6	19.6	23.6	29.2	36.0	43.7	47.4
Lone parent families as percent of all families with children	9.8	9.8	11.4	13.2	14.0	16.6	18.8	20.0	22.3	25.0

Notes: 1. For 1941-71 births to non-married women are designated as illegitimate births.

2. Data for 2001 are shown as 2002 for common-law couples and lone parent families.

Source: Beaujot and Kerr (2004, p.212).

Table 1 presents some statistics that capture these trends in the Canadian case. In terms of the first stage, the average births per woman, as measured by the total fertility rate, had reached a peak of 3.9 in 1957, declined to 2.2 in 1971, and has been relatively stable at about 1.7 to 1.5 births per woman over the whole period 1980 to 2002. The median age at first marriage declined over this century to reach a low of just over 21 years for brides and 23 years for grooms in the early 1970s, then increased to ages 27 and 29 for women and men respectively in 2002. The law permitting divorces on grounds other than adultery dates only from 1968. Per 100,000 married couples, there were under 200 divorces in each year over the period 1951-1966 compared to 990 in 1976 and 1,050 in 2002. There had been a long-term increase in separation and divorce with a substantial jump starting in the 1960s. While most marriages remain intact until death, there is greater looseness in the definition of relationships so marriage is no longer forever.

Turning to the second stage, analysis of 1976 Census data shows less than one percent of couples cohabiting. By 1995, the General Social Survey found that among persons born between 1951 and 1970, two out of five have lived in a cohabiting union, and over half of first unions taking place since 1985 have been cohabitations rather than marriages (Dumas and Bélanger 1997, pp. 135, 139). The 2001 Census determined that 16.4 percent of couples were cohabiting.

The proportion of births occurring to women who are not married, and who are largely cohabiting, increased from nine percent in 1971 to 36.6 percent in 2002. Previously, cohabitation was mostly premarital relationships; currently, many post-marital

relationships are cohabiting unions. Along with separation and divorce, cohabitation has become a key indicator of family change.

For the third stage, we find that by 1990, half of divorced persons aged 30 to 39, and more than a third of those aged 40 to 49, were in cohabiting relationships (Dumas and Péron 1992, p. 50). In 2001, over half of step-families involved cohabiting partners (Le Bourdais and Lapierre-Adamcyk 2004). While fertility has remained relatively stable at 1.7 to 1.5 births per woman over the period 1981-2002, the proportion of births occurring to women aged 30 and over increased from 19.6 percent in 1976 to 47.4 percent in 2002.

These changes in births, marriage, cohabitation and divorce have brought fewer children, but also a higher proportion of children not living with both biological parents. In particular, lone-parent families as a proportion of all families with children increased from 11.4 percent in 1961 to 25.0 percent in 2001.

These data also confirm the uniqueness of the 1950s as a period between the two transitions. Various authors have observed that this was a period when life was family centred. Not only was this the peak of the baby boom, but it was also a period of marriage rush, as marriage occurred at young ages and high proportions of persons married at least once in their lives. In North America, this was an era of unusual prosperity and economic optimism, which allowed the maximum number of individuals to realize traditional norms about marriage and the family. It was possibly a "golden age of the family," where many families corresponded to the ideal of domesticity, especially in the suburbs, and consequently there was less variability (Skolnick 1987, pp. 6-16).

Subsequent research has made it clear that not all was ideal in this golden age. Isolated housewives in particular experienced a lack of self-worth, referred to by Friedan (1963, p. 15) as the "problem with no name." Since the task of maintaining the home had been assigned to women, men became less competent at the social skills needed to nourish and maintain relationships (Goldscheider and Waite 1991, p. 19). The idealism of the time also introduced blinders regarding some realities of family life, including violence and abuse. Given a general denial that such things could ever occur in families, there was little recourse for the victims of violence. There was also a lack of autonomy, especially for women, to pursue routes other than the accepted path (Veevers 1980). Childless couples were considered selfish, single persons were seen as deviants, working mothers were considered to be harming their children, and single women who became pregnant were required either to marry or to give up the child to preserve the integrity of the family (Kersten and Kersten 1991; Wilson 1990, p. 99).

The restriction on alternative life styles did imply few single-parent families. In hindsight, there were pent-up problems that were preparing the way for the second transition that started in the 1960s.

Family Variability and Uniformity

A common theme in the literature is the greater variability in family patterns. The varied forms of entry and exit from relationships, having or not having children, and in the timing of childbearing, represent many differences across the family life trajectories of individuals. However, it is useful to recognize some elements of uniformity, sometimes more uniformity than in the past. At ages 30 to 54 there is a strong commonality of experience involving living in a relationship, having children and working, and little change in the propensity to live alone (Beaujot 1995). Households now mostly consist of either one family with no additional persons, or one person living alone (Péron et al. 1999). Living in non-family households occurs mainly for the elderly who have previously lived in families, and for the young who are between families. The high predominance of family living is also visible when considering the extent of cohabitation. In sum, the main changes have seen more families formed through common-law unions, lone parenthood and blended families, while the proportion that are two-parent families based on marriage has declined. Nonetheless, by age 20, 76 percent of children from the 1961-63 birth cohort have known no other than two-parent intact families (Péron et al. 1999). In addition, based on data gathered through the 1990 General Social Survey, 84 percent of married men and women have had no previous union (Péron et al. 1999, pp. 107,161).

Macro-Level Implications of Family Change

At the population level, the second demographic transition is linked with powerful demographic changes: population aging, increased diversity and changes in family structures. In particular, this demographic transition brings low fertility and aging, more diverse families, increased internal migration and a greater contribution of immigration to population change. These demographic and family changes point to certain groups that are at risk, including persons in less stable families and persons who are not living in a family context, many of whom are separated by great physical distance from members of their kinship network. Greater diversity in family experiences implies variability across individuals, be they adults or children.

Lesthaeghe and Neels (2002) argued that the second transition has undermined social cohesion. Given the greater importance accorded to individual autonomy, the second demographic transition is characterized by a weaker role for families in establishing social ties, a diversity of family types instead of the one-family model based on intact marriages and childbearing largely seen as a means of individual fulfillment.

The most significant social trend linked with the lower fertility and delayed reproduction of the second demographic transition is population aging. When the trend toward low fertility began, issues of aging and eventual population decline were not seen as particularly significant, partly because of the long time frame involved. Canada's below-replacement fertility levels were first evident in the early 1970s. With relatively few elderly and a large number of people in their reproductive years, the population was still growing. Nonetheless, a population with a fertility rate of below two births per woman

will eventually have more deaths than births. In Canada's case, this is likely to occur sometime shortly after 2025 (Statistics Canada 2001b). While immigration helps to postpone population decline, and at plausibly high levels, it could avoid it altogether for a long time to come, immigration has relatively (i.e., compared to fertility) little effect on age structure and cannot prevent population aging.

The implications of population aging are complex and multi-faceted. Lutz and his colleagues (2003) identified a number of concerns related to aging and population decline including challenges to social security and health systems, more difficult productivity gains, strained relations among generations who are contributors or receivers of public pension programs and diminished social cohesion if societies have difficulty incorporating larger numbers of immigrants. There are also issues associated with caregiving to a large proportion of the population, including the gendered nature of caring activities, where women typically carry a greater share of the burden.

3. Constrained Decision Making in Caring, Earning and Learning Over the Life Course

We propose to join the concepts of caring, earning and learning, the structure of the life course and an overarching theory of constrained decision making to construct a framework for research on families. Each component is discussed and then put with the others in Figure 1 locating the various topics of family research within the framework. The section concludes with a discussion of policy options in relation to caring, earning and learning over the life course.

Defining Families

A family could be defined as a group of persons related by descent from a common ancestor (“blood”), by marriage (or its equivalent) or by some legal or cultural fiction (anthropologists use the term “fictive kinship”), with the latter including adoption and god-parenthood.

Given the diversity across families, definitions become difficult. The “economic family” as defined by Statistics Canada for purposes of data collection, consists of two or more people related by blood, marriage, cohabitation or adoption, and residing together. While it is difficult to define families in other ways for purposes of data collection, we need to recognize that family relations go beyond households. Sometimes persons in family relationships live apart much of the time. Milan and Peters (2003) used the expression “living apart together.”

Instead of defining families through *what families are*, the definition can focus on *what families do* (Daly 2005). Smith (1997) referred to families as co-ordinating the unco-ordinated. The co-ordination of activities in families includes caring for each other, earning a living and learning to acquire the necessary human, social and cultural capital. But, while focussing on activities describes a family, the basic definition of family need not be entirely discarded; otherwise the term loses much of its specific meaning. A fast-food outlet co-ordinates the activities of the unco-ordinated, but we would not generally call it a family except by analogy.

Fox and Luxton (1991) defined families as relationships that bring people together daily to share resources for the sake of caring for children and each other. One respondent in a survey of “unconventional families” defined families as “taking care of each other and promoting each other’s well-being” (Fox and Fumia 2001, p. 465).

In some censuses, families or households have been defined as people eating out of the same pot. This is an interesting definition since eating together is a basic form of sharing and caring for each other. In addition, the food needs to be obtained and prepared, important activities that contribute to caring. The skills necessary to earn a living and maintain a household need to be learned. As circumstances change, learning is a lifelong activity, including acquiring skills and the cultural capital of values and attitudes. The

specific arrangements of caring, earning and learning imply much variety across families, especially if one includes the culture and traditions developed in families, to the point that one could consider each family unique. Nonetheless, families can usefully be defined as *small groups of kin devoted to the organization of caring, earning and learning*.

Thus, a central activity of families involves sharing and transfers. The human species is unique in terms of caring that is not limited to immature individuals, but including those who are not self-sufficient. As with societies and communities, the activities of families include distribution of benefits within the group (McMullin 2004, p. 49). Many things result from the basic fact that consumption is needed over the life course, but some individuals have more productive abilities than others. Educational systems, investments and banking, as well as pensions, can be related to this basic constraint in the human life course. Families play a central role in the redistribution from production to consumption. This includes the sharing aspect of families, but also the importance of families to learning the skills of production and the norms of redistribution.

Families and Earning, Caring and Learning

We propose a conceptual framework that focusses on key activities of families: activities that are relevant over the life course. These activities of caring, earning and learning are of central importance to the well-being of individuals, families and societies.

Defining Earning, Caring and Learning

Earning is used here broadly to include any market or non-market activity through which income or wealth is obtained. That is, besides market work, earning includes such things as inheritance, and profits from investments and pensions. Clearly, these are not the only means through which individuals and families obtain valuable resources. That is, there are other ways in which families obtain resources and share these to sustain and promote the well-being of individuals and families. The focus on resources obtained directly or indirectly through the market highlights the importance of earning in capitalist social arrangements, and of alternate means of economic support for families that have financial difficulties, be they due to age, disability or social exclusion.

We see **caring** as the central way through which families are defined. Families are groups of people who care for each other. Daly (2005, pp. 8-10) observed that

care is the essence of what it means to be family...we are both recipients and providers of care when we live in families...the common denominator in all families is that care is expressed and received...in whatever form they take, families are society's anchor for the provision of care.

This includes child care, elder care, housework and, in effect, all unpaid work. However, while this is the way it should be and usually is, there are many exceptions such as cases of child, spouse and elder abuse.

Volunteering and community participation is typically caring work that is unpaid and that goes beyond the family. In social settings where there is a lack of available kin, neighbours and friends often play caring roles, ensuring that children make it safely home from school, providing care in an emergency situation. Caring includes more than care giving or caring for, it includes caring about someone's well-being, and resource sharing within and beyond the household in taking care (Daly 2003). That is, caring includes "feelings of affection and responsibility combined with actions that provide responsively for an individual's needs or well-being" (McMullin 2004, p. 141).

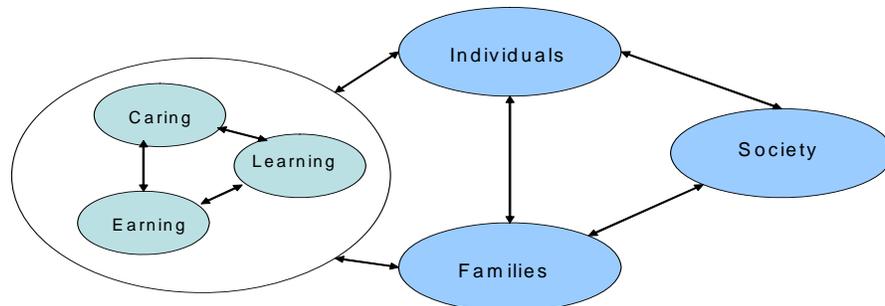
Earning and caring pay particular attention to economic questions and maintaining life, but *learning* is also a central activity of families. This is a focus for the young, but it also occurs over the life course. It includes learning the skills needed to earn and to care, or acquiring human capital, but it also includes passing on the cultural values and ethics through which resource sharing and caring for each other occur in families. That is, it includes the development of human capital for earning and the development of human capability to care (Daly 2005, p. 11). Another advantage of the concept of learning is that it places more importance on the activities of children and youth in families, and gives them agency, or more concretely, important roles and responsibilities. Further, the concept of lifelong learning can include stages where one person is looking after earning while the other upgrades skills to become a stronger earner at another stage.

Earning, Caring, and Learning as a Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework based on caring, earning and learning (or production, reproduction and passing on the culture, expressed at individual and family levels) encompasses public and private spheres and does not presume a specific division of labour between men and women. Families, as emotional and economic units, can be seen as coming together in instrumental and expressive activities, with caring for each other, learning and earning a living as their core activities. The general theoretical orientation based on the tension between caring and earning provides a useful way to understand much of contemporary family life and family policy. This includes how families interact with other agents, especially kin networks, community and government. Families receive support from society in terms of caring, earning and learning, and they also participate in communal activities that build social capital and maintain society.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the concepts of caring, earning and learning are tightly connected and their outcomes are manifested in individuals, families and society, forming a system with feedbacks; that is, when one part is strengthened, all others are strengthened as well. The worker needs care and regeneration to be able to earn. We need to earn to have the wherewithal to provide care. Learning is important to be able to earn, and the income from earning is necessary to learning. These activities are also linked over generations, through various transfers in care, in income and in learning or human resources.

Figure 1: Interrelations of Activities, Individuals, Families and Society



Families that suffer typically have trouble in one of these domains. And given the tight mutual links described above, those having difficulties in one domain typically have difficulties in the others. Thus, measuring the risks associated with caring, earning and learning is a useful way to understand family problems, to analyze the broader social and systemic bases for the difficulties, and to look for areas of policy intervention.

As further elaborated in Box 1, the evolution of the human life course - including a long period of juvenile dependency, menopause that stops reproduction long before death and a long life expectancy - mold families and societies in ways that support production, reproduction and distribution (Kaplan et al. 1998; Draper 1998). These features of the human life course indicate the importance of both reproductive partnerships, and broader kin or social networks to the maintenance of life and the development of culture.

Box 1: Evolution of Human Life Course

In his theory of the evolution of the human life course, Kaplan (1997) makes the case that, compared to other primates and mammals, three distinctive features characterize human life histories: (1) an exceptionally long life span, (2) an extended period of juvenile dependence, and (3) support of reproduction by older post reproductive individuals. He proposes that the ecological niche in which the human species evolved, obtaining nutrient-dense but difficult-to-acquire foods, has meant that “effective adult foraging requires an extended developmental period during which production at young ages is sacrificed for increased productivity later in life.” In this model of the major life course tradeoffs, investments in foraging efficiency have evolved along with mortality reduction and the age pattern of investments in reproduction. That is, greater efficiency in production is achieved at the expense of a longer period of childhood and adolescent dependence. Productivity then continues over an extended life span, beyond the ages at which reproduction takes place. This post-reproductive productivity permits transfers to the younger generation as they enter adult ages, and thus supports their reproduction

Calculations of food production and consumption suggest that, if young adults are reproducing, thus necessitating food transfer to the next generation, this young “nuclear family” is often not nutritionally self-sufficient. It will depend on transfers from its embeddedness in a larger extended family or social group. Sometimes this takes the form of offspring living with grandparents for given periods. Thus even at typical ages for starting reproduction, given the additional transfers of reproduction itself, there is dependence on older post-reproductive individuals who remain productive.

In effect, our major institutions are built around the fact that consumption occurs throughout life while production does not. This lack of congruence between production and consumption, and the consequent periods of dependency over the life course, underlies not only families as a means of transfer and support, but kin networks, and in modern societies the very banking system, the need for savings, investments, and insurance, both private and collective. Stated differently, the structural constraints on the life course include not only consumption and production, and the associated opportunities and constraints, but also societal structures, policies and regulations (Corijn 2001).

Besides helping to understand the age at life course transitions, this perspective on the evolution of the human life course helps in interpreting the emphasis on quality of reproduction, which has been furthered in modern skill-based economies. It also suggests that quality reproduction depends on transfers from persons in the post-reproductive stage, through either family or social mechanisms. It could be that our institutions have become too focussed on supporting dependents at later ages, including personal and collective investments to support a long retirement period. To ensure that younger persons can become reproductive, we may need to work out better transfers toward the young at ages beyond the teen years, and a longer period of post-reproductive productivity, instead of early retirement and a long period of dependency late in life. Aging societies are tempted to pay particular attention to the aged, which can undermine the very potential for reproduction.

Source: Excerpt from Beaujot (2004).

Life-Course Paradigm

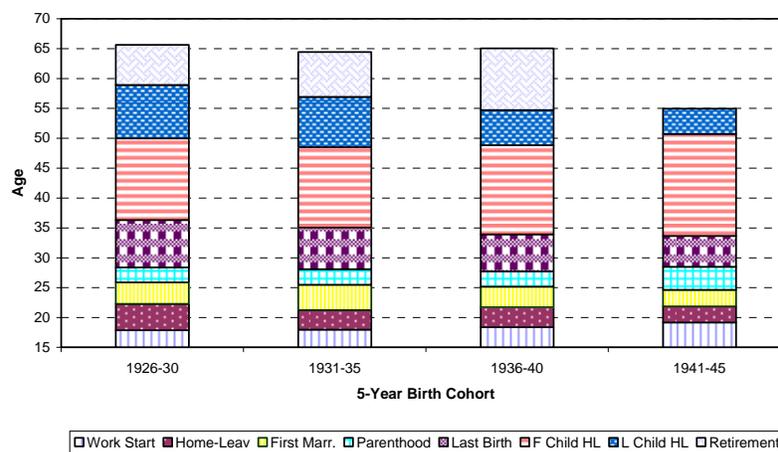
Family Life Cycle

The concept of family life cycle captured the stages of a modern nuclear family from its formation through its dissolution and, until the 1970s, was used as a structural framework for analysis of families in various disciplines including demography, sociology and psychology. The basic stages of family life cycle included family *formation* typically

through marriage, its *extension* with childbearing, *contraction* when children leave home and *dissolution* through death of a spouse.

For the older cohorts, it is possible to view their life course through the lens of a nuclear family cycle. Many in these older cohorts formed their families before the rapid changes in the 1960s. Using retrospective data collected through the 2001 General Social Survey of Family History, for example, Ravanera et al. (2005a) examined the timing of family life of Canadians born between 1926 and 1945. As can be seen in Figure 2, a man born in 1926-30 typically started work at about 18 years, left his parent's home at 22, married at age 26, became a parent at 28 and continued having children until age 36. His first child left home when he was age 50 and his last child left when he was 59. He retired from work at almost 66 years old. A man born 15 year later (in 1941-45) started work a year later at 19 years but experienced the other family life events at younger ages so his nest had emptied by 55, or four years earlier than that of a man born 15 years earlier.

**Figure 2: Median Age at Life Course Events, Males, Canada
2001 General Social Survey**



Source: Ravanera et al. (2005a).

The median age at retirement could not as yet be estimated as members of the 1941-45 cohort were about 56 to 60 years old in 2001. One main factor that changed the life-course timing is the decrease in the number of children, which shortened the period between the start of parenthood and the birth of the last child (or, the completed extension period, to use a family cycle term).

The concept of family life cycle, however, has become inadequate to describe families transformed by cohabitation, divorce, post-marital cohabitation and remarriage. No dominant family form has replaced the nuclear family type; rather, families are formed and re-formed by conditions confronting individuals and families. This is particularly true for young cohorts still in the process of going through the early phases of their life course. Charlotte Hohn (1987) identified as many as 40 types of family life cycles to take

into account variations as to presence of children, marital dissolution and remarriages. The concept of family life cycle has itself become inappropriate as some types do not in fact constitute a family as commonly understood, for example, the life cycle of a person who never married and never had children.

In place of family life cycle, a life-course perspective proposed by Glen Elder (1978) provides a more appropriate structure to study individuals, typically embedded within family or families. A life-course framework necessarily focusses on individuals, but brings in the family at various stages of a person's life. While the simple concept of family life cycle no longer applies, an individual goes through (some or all) the stages of family life including family formation and dissolution.

Timing Over the Life Course

As Hareven noted (2000, p. 154),

three features of timing are central to the understanding of changes over the life course: first, the timing of transitions over an individual life path, particularly the balancing of individuals' entry into different family and work roles and their exits from these roles; second, the synchronization of individual transitions with collective family ones, and third, the cumulative impact of early life transitions as shaped by historical forces on subsequent ones. In all these areas, the pace and definitions of timing hinge upon the social and cultural context in which transitions occur.

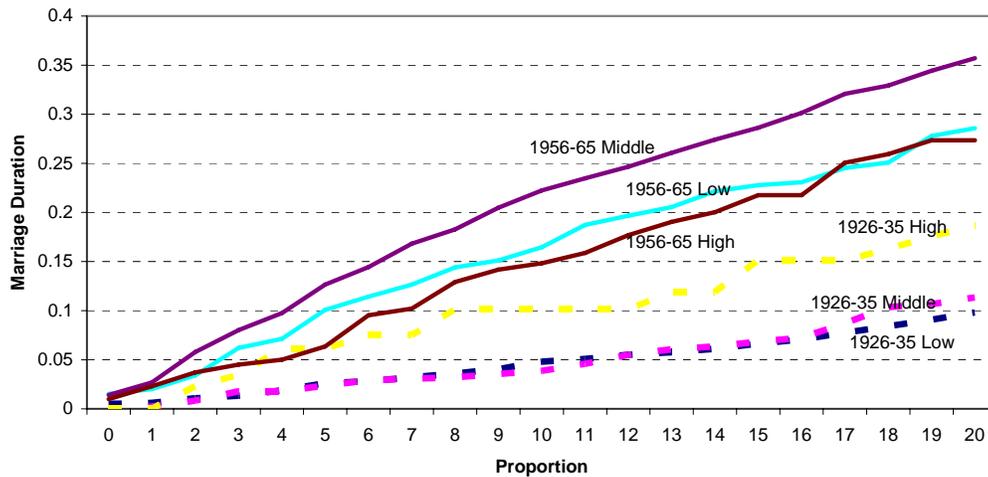
Until the mid-1970s, the trend in timing of individual life events was toward age homogeneity with, for example, modern youth experiencing greater uniformity and more routinization in the transition to adulthood compared to their forebears (Modell et al. 1976; Hogan 1982; Winsborough 1979). But this trend and the influence of norms and structures have changed. In a recent study of age norms, Settersten and Hagestad (1996a,b) concluded that age prescriptions are no longer normative in that people perceive no major negative consequences for non-adherence to timetables. However, age structuring of society has by no means vanished (Setterstein 1997). Formal age rules and laws buttress age structuring with built-in sanctions governing the lives of children (e.g., age at entry to and exits from schools) and adults (for example, age at retirement) (Foner 1996). These are corroborated in a study of age variability in life-course transitions of Canadians, which shows that school completion, and for women, start of regular work have become more age homogenous (Ravanera et al. 2004). For family events, such as marriage and births of children, there was a move toward narrower age ranges in experience of events until the 1970s and subsequently, a widening of age ranges. Age at transition has become more heterogeneous and weakens the assertion in Foot and Stoffman's popular book, *Boom, Bust, and Echo* (1996, p. 2) that "demographics explain about two-thirds of everything," which is largely based on the assumption that cohorts go through various life events at roughly the same age. Besides the delays, the transitions of the early life course have become more variable across individuals and more fluid in terms of defining given transitions.

Even greater caution should be taken for forecasts based on later life events (say, home-leaving of children) for which age variability within cohorts is greater than in transitions in early life (say, first marriage or first birth).

That the occurrence and timing of life-course events hinge on the social and cultural context is best illustrated by the shift of divorce and cohabitation from socially unacceptable to being tolerated or acceptable. As Lesthaeghe (1995, p. 57) noted, there is “historical cumulativeness” to the second demographic transition in that the “changes have been prepared during earlier periods.” The changes in the earlier periods would have been manifested in the behaviour of the innovators in older birth cohorts (Ravanera et al. 2005b). These innovators would have belonged to higher social classes and had the social resources to go against cultural norms and the material resources to overcome some of the adverse outcomes of their behaviour. As the innovative behaviour becomes widespread and the old norms disappear, the differential by social status vanishes or gets reversed, which is detected in the behaviour of the younger cohorts. In the case of divorce, for example, while the number of divorces was small, women with high social status in the 1926-35 birth cohort have the highest probabilities of dissolving their marriage, whereas for the 1956-65 birth cohort (forming part of the baby boomers), it is the middle class women with the highest probabilities (see Figure 3).

A similar diffusion process seems to have happened to cohabitation (Ravanera et al. 2005b).

Figure 3: Cumulative Proportion of Marriage Dissolution by Duration, by Social Status, 1926-35 and 1956-65 Birth Cohorts, Women Who Married Directly



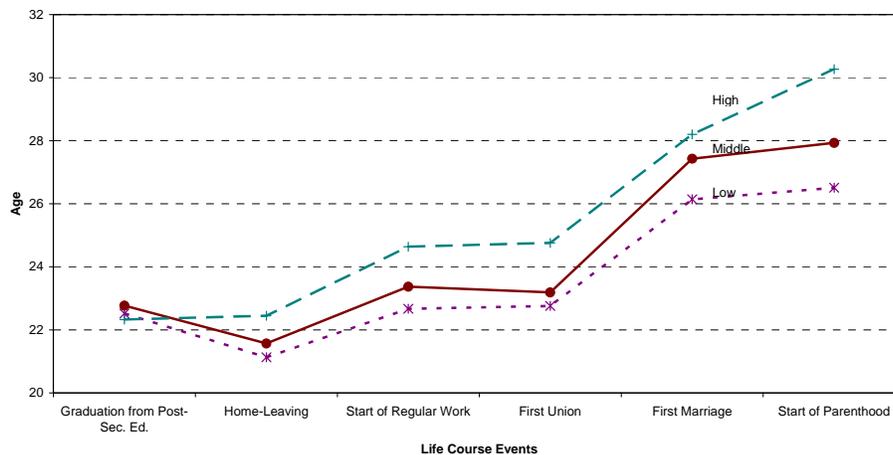
Source: Ravanera et al. (2005b).

Transition and Trajectories

Understanding changes in the life course involves examining transitions from one stage to another (or from one social role to another), particularly timing (as shown above). When multiple events are involved, life-course perspective uses the concept of trajectories or linked transitions across successive years (Elder 1985; Hagestad 1990; George 1993). In addition to culture and norms (as illustrated in the case of divorce above), transitions and trajectories are influenced by one's own characteristics and by societal conditions, such as labour market, resources in the communities and one's own family, all neatly described by Giele and Elder (1998) as influences of location in time and place, linked lives and human agency. Furthermore, as Hareven (2000) noted, early life transitions can have cumulative impact on subsequent ones.

These influences are well illustrated by a study of transition to adulthood of Canadians born between 1961 and 1980, which involves experience of a number of events at early life (Ravanera and Rajulton 2004). As shown in Figure 4, women with high social status (defined by parental education and occupation) experience all events at older ages. Middle-class women resemble low-status women in their home-leaving, starting work and union formation, but differentiate themselves from low status women in marriage and start of parenthood.

Figure 4: Median Age at Transition by Social Status, Women, 1961-80 Birth Cohort, 2001 General Social Survey



Source: Ravanera and Rajulton (2004, Figure 2B).

Furthermore, Ravanera and Rajulton (2004) noted that the timing of the eventual trajectory to a certain state is influenced by events that happen (or did not happen) earlier in life. For instance, the time spent for other pursuits delays the onset of parenthood. Young men and women who do not go through the other early life events start parenthood the earliest, while those who go through graduation from post-secondary education, regular work and marriage become parents the latest.

In sum, the life-course perspective, together with its various elements, could be used as a framework in different ways that ranges from an analysis of life course itself to the use of life-course stages as organizing elements of a study. In many studies, the life-course stage is used as a backdrop to examine the consequences of changes in families.

A life-course perspective provides a structure within which to consider earning, caring and learning the nature and relative importance of which vary over the life course. The concept of “linked lives” enables us to look at dependence and transfers within families defined by common residence, within broader family networks, in communities and in societies. These transfers, occurring within families as defined by residence but also across households that are linked through family relationships, include child support, family support of post-secondary education, health benefits for dependants not living in the household, transfers from grandparents and transfers to married children. These transfers within families are further linked to transfers occurring in the broader society.

The potential that individuals have for earning and caring affects the likelihood of given life-course trajectories. In particular, the difficulties in these domains are relevant to family formation and dissolution. Individual life trajectories are also defined by alternative approaches to the division of earning and caring activities.

Constrained Decision Making, the Family and the Life Course

Theoretical Approaches to Study of Family

In proposing a framework for analysis, the life course presents itself as an essential context, especially as one considers the transitions, but also the links across life and the content of the whole life course. Limiting the framework to only the life course presents the disadvantage of being excessively general and descriptive. But the life-course perspective is comprehensive. Specific theoretical approaches often are less so. For instance, structural–functional, micro-economic and feminist approaches generate useful questions, but the domain of inquiry is restricted.

The functionalist approach, with its emphasis on the value of having separate institutions performing specific functions, has a tendency to focus on reproduction, socialization of the young and stabilizing adult personalities as the key functions of families. The function of production is seen to be in the domain of the market. That is, while the promotion of learning and individual well-being are important functions of families, the functionalist perspective has the disadvantage of viewing work and family, or the public and private, as separate spheres. Families are relegated to the private spheres, which are often viewed as less important than the public sphere. There is also a tendency to focus on a family form based on a gender division of tasks, which is sometimes seen as the only workable alternative through which families can properly function.

The feminist perspective has had the advantage of observing that families are areas of both conflict and cohesion and, in particular, that there is not necessarily a “unitary interest (Feree 1990). Besides observing that women are often exploited by traditional

family arrangements, the feminist perspective has also focussed on the link between the two spheres, particularly on the role of women. Kempeneers (1992) made the important observation that women largely provide the “junction” between work and family, between the changing needs of production and reproduction, and thus they largely bear the costs of the inevitable conflict between these two areas of life. For the most part, women and men are involved in both spheres, but women bear the brunt of the accommodation between the two spheres. Individual decisions to work, choose an occupation, have children, work part time, change employment, are a reflection of what Kempeneers (1992) called the global adjustment processes between the structures of production and reproduction. At the same time, there is a tendency in feminist theory to look at families mostly from the perspective of women, and to conclude that women are disadvantaged in heterosexual families.

The micro-economic perspective has made useful contributions by using an economic model to consider family questions, such as union formation, childbearing and the division of work (Becker 1981). This focus on the economic side of family questions has tended to give more importance to questions of efficiency, and to downplay the importance of other values like mutuality, equality, cohesion and generativity.

Constrained Decision Making

Micro-economics has provided a powerful theoretical perspective for the study of human decision making, including choices made in the realm of the family and the individual life course: marriage, childbearing, divorce, migration, home leaving and the like. But in the nature of the case, the focus in micro-economic models is on economic variables. In addition, the theory typically has involved simplifying assumptions that help — and are even required for — the development of rigorous theory. These assumptions include such things as impersonal markets, lifetime decision horizons, strict maximization of utility, unvarying tastes or preferences, unitary decision makers and perfect knowledge. These assumptions lead to models that often are effective in studying narrowly economic behaviour and highly rational behaviour in general. But they do not always seem adequate to the study of the hurly-burly of everyday family life, and life-course behaviour involving highly emotional areas, such as sex, marriage, divorce and family conflict. The limitation of the micro-economic theory of rationality in decision making has long been recognized in the field of psychology that proposes “bounded rationality” as an alternative (Gilovich et al. 2002; Galotti 2002). Galotti (2002, p. 6) noted, for instance, that decision-making processes vary depending on a number of factors especially the specific decision being made, and the characteristics of the individual and group making the decision. This is not to say that economic models cannot provide important insights into this realm, but only that they need to be broadened and supplemented to build a more comprehensive framework for decision making.

The proposed framework retains the central economic notion of constrained choice, recognizing that humans are not able to choose anything they want — except in fantasy — but invariably must choose within constraints. Our options are limited, often in ways that go far beyond the limits suggested by the economic model.¹ A few examples suffice for the purpose of this report.

- Family decisions, unlike decisions in the stock market or financial markets, by definition are not impersonal decisions. In the family, it is not so much the case of a unitary decision maker trying to maximize her or his own rewards (whether long or short term). The decision often is a joint decision involving two or more family members, and typically involves compromise. The rewards and penalties for others are taken into account, or at least are supposed to be. Altruism is involved: the rewards and accomplishments of others become a source of satisfaction for the decision maker.
- Most people have some general lifetime goals — happiness, wealth, fun, power, accomplishment — but day-to-day decisions often do not involve a time horizon of a whole lifetime. Young people, in particular, tend to have shorter time horizons. The high school drop-out typically does not assess the long-term consequences — good or bad — of his or her decision. Nor do they possess the knowledge needed to do so, much less perfect knowledge. Some young couples may make childbearing decisions with a view to “maximizing lifetime utility,” but even for those who do, their utility calculus often is incomplete. It can be argued that most young couples ignore “late-life utilities,” such as the rewards of grandparenthood. By the same token, some older persons ignore what are for them “post-life utilities,” as when they act in ways that will negatively impact their descendants, for example, voting against support for better schools, day care, and environmental protection, in favour of lower taxes or better medical care for the elderly.
- Many human decisions are barely decisions at all, except in the core sense that the individual takes some action. Our behaviour is massively shaped by early socialization, and by internalized values and norms. It is constrained by outside influences, such as law and government, cultural norms and, increasingly, by the incessant urgings of advertising and the media. Most people are greatly influenced by their peers and age mates. We do what we do to a large extent because everyone else is doing it. Again, young people are particularly subject to peer influence, but it occurs at all ages and stages of life.

In general, when it comes to our lives and families, most of us do not rationally try to maximize. We juggle, muddle and compromise, and hope for the best, which is often good enough.

Decisions regarding key family questions are thus viewed as constrained choices, with constraints coming from biology, development over the life course, and institutional context (Seltzer et al. 2005). Expanding on the micro-economic perspective, we include the role of values and goals in setting normative constraints. From the feminist perspective, we incorporate the importance of considering the possible conflict of interest across individuals in families, be they women or men, parents or children, siblings or generations. At the same time, we do not see individual well-being as the only goal. When all is said and done, it is what we leave behind at death that counts, or the role that

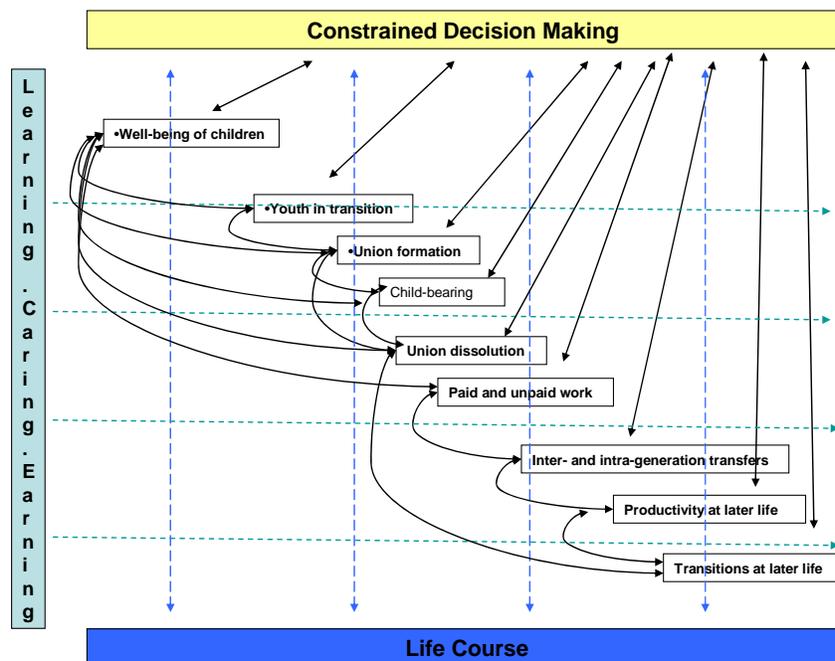
we have played in generating social and cultural capital, which include helping raise the next few generations and helping build strong neighbourhoods and communities.

Diagram of the Proposed Framework for Research on Families

Figure 5, very loosely patterned after the schematic diagram in Seltzer et al. (2005, p. 911), shows that the three components of the framework discussed above (learning, earning and caring; the life course; and constrained decision making) border the various research domains on families. For the sake of simplicity, the contents of the three components, described in the preceding sections, are not shown in the diagram but should be presumed as being included in the framework. The fourth side of the framework, left open in the diagram, relates to outcomes including economic productivity, social cohesion and generativity over generations (see Figure 1).

The green dashed horizontal lines indicate that the interrelated activities of caring, earning and learning underpin research on family at any point in the life course, from early to later life. In most instances, these activities would be in the forefront of the research be it on the well-being of children, on youth transitions, etc. Furthermore, even if these activities are not the focus, they would most likely be taken for granted as part of the research background.

Figure 5: Framework for Research on Families



The dashed vertical lines represent the connections between the elements of the life course and the constrained decision-making theory explained above. This grid indicates that research on families must consider that opportunities and constraints faced by individuals are conditioned by circumstances of a person's life course. This would include consideration of historical time (and thus, the importance of bringing birth cohort into an analysis), the economic, political or social conditions surrounding the person (or *location in time and place*), the socio-economic situation of her/his families with norms and values that they live by (*linked lives*), and the individual's own personal abilities (*human agency*). Thus, the family, the community and the state could be the source of constraints (or conversely, support or opportunities) in the person's decision-making process.

The black arrow-tipped lines denote the abstractions (in the form of explanations, models or theories) formulated through the research process. Necessarily, these lines are illustrative and the diagram does not include all the possible lines that could be made. The straight lines pointing to the constrained decision making represent theories generated in each research domain that are based on constrained choices as explained above. The curved lines signify explanations and other theories that relate one research domain (the labels inside the box) with another.

The diagram could be useful in viewing results in each research domain, the interrelations among the domains, and their interpretations and abstractions in the form of models and theories. Some of these research findings are presented in Chapter 4 for each broad life-course stage. Take, for example, findings on union dissolution.

[The] greater independence of women makes the divorce more viable. [In the diagram, this would be represented by a black arrow connecting union dissolution to paid and unpaid work.] Divorces are less likely to occur when there are young, dependent children because the family is more economically interdependent at that time [this would be a connecting line between union dissolution and constrained decision making.] Indeed, both childless couples and those in the empty nest stage have higher risks of divorce [signified by a line connecting union dissolution and childbearing, and a line connecting union dissolution and transitions in later life].

The framework could be useful not only for viewing current available research on families but on situating other domains in family research that might arise. Boxes and lines, representing the research domains or topics and the theories and abstractions arising from the research, could be added to the diagram as needed, but all within bounds of learning, caring and earning; the life course; and constrained decision making.

Policy Options and Earning, Learning and Caring Over the Life Course

While we return to policy issues at the end of the document, it is useful to indicate some of the general ways in which the framework of constrained decision making in caring,

earning and learning over the life course can be a useful lens through which to consider policy options.

The links between earning and caring are important for understanding the behaviour and opportunities of adults, who generally give high priority to both family and work; and they are important to the well-being of children who depend on the earning and caring roles of parents. The links are crucial to both the material production of the economy and the demographic reproduction of the population. They are also important to the social security policies of welfare states that seek to enhance the self-sufficiency of individuals, promote families as a basic form of security, ensure community services and secure a broader social safety net.

In planning for interventions, governments often focus on specific target or risk groups. This presents the disadvantage of suggesting that others are not in need of support and transfers from community and society. An advantage of focussing on caring, earning and learning is that it enables us to look at the whole population, including persons not currently living in families as defined by common residence (sometimes called “unattached”), who also have family ties of caring, earning and learning, but across households. Picot and Myles (2005, pp. 25, 28) found that about two thirds of persistent low-income earners relate to five population groups: lone parents, recent immigrants, people with work disabilities, unattached persons aged 45 to 64, and Aboriginal persons. These are also the groups highlighted by Dryden (2005, p. 8). They estimated that 25.9 percent of the population aged 16 to 64 are members of at least one of the five groups. For various reasons, each group is increasing in relative size.

- Persons with disabilities are increasing with an aging population, including an aging work force.
- The Aboriginal population is increasing with the high fertility and the large relative size of the population at early adult ages.
- Recent immigrants have increased with the higher levels of immigration.
- Lone parents increase with family change of the second demographic transition.
- Unattached persons over 45 also increase as a function of family change.

To unattached persons over 45 should be added persons of any age who are more or less kinless, that is, who have no close kin or only a few, or whose close kin are so far away that many forms of mutual assistance are ruled out.

One could probably divide target groups into those who would be in trouble regardless of the circumstance, often as a function of poor health, disability or lack of skills, and those who have or would have difficulties because of the macro-economy and the employment situation in particular.

The framework of caring, earning and learning over the life course is thus particularly useful for the identification of persons at risk or who would be at risk later in life. The life-course framework, with its concepts of trajectories and linked lives, helps in appreciating that those in difficulty often started having problems much earlier in life, typically with deficits in learning, earning and caring transfers across generations. Focussing on life-course transitions could also help identify the timing when interventions would be most beneficial.

In the context of the evolving society, various comparisons need to be made. Particular attention is needed on differentials of earning, caring and learning across generations, gender, space and culture. For instance, understanding the learning, earning and caring in immigrant families, as well as the differential life course determinants of immigrants, could well inform policies.

Policy thinking is too often based on families that are already formed. The life course approach prompts a look at the bases for family formation, including the systemic bases for lack of family formation, be it in terms of unions or childbearing. The focus on earning, learning and caring permits a look at ways in which policy might better support these activities, and it draws attention to how existing policies of governments and the private sector may frustrate the potential for earning a living, caring for each other and integrating the next generation. The treatment of these core activities highlights the need for co-operation among ministries that are concerned with labour, skills and human resources on the one hand, and social and caring issues on the other hand. For instance, the identification of children as a target group brings us to consider the workers who care for children.

4. Trends in Caring and Earning Over the Life Course

Childhood (children under 15)

The Place of Children

Family transformations clearly affect children. In the first demographic transition, children lost their economic value to parents, as economic activities came to depend less on work within the family, including the labour of children, and the economic role of children changed from one of producer/dependant to one largely of dependant. Parents now give their children more than they could ever expect in return (Caldwell 1976). In the second transition, it became more acceptable for adults to structure their lives in terms of their own interests rather than in terms of the interest of children. There is a shift in values and norms from family or child-centred orientations toward more individualism (Ariès 1980; Lesthaeghe 1983; Roussel 1987). Children are largely viewed as a means through which adults can receive affective gratification and blossom as individuals (Romaniuc 1984, p. 64). Folbre (2000) spoke of changing gender norms allowing women to make decisions on union formation and childbearing based on self-interest.

While children remain important for most people, they are no longer so important as to be impediments to parental divorce and subsequent fulfilment in other relationships. Keyfitz (1994, p. 7) proposed that the presence of children, once the main reason not to divorce, no longer plays that role. Similarly, the formalization of a couple's relationship through a legal marriage is no longer seen as necessary before having children, even though such informal unions have higher rates of dissolution.

Children have benefited from many of the behaviours of adults, especially later childbearing, fewer children and dual incomes, but they have sometimes suffered from the greater flexibility in the ability of adults to structure their relationships (Picot et al. 1998; Kerr 1992).

In general, research on adult behaviour and children's outcomes reinforces the view that children do best in intact marriages, with both original parents (biological or adoptive) present. On average, children who experience other patterns — lone parenting, divorce or separation, informal unions and step-parenting — do less well, although the average differences are not large.

Marital Quality and Children's Well-Being

In *A Generation at Risk: Growing up in an Era of Family Upheaval*, Amato and Booth (1997) found that the link between parental marital quality and children's well-being is the most consistent finding. They suggested that both fathers and mothers play key roles in their children's lives, providing relationships with two adults in the household. Divorce is advantageous to children under some circumstances; that is, when children are in highly conflictual marriages. However, they proposed that only a quarter to a third of marriages that dissolve are in this category. Consequently, when couples dissolve their relationships at "relatively low thresholds of unhappiness" many children undergo long-

term adverse effects. Thus, "the worse situation for children to be in is either a high-conflict marriage that does not end in divorce or a low-conflict marriage that does end in divorce" (Amato and Booth 1997, p. 238). These influences are not rigid and deterministic, but on average they affect most aspects of the lives of young adults: standard of living, size of support network, whether they cohabit, quality of their marriage, whether the marriage ends in divorce, self-esteem and general happiness with life. When divorce occurs early in life, there are more consequences for the child's economic attainment and psychological well-being, and relations with both parents are weakened. When divorce occurs in adolescence, on average, only the cross-sex parental relationship is weakened.

Children in Lone-Parent Families

The 1995 Canadian General Social Survey shows that 8.3 percent of children are born to mothers who are neither married nor cohabiting. By age 15, 34.5 percent of children have experienced living in a household without both biological parents (Heuveline et al. 2003, p. 56).

The risk of lone parenthood is much higher when parents have ever cohabited. For instance, among children born to two-parent families in 1987-88, 8.1 percent had experienced a family disruption by age 6 if the responding parent had never cohabited, but 24.6 percent if they had cohabited (Marcil-Gratton 1998, pp. 14, 18). When parents separate, children born in common-law unions have less contact and receive less financial support from the non-custodial parent (Marcil-Gratton et al. 1999).

The abundant literature on lone parenthood suggests that the difficulties faced by children are a function of a breakdown in the transfer of financial, human and social capital (Beaujot 2000, pp. 287-300). These difficulties were originally traced to the lack of a male role model, especially for boys, and the lack of the male income in a typical lone-parent family. However, the latter explanation is insufficient, since it was found that children in step-families, presumably with higher income and the presence of both male and female role models, had similar problems (Cherlin and Furstenberg 1994; Demo and Acock 1988; Kerr and Michalski 2004).

Research findings on the effects of divorce and separation on the subsequent achievements of children are mixed. Using the 1979 American National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Aughinbaugh et al. (2005) found lower achievement among youth who had undergone a change in their parent's marital status. Much of this disadvantage disappeared after controls for background factors, suggesting that it may not reflect the marital transitions per se. Following British cohorts born in 1958 and 1970, Sigle-Rushton et al. (2005) found a relationship between divorce and achievement, and that, as divorce becomes more common, there is little change in the magnitude of the relationship.

In considering this literature, it is important to keep in mind that, on average, children in both intact and non-intact families do well (Haddad 1998; CCSD 1997). Clearly there are conditions where children are better off without a given parent, and even instances where

they are better with neither parent. In many other cases, step-parents and non-residential parents provide important resources for children. Generally however, children do less well when they live with one parent or with an informal parent (Beaujot 2000, pp. 296-297; Kerr and Beaujot 2003).

Children in Step-Families

The literature on step-parenting and children concludes that, on average, children are not better off than in lone-parent families (Cherlin and Furstenberg 1994). For instance, among persons aged 20 to 44 in 1994, the likelihood of having completed high school was 82 percent if at age 15 they were living with two biological parents, compared to 71 percent with a lone parent and 69 percent if they were living in a blended family or step-family (Frederick and Boyd 1998, p. 13). Cooksey and Fondell (1996) found that of all fathers living with children, the ones who spend the least time with their children are step-parents. On average, mothers also spend less time with their children after a separation, and children tend to leave home more quickly. It may be because children do not benefit from co-parenting when one of the parents is a step-parent (Amato 1998).

Timing of Childbearing and Children's Well-Being

Children generally do better when a woman or couple's childbearing is somewhat delayed rather than occurring early. Based on census data, Lochhead (2000) found that delayed childbearing is more frequent among women with university education, and there are increasing income differentials to the disadvantage of younger first-time mothers, even in two-parent families. Using U.S. data, Martin (2000) found that delayed childbearers, who tend to have more education, are increasingly likely to raise their children in intact marriages, while early childbearers are more likely to raise children outside of marriage. Canadian data also indicate that women under 30 who are formerly married are much more likely to have children than those who are single, cohabiting or married (Ravanera 1995, p. 18). Consequently, Bianchi (2000) spoke of two models of family formation, with one group taking advantage of parental investment from both mothers and fathers, and the other where fathers are absent and mothers do not have adequate time and resources to invest in children. Children born from mature parents are more likely to have a mother with more human capital and a father, in a dual-income family. This contrasts with the greater likelihood of lone parenthood for those who parent early.

Young Adulthood (adolescents and youth aged 15-34)

Home Leaving

The median age at home leaving was youngest for the 1951-56 birth cohort, at an average of 21.5 years for men and 19.9 years for women (Beaujot 2000, p. 97); it has increased in subsequent cohorts. The 2001 Census reflected this trend, with 41.1 percent of persons aged 20 to 29 living with their parents in 2001, compared to 27.5 percent in 1981 (Statistics Canada 2002a, p. 27). In their explanation, Lapierre-Adamcyk and her colleagues (1995) emphasized the more difficult economic times beginning in the early 1980s, and women's labour market behaviour. Women's labour-force participation has come to resemble that of men, as they often postpone family life to give priority to a career.

Young people are more likely to be living at home if they study full time, are unemployed or have low income. That is, the economic resources of children are important to home leaving. But patterns are greatly affected by marital status, with married or formerly married persons less likely to be living with their parents (Boyd and Norris 1999).

Boyd and Norris (1999) contrasted two views on later home leaving. On the one hand, home leaving signals other successful transitions to adulthood, like completion of education, employment, marriage and childbearing. On the other hand, living at home can benefit young people in making other types of transitions from adolescence to adulthood, especially completing education, experimenting with relationships and obtaining employment. Goldscheider and Goldscheider (1999) made a similar point in their book, *The Changing Transition to Adulthood: Leaving and Returning Home*. They observed that leaving home and establishing independent residence is seen as a critical step in the transition to adulthood, clearly marking a shift from dependence to greater autonomy. On the other hand, they noted that early home leaving can result in lower transfers to children and lower levels of living.

Most authors focus on the economic factors associated with a delay in home leaving. But there are also cultural factors making parental homes suitable to older children. In particular, the narrower generation gap and more egalitarian relationships between parents and children seem to allow many young adults to live in the parental home more comfortably. Smaller families also encourage later home leaving (Mitchell et al. 1989).

As another example of the importance of values and expectations, Goldscheider and Goldscheider (1993) found that the attitudes of both parents and children matter considerably in the decision to leave home. At the same time, they found little relationship between measures of parental resources and the timing of home leaving, except that home leaving to attend post-secondary education is more likely when parents have more resources (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1999, p. 209). Also, parental resources do not predict children's returning home, that is, "parents' willingness to share their home is not a function of their affluence" (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1999, p. 209).

Many commentators talk about late home leaving in negative terms; for instance, Boyd and Pryor (1989) used the term "cluttered nest." In some regards, the delay in home leaving is counter to the "idea of progress" underlying family trends, as implied especially by the growth of individualism. However, from the point of view of children, early home leaving can pose problems for completion of high school, establishing savings and receiving transfers from parents. Based on data from Sweden, Bernhardt et al. (2003) found that early home leaving is linked to lower educational aspirations and lower educational attainment, which would be particularly the case when the departure is due to a push factor, such as family conflict. Such early departures lead to a reduction in the quantity and quality of contact with both parents, and have negative consequences for successful career patterns and stable families. Bernhardt et al. (2003) further found that

when children live with a divorced parent without a step-parent, and family conflict is low, the risk of early leaving is not higher than in an intact family.

On the other hand, Palomba (2001) found that the very late home leaving found in Southern Europe may be detrimental to the independence of young people. Contrasts across countries suggest that home leaving is later when children depend on transfers within the family, and earlier if there are more state transfers, as in Nordic countries (Reher 1998; Breen and Buchmann 2002; Iacovou 2002). For men born around the 1960s, the median age at home leaving ranges from 20 years in Sweden to 26 or 27 years in Italy and Spain (Billari et al. 2001). Independence from parents at affordable costs is reduced when there is a poor housing market and lack of rental accommodation. In contrast, greater social transfers to young people, as occurs in Sweden, allows more independence from parents.

Out of School

The exact time of completion of formal education is difficult to mark, because the future may bring a return to the classroom, but there can be no doubt that this transition is occurring later. In “100 Years of Education,” Clark (2000, p. 4) found that in 1911 only about one percent of persons aged 20 to 24 was attending school, which increased to eight percent in 1961, but 48 percent in 1996. In the period 1976-2001, the percent of persons attending school full time at ages 16 to 24 increased from 34.0 percent to 47.7 percent for men, and from 30.7 percent to 52.5 percent for women (Morissette 2002, p. 33). For men and women combined, a third were attending school full time in 1976, but this increased to half of the age group in 2001. The greater increase for women also applies to ages 25 to 29, which saw 2.0 percent attending full time in 1976 and 7.3 percent in 2001, while men’s rates went from 4.0 to 7.7 percent.

The median age at school completion increased from 18.8 years for the cohort of women born in 1941-45, to 21.8 years for the one born in 1971-75 (Ravanera et al. 1998). For men over these cohorts, the median ages were rather stable, at about 22 years (Ravanera et al. 2002, p. 299).

Of the several transitions in education, it is high school graduation that has especially increased, with 88 percent of the population now completing high school (Bowlby and McMullen 2002). Wanner (1999) found over cohorts born from 1905 to 1969 that the transition from high school to post-secondary education has increased, but the one from entering post-secondary to completion of a post-secondary degree has actually declined for men.

The transition to post-secondary continues to increase, with 62 percent of high school graduates going on to post-secondary education within a year, and another 20 percent after only a one-year delay (Tomkowicz and Bushnik 2003). International comparisons show that Canada is at the very top of countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in terms of the proportion of the population at various age groups that has completed a post-secondary qualification, diploma or degree. For instance, at age 25 to 34, half of the Canadian population has obtained such a qualification, compared to an average of around 25 percent for European countries

(Beaujot and Kerr 2004, p. 249). Other comparisons show that Canada has particularly high enrolment rates at ages 18 to 21, but by age 24 it is about in the middle of OECD countries (Fussell 2002, p. 21)

There is much pressure on young people to finish high school and to obtain post-secondary education. There are continued reports that job growth will be in the high skill area, and that Canada will need to import more skilled labour from abroad. The 2002 Survey of Approaches to Educational Planning found that the vast majority of parents (93 percent) expected their children to complete post-secondary education, and three quarters of parents expected them to obtain a university degree; half of these parents were saving to help their children in this regard, with another 30 percent reporting that they planned to start saving in the future (Shipley et al. 2003). The savings are often small in comparison to the actual cost of post-secondary education. In effect, families are confronted on a day-to-day basis with competing needs: immediate consumption, long-term saving for parental retirement and long-term savings for their children's education.

While longer schooling is clearly involved in the delay of early life transitions, it is noteworthy that for men the median age of school completion for the 1971-75 cohort was 21.5 years, while that of first union was more than 25 years, and first childbirth over 31 years (extending the trends from older cohorts shown in Ravanera et al. 2002, p. 299). Similarly, the 1971-75 cohort of women completed their education at a median age of 21.8 years, compared to 23 years for first union and about 28 years for birth of first child (Ravanera et al. 1998, pp. 187-189). Women's longer education may be delaying men's entry into first unions, but childbearing seems to be delayed much beyond the ages when education is completed for both genders.

In their study of early life transitions of Canadian youth, Ravanera and her colleagues (2003) observed that young people with more parental resources, as measured through mothers working and living in communities with more resources, are especially likely to complete their schooling later. In contrast, children who do not live with both parents to age 15 leave school a year earlier, while they start work and leave home two years earlier.

In their analysis of the factors affecting union formation in Canada, Turcotte and Goldscheider (1998) observed the increased importance of higher educational attainment for women's entry into marriage. School enrolment was found to have become a bigger impediment to first union formation for younger cohorts.

Comparisons across countries suggest similar results, highlighting the importance of distinguishing educational attainment and school enrolment. That is, educational attainment has sometimes positive, sometimes negative and often no net effect on women's family formation, but educational enrolment impedes marriage (Sorensen 1995, p. 229). For men, greater educational attainment increases the likelihood of union and family formation (Corijn 2001, p. 11). Educational enrolment involves a high degree of dependence on parents, so young people of both genders do not consider themselves sufficiently mature for marriage (Blossfeld 1995). An Ontario survey found similar normative expectations that young people attending school are not ready to get married

(Beaujot 2000, pp. 108-110). That is, the extension of education and the narrowing of the gender gap have profound effects on the early life course. Women's increased education is delaying union formation for both genders.

Into the Labour Force

The transition into the labour force typically takes place over a number of years, as young people who are still students begin working on a part-time basis. The OECD (1997) has proposed that the starting age of the school-to-work transition can be estimated as the last age at which more than 75 percent of youths are only attending school; that is, not working at all. The end of the transition would occur when more than half are only working. On the basis of the Labour Force Survey, excluding the summer months, Bowlby (2000, p. 44) estimated that this transition starts at about age 16, while the end of the transition has moved from age 21 in 1984 to age 23 in 1998. Thus the transition now takes place over seven years, and not until age 23 is half of the cohort working without also going to school.

Among youths aged 15 to 24, the largest category in 1984 was those who were working and not attending school (37 percent of the total), but by 1998 the largest category was those who were attending school but not working (40 percent of the total). Those both attending school and working had increased, while those neither attending school nor working had declined over this period (Bowlby 2000, p. 43). This confirms that fewer had completed the transition from school to work.

Besides the higher proportion attending school full time, the period 1981-2001 saw a drop in the proportion of non-students employed full time, among persons under the age of 30 (Morissette 2002, p. 33). At ages 16 to 24, the proportion of men non-students working full time declined over this period from 77.6 to 69.1 percent, while for women the decline was from 61.0 to 56.3 percent. At ages 25 to 29, there were again declines for men, from 88.1 percent working full time in 1981 to 83.8 percent in 2001. At this age group, women made significant gains, from 50.9 to 66.2 percent working full time. Morissette then calculated the earnings of full-year, full-time employees and found declines over this period for both age groups of men and stability for women.

Other studies confirmed the disadvantage of younger men, especially in comparison to older men (Morissette 1998; Picot 1998). The proportion working, the hours worked per week and the wages per hour all declined relative to older men. Picot and Sweetman (2005) and Myles (2005) spoke of the disadvantaged situation of recent entrants to the labour force, be they from within Canada or from abroad. This is seen to be affecting men's transition to marriage. For instance, Oppenheimer and Lewin (1999) argued that the transition to marriage depends on men's earnings and their career mobility.

Tanner and Yabiku (1999) concluded that contemporary youth's transition to adulthood is delayed not as a function of their having different goals, because the goals of stable jobs remain dominant. It is the economic realities that frustrate their achievement of these goals. In their analysis, Turcotte and Goldscheider (1998) found that working is increasingly important for entering any kind of union, since union formation increasingly

requires the earning power of both partners. The labour market disadvantages of young men reduce union formation.

Union Formation

The term “union formation” in this context refers to formal marriage or to cohabitation (also referred to generally as “common-law unions,” in French unions libres). Such unions are the most common pathway to the start of a family or family household, although there are others. For example, two lone parents might share a household without becoming intimate partners or two siblings may live together.

With respect to family formation through unions, the main trend is toward delays in union formation and a lower proportion of persons in a union at given ages. There are delays not only in marriage, but also in cohabitation and, thus, in union formation as a whole. For instance, as shown in Table 2, at age 35 to 39, 83.8 percent of men and 81.7 percent of women were in unions in 1981, compared to 60.2 percent of men and 65.1 percent of women in 2001.

Table 2: Marital Status of Population by Sex and Five-Year Age Group, Canada, 1981 and 2001 (in percent)

	Marital Status									
	Never Married		Cohabiting		All Unions		Total		Separated, Widowed, or Divorced	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
<i>1981</i>										
15-19	98.4	93.3	0.7	2.9	0.7	3.6	1.4	6.5	0.1	0.2
20-24	71.9	51.1	7.1	9.4	19.8	36.5	26.9	45.9	1.2	3.0
25-29	32.0	20.0	8.1	7.1	55.6	65.9	63.7	73.0	4.3	7.0
30-34	15.0	10.5	6.0	4.7	73.1	75.5	79.1	80.2	6.0	9.4
35-39	9.3	7.3	4.7	3.6	79.1	78.1	83.8	81.7	6.8	11.0
40-44	7.8	6.1	3.6	2.8	81.2	79.2	84.8	82.0	7.4	11.9
45-49	7.5	5.8	2.8	2.1	81.8	78.8	84.6	80.9	7.9	13.3
50-54	7.8	6.0	2.1	1.7	81.6	76.4	83.7	78.1	8.4	15.8
55-59	7.8	6.3	1.6	1.2	84.6	75.6	86.2	76.8	5.9	16.9
60-64	7.6	7.1	1.2	0.9	84.3	67.8	85.5	68.7	7.0	24.2
<i>2001</i>										
15-19	98.9	96.9	0.7	2.3	0.3	0.6	1.0	3.0	0.2	0.2
20-24	85.3	73.3	9.7	15.4	4.5	10.2	14.2	25.6	0.5	1.1
25-29	53.3	38.9	19.1	20.0	25.6	37.3	44.7	57.3	2.0	3.8
30-34	30.8	21.1	17.4	16.3	47.3	55.1	64.7	71.4	4.5	7.5
35-39	21.3	14.6	14.8	13.7	56.8	60.7	71.6	74.4	7.1	10.9
40-44	15.9	11.4	12.3	11.4	62.2	63.3	74.5	74.7	9.7	13.9
45-49	11.7	9.0	10.2	9.3	66.2	65.0	76.5	74.3	11.8	16.7
50-54	8.5	7.2	8.7	7.2	70.1	66.4	78.8	73.6	12.6	19.2
55-59	6.7	6.0	7.4	5.4	73.0	66.5	80.5	71.9	12.8	22.1
60-64	6.1	5.4	5.6	3.4	75.6	65.2	81.2	68.6	12.8	26.0

Source: Beaujot and Kerr (2004, Table 9.4).

As shown in Table 1 earlier, the median age at first marriage declined from 23.0 years for brides and 26.3 years for grooms in 1941, to just over 21 and 23 years respectively for those marrying in the early 1970s, then increased to median ages of 27 and 29 in 2002.

The macro-economic context plays an important role. Delays in union formation can be linked to the increased importance for youth to invest longer in themselves before they invest in reproduction, and to the lack of opportunities. While the formation of a stable intimate relationship is an important priority for most people, the diversity of available alternatives may reduce the relative desirability of marriage or cohabiting unions.

Differences between Cohabitation and Marriage

The fluidity of the transition associated with home leaving, with the greater frequency of returning home, is matched by that in union formation that includes marriage and cohabitation, as well as non-residential intimate relationships, some of them long-standing. For instance, 63 percent of first unions among women who were aged 20 to 29 in 2001 were common law rather than marriages (Statistics Canada 2002b). Among women aged 30 to 34, 4.7 percent were in a cohabiting union in 1981; in 2001, 16.3 percent of women of the same age were cohabiting (see Table 2).

For society, the meaning and nature of cohabitation relative to marriage evolves in stages, especially in terms of social acceptability (Kiernan 2002). This evolution would start from a time when cohabitation is an unconventional or offbeat lifestyle associated with a small minority, to a time when many persons in some cultures view cohabitation as a reasonable prelude to marriage to test and strengthen relationships. Eventually, we see cohabitations that last longer, that often include childbearing, and that are less distinguishable from marriages. By the turn of the century, this evolution had proceeded further in Quebec than in the rest of Canada (Le Bourdais and Lapierre-Adamcyk 2004; Kerr et al. 2005). In their typology, Dumas and Bélanger (1997) saw an increase both in cohabitations of low durability, and in common-law unions that last longer without being converted into marriages. Relationships of less durability become more likely to end as cohabitations rather than being converted into marriages (Dumas and Bélanger 1997).

While cohabitations take on a variety of forms, from those that are equivalent to marriage to those that might better be seen as an alternative to living single, two things are clear. First, cohabiting unions are twice as likely to end in separation as first marriages (Statistics Canada 2002b). Second, Wu (1999) proposed that cohabitation delays marriage mostly because people who are marrying have a longer period of premarital relationships.

The process of union formation is not completely understood, but at least two models have gained some currency. In one model, marriage would be selective of persons with higher status, especially for men. Men with lower status would be less desirable as marriage partners. In this model, marriage may bring a greater division of labour, since men with higher status take more responsibility for earning a living. In a second model, cohabitation is better viewed as an alternative to marriage, and it may signal greater departure from a traditional division of labour. Cohabitation would then imply less differentiation between women and men, or it would be selective of women with higher socio-economic status compared to married women. While having children is an option in this alternative, the level of childbearing remains significantly lower than in married unions. These models may apply differently in the United States and Canada. For instance, women in the United States whose first unions were cohabitations tended to

have less education, but in Canada they tended to have higher education (Torrey and Eberstadt 2005, p. 46). Comparing various economic characteristics, Kerr et al. (2005) proposed that the second model applies more to Quebec than to the rest of Canada.

The lower durability of marriages preceded by cohabitation has largely been interpreted in terms of selectivity, with persons who are willing to cohabit before marriage also being more willing to separate from marriages (e.g., urban residents, university graduates, persons with no ties to organized religion). When cohabitation is less common, it may also be that individuals involved in these unions feel they need to legitimate their conjugal behaviour by formalizing their unions through marriages. As cohabitation becomes more common, and as we see relationships of less durability ending as cohabitations rather than being converted into marriages, the stability of relationships preceded by cohabitation may become more similar to direct marriages. Nonetheless, when we put all relationships together, the durability of relationships is doubtless declining. That is, the greater frequency of short-lived cohabitations and of cohabitations that are not converted into marriages compensates for the relative stability of marriages, where the proportion divorcing has not changed substantively since the late 1980s.

Fertility is consistently higher for married than cohabiting couples (Dumas and Bélanger 1997, p. 163). Using data from 1985-1994 in the 1995 General Social Survey, for the country as a whole, the total fertility rate in married couples was double that of cohabiting couples, for women aged 20 to 44. The differences were smaller in Quebec where the total fertility rate was 85 percent higher for married than cohabiting, compared to 120 percent higher in the rest of Canada.

Cohabitations are somewhat more stable in Quebec, but the now relatively infrequent direct marriages remain the most stable. Cohabiting couples who give birth to a child also tend to be somewhat more stable than those who remain without children (Wu and Balakrishnan 1995). However, family change has brought less stability in the lives of children. Following children to age 6 through the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, in those unions that remained cohabitations, 37 percent saw the dissolution of their parent's union in Quebec, and 61 percent in Ontario. While common-law unions are more stable in Quebec, they remain considerably less stable than other unions involving children, be they direct marriages, persons who cohabited before marriage, or cohabiting persons who married after the child was born (Marcil-Gratton and Le Bourdais 1999).

Determinants of Unions

Becker (1981, 1991) suggested the delay of marriage can be attributed to lower gains to marriage when there is less gender specialization in the division of labour of couples. This "independence hypothesis" would argue in particular that women who have higher achieved status would be less likely to marry, because they have less to gain from marriage.

Looking at the situation in the United States before 1980, Goldscheider and Waite (1986) interpreted the results as implying that men with more achieved status are more likely to

“buy marriage” as part of the package, while women may use their higher education and occupational status to “buy out of marriage.” However, with most relationships taking the form of the two-worker model, achieved status has since come to increase the likelihood of marriage for both men and women (Goldscheider and Waite 1991; Sweeney 1997).

Canadian results show similar changes over time, implying shifting dynamics associated with forming relationships. Using the 1995 General Social Survey, Turcotte and Goldscheider (1998) found that more highly educated women from the pre-1950 cohorts were less likely to marry, but the opposite applied in the post-1950 cohorts. For men of both cohorts, education was positively related to entry into unions, but the relationship declined in importance. Mongeau and her colleagues (2001) also found that the Becker model applied to older cohorts, where women were likely to marry sooner if they had more work interruptions. However, in the more recent cohorts, uncertainties at work as measured through significant work interruptions reduce men’s likelihood of marriage, and they increase the likelihood that women will cohabit rather than marry. Given that union formation increasingly requires the earning power of both partners, we can expect to see an increased importance of education to women’s entry into marriage, while working becomes increasingly important to entry into any type of union. In Quebec, where cohabitation is particularly high, women’s employment increases their likelihood of forming a common-law union (Bélanger and Turcotte 1999).

That is, it would appear that the Becker model does not apply to younger cohorts. That model expected fewer marriages when there were fewer gains associated with gender specialization, and as women became more economically independent. In her alternate theory of marriage timing, Oppenheimer (1988) did not attribute the delay of marriage to lower gains to marriage, nor to an independence hypothesis wherein women with more status would use that status to remain more independent. Instead, Oppenheimer (1988, 1997) attributed the delay to the difficulty that young men have had in establishing their work lives, and to the importance attached to the work lives of both spouses. Young adults will search longer for a spouse if there is a longer period of uncertainty before their economic future is defined. They also search longer when they lack knowledge regarding the economic future of their potential spouse. In a qualitative survey that asked when it was best to start a union or get married, respondents from London, Ontario, and the surrounding area largely said that it was best to wait until education is completed, and work lives are being established (Beaujot and Bélanger 2001). Given the importance of work to a couple’s life style, the delayed entry into relationships follows on the longer period of education and the difficulty in establishing secure jobs.

Besides these economic questions, marriage may pose a different priority for young people. In “Sure, I’d Like to Get Married ... Someday,” White (1999) proposed that there is a worldwide retreat from marriage, as men know that marriage requires greater commitment to a stable work life, and as women know that they cannot depend on the stability of the union. However, survey evidence would suggest that young people attach much importance to living in a stable relationship (Lapierre-Adamcyk 1990). Attitudes and values clearly play a role in the entry into cohabitations and marriages, but these attitudes indicate strong expectations and preferences to enter relationships (Milan 2003).

That is, the delay would not be associated with a retreat from relationships, but rather with the complexity of achieving two rewarding jobs and a stable relationship.

Box 2: On the Social and Economic Foundations of Family Formation

The human urge to reproduce is shared with other biological species, presumably the result of evolution. Without adequate reproduction, humans would have gone extinct. But any biological urge is overlaid by cultural values and social norms, and is contingent for its expression on favourable material circumstances. Virtually all human societies have encouraged marriage and childbearing as the norm, both for women and men. But they have differed in the extent of this encouragement, and have imposed some restrictions.

In Canada today, there are various formal restrictions on marriage (age; mental capacity for consent; an existing marriage), but also informal norms regarding suitability for marriage and childbearing. There is a general notion that an individual or couple should be more or less independent and self-sufficient before undertaking to start a family. There is still some gender asymmetry, the sense that the male must be at least an equal partner in providing necessary support. Though seldom voiced directly, there is the not uncommon feeling that individuals and couples should not bring children into poverty, although it is hard to see what else a poor young couple could do in the short term, short of not having children at all. Further research is needed to document these attitudes and informal norms, their sometimes rapid changes, and the sources of the greatest normative influence – peers, parents, the media, etc.

Some of the past incentives to marriage no longer exist, or have been greatly attenuated. In the not-to-distant past, access to regular sexual intimacy was for the most part limited to marriage. And not a few marriages were occasioned by pregnancy. Contemporary norms tolerate sex, including cohabitation, without marriage, and marriage without children. Modern fertility control (contraception and abortion) means that one can have sex without pregnancy or birth. Family formation is much more a matter of choice rather than just going with the flow of social pressure and custom.

The decision to form a serious partnership or to start a family is not a completely rational one. But most people show some forethought before undertaking the fateful step of parenthood. Couples consider how many children they might eventually want, the costs of achieving and raising that number, and the resources available to support a family. Can a young person or couple look into the future with confidence that they will be able to support themselves and children? Some couples will not bother to think ahead. And some, with substantial means, will find the money costs – though not necessarily the time costs – of having children inconsequential. For most young people, the matter merits and gets serious consideration.

What are the prospects facing younger Canadians today, the potential parents of tomorrow's families? Although Canada is a prosperous society and widely considered one of the most livable in the world (in terms of the UN Human Development Index), a number of features would seem to militate against timely family formation by the average young Canadian.

Chief among these factors are: (1) a decline in the quality of available jobs, with stagnant real wages, less job security and fewer benefits; (2) a gradual erosion of the 'social safety net.'

These trends are documented in a recent report from a major Canadian bank (TD Bank Economics, 2005b). The report deals specifically with Ontario, but clearly has wider relevance. The analysts begin with the observation that Canadian governments have made great strides in improving the financial security of our oldest and youngest citizens, but that '... alongside these gains, there has been a steady erosion in income support for working age adults' [p.i]. They continue.

In the face of an increasingly challenging labour market environment, marked by stagnant wage growth, a reduction in the share of the labour force covered by the federal government's Employment Insurance [EI] program has left unemployed adults with fewer resources to fall back on when they lose their jobs. And no one has been harder hit than those forced to turn to social assistance, after a decade of cuts to welfare delivered by provincial governments intent on trimming deficits [p.i].

Box 2 (Cont'd): On the Social and Economic Foundations of Family Formation

The report focuses on the role of government income security programs. Another report could be written, of course, on the development of what they describe as 'an increasingly challenging labour market environment.' While some market forces are irresistible, other challenges in the current market are the result of systematic efforts to reduce labour costs – by laying off larger numbers of workers, by cutting wages, by exporting jobs to low-wage nations, by contracting out, by cutting back or even renegeing on pension benefits. The challenges facing the younger worker looking for a good, secure job are not accidents of history. At least in part, they are a result of economic policy in the private sector.

Late teen-agers and young adults may well have experienced the above trends, if only indirectly through job difficulties of family, including parents and older siblings. They will have more direct experience of relatively high unemployment rates, from incidents of unemployment affecting them or their age mates. Unemployment has always been somewhat higher among young adults, and that trend continues, but is now combined with a decline in the quality of jobs noted above. In the period 1995-2000, unemployment among persons under 25 was roughly double that among those 25 and over. The September 2005 Labour Force Survey (Statistics Canada, October 7, 2005) reports the lowest overall unemployment rate in almost three decades, but notes an increase for persons 15-24 to 12.7 percent, roughly double the overall rate. It is possible that the true rates might be higher than the measured rates, with some youth not even looking for a job, and others continuing their education in part because of a shortage of good jobs. The current mix of public and private policies relating to income security is particularly hard on young males and on single persons. Young men ages 20-24 were recently reported as having unemployment rates more than half again as high (10% vs. 6.4) as young women of the same ages (Statistics Canada, 2005).

Such unemployment rates, combined with low job quality for many of those employed, militate against career development, savings, retirement of educational loans, etc. Young people who might wish to start a family will not be well-positioned to do so. This is especially the case for young men. Could this be a factor in the high number of lone-mother families?

Single [that is, currently unmarried] persons also do not fare well under current welfare programs. The TD Bank report cited earlier (2005b) notes that recent Ontario welfare reforms 'worsen the gap between single adults and lone parents' (p.22), making it extremely difficult for the single person to work his or her way out of poverty. They conclude that 'directing additional welfare resources toward single adults... would deliver the biggest "bang for the buck", particularly given the support these individuals get from the rest of the income security system' (p.23).

Meaningful reform in the above systems to make them more youth-friendly will not be easy. As the baby-boomers become seniors, they will wield enormous political power, as noted on p.30 of *Knowledge Plan, 2005-2008*. The larger relative number of seniors, combined with their high voting participation, in fact, sets the stage for a regression in the well-being of young and middle-aged adults, if the elderly were consistently to vote their own interests. Restraint on the part of the elderly and courage on the part of politicians will be needed to avoid such regression. The classic – and convincing – analysis of the process is by Preston (1984).

Nor is it certain that large numbers of young people would take advantage of improved economic circumstances to begin families. But some significant number would, and it would redound to their own fulfillment and well-being, as well as pushing macro-demographic indicators in the right direction.

A variety of pronatalist programs have come into being in Europe, partly in response to extreme low fertility, and some of them appear to be having some effect (see Saunders, 2005).

Thomas K. Burch

Into Parenthood

While there is certain fluidity to home leaving and union formation, making the transition difficult to mark, the same does not apply to the transition to parenthood, especially for women. The transition to parenthood involves much change in people's lives, and it is highly significant because of the associated permanence and obligation. One can have ex-spouses and ex-jobs but it is not as easy to have ex-children. Even for men, parenthood is one of the most permanent commitments (Rindfuss et al. 1988).

The significance of the transition to parenthood can also be seen in how people use their time over a 24-hour day. The change from being single to partnered brings a small increase in the time spent doing housework for men, and a larger increase for women, with a decline in the time women spend doing paid work in some countries (Gauthier and Furstenberg 2002). The transition to parenthood brings a definite increase in the time women spend in housework and child care, with a reduction of time in paid work. Men also experience an increase in time spent in housework and child care (Beaujot and Liu 2005).

The delay in childbearing can be seen in the average age of women at first birth, which increased from 23.4 in 1976 to 27.6 in 2001 (Lochhead 2000; Statistics Canada 2003). In 1976, only nine percent of first-time mothers were over 30; by 2001 the figure was 34 percent.

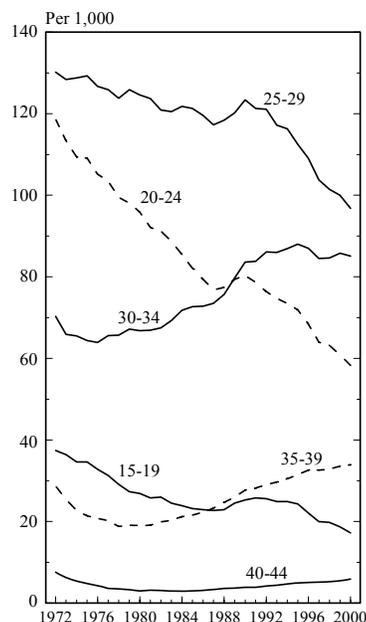
From a cohort rather than calendar year perspective, the median age of men at their first birth was 26.5 in the 1941-45 birth cohort, compared to 31.2 in the 1961-65 cohort (Beaujot 2000, p. 97). For women, this median age increased from 23.3 in the 1941-45 cohort to 27.8 in the 1966-70 cohort.

The delay in childbearing can also be seen in the reductions of fertility for women aged 15 to 19, across a number of countries (Teitler 2002, p. 142). There are also important variations, with Canada's rate being significantly lower than that of the United States, but similar to the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia, and higher than that of many European countries. For instance, the birth rate at ages 15 to 19 is close to 5 per 1,000 women in the Netherlands and Sweden, compared to 16 in Canada and 49 in the United States. The Canadian rates have declined from 34.0 births per 1,000 women in 1976. This is not a function of delays in the age of first intercourse, which has been declining for both sexes, reaching a median age of about 16 to 17 years (Teitler 2002, p. 136). Presumably, more Canadian young people are using effective contraception. And, in the Canadian case, about half of conceptions to teenagers are aborted (Dryburgh 2000).

In absolute terms, the strongest declines in fertility have been at ages 20 to 24, from 108 births per 1,000 women in 1976 to 56 in 2001 (see Figure 6). Until 1969 the age group 20 to 24 had the highest fertility rate, but it has since been bypassed by the age group 25 to 29. Conversely, since the mid-1970s, fertility has increased at ages 30 to 39. This is clearly counter to the long-term trend during the first demographic transition, from 1870 to 1945, where the largest fertility declines were for women over 35.

The changed age pattern of childbearing, or the delay of fertility, has largely been associated with women's increased education and labour force participation. Particularly in the period 1963-89, Rindfuss and his colleagues (1996) observed that women with a college education in the United States experienced dramatic shifts toward later ages at childbearing. With regards to males, Ravanera and Rajulton (2000) found that men of higher status start parenting later and finish sooner. Lochhead (2000, p. 42) observed that the distribution of first births shifts further to higher ages for women who have more education. He pointed especially to powerful economic and career incentives to delay childbirth and family formation, for many young women and men. Fussell (2002) attributed both later and less childbearing to more economic and psychological insecurity for men and more labour force participation for women.

Figure 6: Fertility Rate by Age Group, Canada, 1972-2000



Source: Belanger (2003, p. 34).

The data from the 1998 Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics suggested that the economic advantages associated with delaying parenthood have increased for younger generations of mothers (Drolet 2002). The 1998 Survey found no significant association between the timing of marriage and wages, but the timing of parenthood did make a difference for women's wages. Controlling for other variables, the wages of women who had their children later did not differ from those who had no children, but women who had their children earlier than the average for their level of education, field of study, urban size and birth year, had lower average wages. Women who delayed their births had accumulated more years of full-time work experience (Drolet 2003).

The relation between labour force participation and childbearing probably involves two models. In a model that was more relevant to older cohorts, women who had less labour market integration were more likely to have children. However, in younger cohorts, we may be seeing women delay childbearing until they are better integrated in the labour force, and consequently it would be the women who are better integrated in the labour market who would be having children. This model is encouraged by provisions for parental leave and child care, which are oriented toward employed parents. Certain occupations are more conducive to the second model, with women in education or nursing having more flexibility to have a child compared to those in law or engineering. In a qualitative study based on women who graduated from university in 1985, Ranson (1998) found that those in education could take advantage of leaves, and guaranteed return to their employment, while women in law or business found that they had to concentrate on their careers to the point that they had put off childbearing.

Mid-Adulthood (prime productive ages, 35-59)

Union Stability

Trends in Union Dissolution

While there are dissolutions of unions at various points of the life course, they are treated in this section on mid-adulthood. Marital instability that was previously due to premature deaths now occurs through voluntary means. Separation and divorce have certainly increased since the 1960s, but it is also important to appreciate that the most common situation is for people to be married only once. In terms of family units, the 1995 General Social Survey found that 70 percent of families with children included both biological parents, while 22 percent involved only one parent and eight percent were step-families with one biological parent and a step-parent (Beaujot and Kerr 2004, p.222).

It is estimated that **at least one third** of marriages taking place in the last two decades will end in divorce within 25 years (Péron et al. 1999). This is taken from the observation that among persons who married in 1968-69, 29.3 percent had divorced within 25 years (Dumas and Bélanger 1996, p. 35). The trends at shorter marriage duration involve higher propensities to divorce for subsequent cohorts. For instance, within 10 years of marriage, the 1968-69 cohort had 11.4 percent divorces, while the 1983-84 marriage cohort had 18.4 percent divorces. Life table techniques that extrapolate on the basis of the data from a given year suggest that there was a stabilization of divorces between 1986 and 1991 at slightly more than 30 percent of marriages (Nault and Bélanger 1996, p. 18). The comparison of divorces by duration of marriage also suggests that there may be the beginnings of a decline in the propensity to divorce (Bélanger and Dumas 1998, p. 35). In part, this may be because marriages are becoming more selective, with more cohabitation and less marriage. Compared to other countries, Canadian divorce rates are higher than in Japan, France or Germany, roughly the same as those of Sweden and the United Kingdom, and considerably lower than in the United States.

Types of Unions

Given the spread of cohabitation, and a trend toward cohabitations of longer duration, sometimes as a substitute for marriage, it is useful to look at various patterns of

combination of cohabitation and formal marriage, since separations vary considerably by pattern. Using life-table techniques based on data from 1995, Belanger and Dumas (1998) estimated that after 25 years, 20 percent of marriages not preceded by cohabitation have separated, compared to 40 percent of unions that involved a marriage preceded by cohabitation. For all unions that started as cohabitations, regardless of their involving a marriage, the life table estimates indicate that 65 percent are expected to separate, and this rises to 85 percent for unions that remained as cohabitation. Even after five years there are significant differences, with half of unions having dissolved if they involved cohabitations that were not converted into a marriage, compared to only five percent of dissolution for unions that started as a marriage not preceded by cohabitation. According to the 2001 General Social Survey, more than 30 percent of persons aged 40 to 59 who started their conjugal relationships through marriage are expected to separate, but the number is twice as high for those who started with cohabitation (Statistics Canada 2002b, p. 4). As noted earlier, this statistical relationship reflects more the personal characteristics of persons who cohabit than a causal effect of cohabitation as such on subsequent union dissolution.

Determinants of Union Dissolution

The understanding of divorce trends can be placed in the context of instrumental and expressive factors in marriage, and the changing nature of the marriage commitment. Since there has been a decrease in the **instrumental** functions fulfilled by families, families have less holding them together. This is particularly true in the economic domain where families now involve less economic interdependence in a family enterprise, such as a farm or small business. For the wife in particular, it is much easier to get out of an unhappy marriage if she is employed in a two-income family. Moreover, if she no longer receives her status from her marriage, the prospect of moving out is less negative. Stated differently, the greater independence of women makes divorce more viable. By the same token, the greater viability of divorce forces women to become more independent. For similar instrumental reasons, divorces are less likely to occur when there are young, dependent children, because the family is more economically interdependent at that time. Indeed, both childless couples and those in the empty nest stage have higher risks of divorce (Rowe 1989; Hoem 1995).

Divorce levels are also higher at lower levels of socio-economic status. A lower income means that the instrumental exchanges in the marriage are less rewarding and consequently the prospect of divorce is not as negative. In Sweden, the relationship between education and the propensity to divorce has changed (Hoem 1995). In cohorts born before 1940, those with more education were more likely to divorce, possibly because of more liberal attitudes toward divorce. However, in subsequent cohorts those with more education have lower divorce probabilities, possibly because of the more rewarding nature of their instrumental exchanges. In Canada, Balakrishnan and his colleagues (1993) found that higher education is linked with higher divorce rates, but the presence of children reduces these rates. Higher men's incomes reduce divorce. Women with higher incomes have higher divorce prospects, but lower rates of dissolution of cohabitation. Divorce propensities are particularly high for those who married at a young age and who had premarital births.

The greater relevance of the **expressive** dimension is equally important in understanding the divorce trend. Marriage is now seen much more as an arrangement for the mutual fulfilment of participants. Spouses expect more from families in terms of intimacy and interpersonal affect. In addition, individual well-being and self-fulfilment are seen as significant values. Families are expected to serve individual needs, rather than individuals serving family needs. Divorce today then may be more prevalent because it represents a natural solution to marriages that do not serve the mutual fulfilment of the spouses. In particular, 88 to 95 percent of respondents consider that divorce is justified if there is "lack of love and respect from the partner," "unfaithful behaviour" or "abusive behaviour" (Frederick and Hamel 1998, p. 8). According to the 1995 General Social Survey, the most common grounds for divorce are abusive behaviour, infidelity, lack of love and respect, and excessive drinking by a partner, all factors at the expressive level. For Hareven (1983), high rates of divorce were proof that people care about marriage, and about the quality of their relationships. On the other hand, Ambert and Baker (1988) found that significant numbers regret their decision to divorce. In a third of separations, there were no serious grounds for divorce. Some divorces happen because of circumstances that have little to do with the marriage, such as problems at work, mid-life crises or continuing emotional problems. Other divorces are due to "taking a risk" with an affair that does not lead to a permanent relationship.

One of the most consistent findings in divorce research is that the probabilities of divorce are higher for those getting married at an early age. For women aged 35 to 49 in 1984, the probability of marital dissolution among those who married at 19 years of age or younger was almost twice as large (26 versus 14 percent) as the probability among those who married at the age of 25 or older (Balakrishnan and Grindstaff 1988; Desrosiers and Le Bourdais 1991). The same applies to the risk of dissolution of common-law unions, which are higher for those entering unions at young ages or if there was a conception before the union (Turcotte and Bélanger 1997, pp. 19-20). There are several reasons for the higher divorce levels among those marrying young. Some of these reasons are related to instrumental questions. The lower income associated with youth means the instrumental exchanges may be less rewarding. Regarding the expressive dimension, one can hypothesize that, as these young married persons mature, they find their spouses to have been poor choices and they do not receive the expected gratification. It may even be that, for persons marrying at younger ages, emotional gratification is particularly important. Early marriage may have been a way of escaping an unrewarding situation in their families of origin. If the expressive dimension is especially important to them, they will hesitate less to separate when this dimension is not working.

The higher incidence of divorce for second marriages can also be seen in this light. The lowest dissolution rate is for marriages involving two single people, while those involving a divorced woman and a single man or two divorced persons have the highest rates (Dumas 1990, p. 44). Persons who have already divorced are more likely to see marriage in terms of mutual fulfilment and to leave a marriage that is not rewarding.

Obviously, divorce would be less common if everyone frowned on it and if the legal restrictions were formidable. But there has been a significant change in the attitudes toward divorce in Western societies. The social stigma attached to marital dissolution has lessened considerably and people now accept that divorce occurs frequently for "normal" people. There has also been considerable change in the definition of acceptable grounds for divorce. Until 1968, adultery was the only grounds for divorce in Canada. The 1968 *Divorce Act* extended the grounds for divorce to include both fault-related grounds and marriage-breakdown grounds. Fault-related grounds include adultery and other sexual offences, prolonged alcohol or drug addiction, and physical and mental cruelty. To obtain a divorce on these grounds there must be an injured party who brings the other spouse to trial and a determination of guilt. As of 1986, divorce under marriage-breakdown grounds can occur after spouses have lived apart for one year, for whatever reason.

Lack of agreement on the model for the division of earning and caring may also be responsible for separations, especially in cases where there is difficulty accommodating new models. In other cases the division of work is seen as significantly unjust. The inability of couples to work out acceptable arrangements on the sharing of work can represent a major element of incompatibility. It could also be that persons who are not willing to do their share have already indicated that they do not care about the relationship. Stated positively, persons who care about each other will seek to establish relationships based on a sense of overall equity.

In American couples, Huber and Spitze (1983) found that over a fifth of men and close to a third of women had seriously thought of divorce. Earnings had no effect on the likelihood of having considered divorce, but the more housework the husband was seen to do, the less likely the wife was to have thought of divorce.

But sharing tasks can also be difficult since it involves the potential to criticize each other and to enter the wife's domain. Thompson and Walker (1989, p. 859) found that "sharing family work is associated with greater marital strain." (The link between household division of labour and family solidarity was dealt with by Emile Durkheim in his *Division of Labour*. For a more recent formulation, see Burch 1985).

Consequences of Union Dissolution

Apart from the effect on children, union dissolution impacts on the couples themselves. Interesting analyses have been made of the **economic outcomes** of separation, for men and women. Administrative data, especially from taxation files, have enabled a five-year follow-up for persons who separated between 1987 and 1993 (Galarneau and Sturrock 1997; Galarneau 1998). Distinct analyses were done for the 40 percent who did not have children under 18 living at home, and the 60 percent who did have children. In the case of those without children, the adjusted family income (after tax and after adjustment for support payments and receipts) declined significantly for women in the first year (by 16 percent) but after five years it involved a five percent decline for women and a two percent gain for men. After five years, 51 percent of men and 47 percent of women had gained in adjusted family income, compared to the year of separation. Those who had remarried or entered cohabitation and were living as couples after five years were more

likely to have made gains. However, women were less likely to have formed a new partnership. For persons who had children under 18, there were even more significant declines in income for women in the first year (23 percent) but after five years the decline was five percent for women compared to a 15 percent gain for men. Once again, there were more gains for those who formed couples.

Models of Sharing Earning and Caring

Since earning and caring activities represent the major responsibilities of families, it is useful to consider alternate models through which paid and unpaid work are divided.

Paid Work by Gender and Parental Status

Men's employment/population ratios have declined since 1981 and women's have increased since 1971. Among the OECD countries, Canada is exceptional for the amount of change between 1960 and 1990 (Engelhardt and Prskawetz 2004, p. 38). In 1960, with 32 percent of women in the labour force, Canada was among the countries with the lowest participation; in 2000, the rate of 71 percent puts Canada in the group with the highest participation.

While the trends for women and men are converging, parenthood still has the opposite average effects; that is, it leads to divergence of the employment patterns of women and men. Women with children at home are less likely to work full time, and the younger the child the less likely they are to be working full time. The opposite occurs for men who are more likely to work full time if they have children at home. There are similar findings with regard to work interruptions, which are more likely for women when they have children, but less likely for men who have children (Cook and Beaujot 1996).

When the relationships are analyzed by marital status, women with children at home are more likely to work full time when they are in cohabiting union or in post-union status, and least likely when they have never married (see Table 3). For men with children at home, it is the married who are most likely to be working full time, but again the never married are least likely to work full time, and least likely to be employed. While 73.1 percent of all women with children under 6 are working, with 49.7 percent working full time, the differences by marital status imply that the traditional division of work is more likely to occur for married women than for women in cohabiting unions or in post-union status. Nonetheless, the least amount of market work occurs for the never married, where 38.5 percent of women with children under 6 are not employed. The differences are stronger when the children are aged 0 to 3 years. In this case, in 2002, 46.7 percent of mothers in single-parent families were working compared to 64.1 percent in two-parent families (Neill 2004, p. 6).

Table 3: Proportion (%) Working Full Time, Part Time and Not Employed by Sex, Presence of Children, Marital Status, Canada, 2001

	Male			Female		
	Full-Time	Part-Time	Not Employed	Full-Time	Part-Time	Not Employed
Married						
No child under 25	73.5	7.2	19.2	49.2	16.4	34.3
Children under 6	92.0	3.3	4.7	49.7	24.9	25.4
Youngest child 6-14	91.3	3.5	5.2	57.1	24.9	17.9
Youngest child 15-24	87.3	4.3	8.4	60.8	19.0	20.2
Total	84.4	4.9	10.7	53.3	20.6	26.1
Common-law						
No child under 25	83.0	7.4	9.6	69.7	16.8	13.5
Children under 6	87.2	5.7	7.2	54.0	20.4	25.6
Youngest child 6-14	86.9	5.0	8.0	65.0	18.4	16.6
Youngest child 15-24	86.3	5.0	8.7	73.5	13.7	12.7
Total	84.8	6.5	8.7	65.5	17.7	16.8
Divorced/separated/widowed						
No child under 25	69.8	7.6	22.6	51.1	13.7	35.2
Children under 6	84.5	4.1	11.4	53.4	18.4	28.2
Youngest child 6-14	84.1	5.9	10.0	63.7	18.6	17.7
Youngest child 15-24	83.7	4.8	11.5	67.8	13.5	18.7
Total	72.6	7.1	20.3	56.5	14.9	28.6
Never married						
No child under 25	54.5	24.0	21.5	44.4	33.1	22.6
Children under 6	64.9	13.5	21.6	40.8	20.8	38.5
Youngest child 6-14	73.9	7.8	18.3	58.6	16.2	25.2
Youngest child 15-24	72.6	5.2	22.2	65.1	12.9	21.9
Total	54.7	23.8	21.5	45.0	31.4	23.6
Total						
No child under 25	62.0	16.4	21.6	48.0	23.0	28.9
Children under 6	90.5	4.0	5.5	49.7	23.4	26.9
Youngest child 6-14	90.2	3.8	6.0	58.9	22.8	18.2
Youngest child 15-24	86.9	4.4	8.7	62.8	17.6	19.5
Total	72.4	11.7	15.9	51.9	22.4	25.7

Source: Canada 2001 Census Public Use Sample.

These relationships of work and parenting indicate the persistence of certain elements of the complementary roles of the family division of labour. In an American study, for example, the average tendency was for childbirth to reduce women's work time and to increase men's average wage (Lundberg and Rose 1998). Couples in which wives interrupted their careers for child rearing showed increased task specialization associated with childbirth, including a reallocation of time of both husband and wife, and declines in wages of wives. However, there is also evidence of the emergence of other patterns. This same study showed that the patterns are significantly different for couples in which the wife participated continuously in the labour market. In those cases, the mother's wage rate did not decline while the hours worked by fathers declined by more than seven percent after the birth of the first child. Furthermore, the wage differentiation on the birth of a first child was not as significant for younger cohorts. Thus, the increase in task specialization associated with childbirth was less applicable to younger cohorts and to the sub-sample of couples in which wives continuously participated in the labour force. As the model of continuous participation in the labour force becomes dominant, the authors

see converging time-use patterns for husbands and wives and a declining wage differentiation associated with parenthood.

The dynamics will be rather different in families based on complementary roles, as compared to what some have called “new families” based on a two-worker model with a more symmetrical division of paid and unpaid work. Berk (1985) used the concept of families as a gender factory to highlight the way the division of labour in households promoted gender differentiation. However, some “new men” have come to see the value of productive roles for both women and men, of maintaining relationships based on equality, and of sharing in unpaid work as a form of mutuality (Coltrane 1995). Just as families have come to promote the education of both their daughters and sons (Wanner 1999), some couples have come to aspire to post-gender marriages where the division of work, still valuable in terms of efficiency, is not based on gender.

When paid work and family care were each full-time jobs, then having one person in the market and one at home brought efficiency. However, when both are to be in the market, Becker (1981) proposed that efficiency would necessitate that at most one person would divide her/his time between home and market production. This theoretical assumption is under question when maximizing production requires that neither worker be shackled with an excessive burden at home. Besides, maximizing efficiency is not necessarily the overriding consideration, in comparison to emphasizing things like equality and mutuality. While there is certain efficiency to the complementary-roles model of marriage, it is also a high-risk alternative for women and children, since it lacks insurance against the loss of the breadwinner.

Types of Sharing Paid and Unpaid Work

Time use data provide an opportunity for detailed descriptions of the different family models. On the basis of the 1998 time-use survey, we divided couples into categories relating to the division of productive activities (Beaujot and Liu 2005; Beaujot and Ravanera 2003). The advantage of time use is that it adopts the same unit of measurement of earning and caring activities, that is, the time spent in these activities. Compared to the wife, the husband could be doing more paid work, less paid work or the same amount of paid work. Similarly, the husband could be doing more, less, or the same amount of unpaid work. We define “same amount” as the case where each member of the couple reports spending between 45 percent and 55 percent of the total time spent by the couple.

A simplification of the categories shows that the complementary-traditional (he does more paid work, she does more unpaid work) is the predominant model with 48.5 percent, followed by woman’s double burden (she is doing same amount of or more paid work, and more unpaid work) with 22.9 percent. But there are those who follow the reverse models as well; that is, the complementary-gender-reversed (she does more paid work, he does more unpaid work) comprises 5.3 percent, and the man’s double burden (he is doing same amount of or more paid work, and more unpaid work), 10.0 percent. The role-sharing model, they do the same amount of unpaid work, comprises 13.1 percent. Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998) called this role-sharing model a post-gender marriage. For the most part, their qualitative studies, along with those by

Hochschild (1989), have seen the role-sharing model as a deliberate attempt by couples to achieve a more egalitarian relationship.

The complementary-traditional pattern is more common when there are younger children and when there are more children in the home (Beaujot and Ravanera 2003). However, women's double burden is most common when there are no children, or when children are older. Men's double burden is also more common when there are no children. The role-sharing model is most common, amounting to 18.5 percent, when both are working full time, or when there are two children (15.1 percent).

Late Adulthood (troisième age, 60-79, quatrième age, 80 plus)

Productivity of the Elderly

In *Reforms for an Ageing Society*, the OECD (2000) observed a dramatic fall in the number of expected years of life spent in employment, along with growth in the years spent in school and retirement. Since the 1960s, the percentage of the population at work has been growing: there are fewer children, the baby boom is in the labour force, and women's participation has increased. For Canada, the percentage of the population employed is expected to continue increasing until 2010, but then to decline if there is a continuation of present trends in participation by age. The continuation of current trends to the year 2030 would mean that Canadian men would spend 50 percent of their lives employed, compared to 74 percent under 1960 conditions (OECD 2000, p. 141; Hicks 2003).

This OECD (2000) document argued in particular for changes that would promote the employment of older workers. It suggested reforms to public pension systems, taxation systems and social transfer programs to remove incentives to early retirement. For pensions themselves, the document proposed a better mix with more private plans, phased reductions in public pension benefits and hikes in contribution rates. International comparisons suggest that early retirement is at least partly due to incentives built into retirement policies (Gruber and Wise 1997). That is, retirement is earlier when the minimum age for entitlement to pension benefits is lower, when the value of pensions is higher, when there are fewer pension benefits from additional years of work, and when disability pensions are available below the normal retirement age.

At the same time, there is much variability in people's health and potential in their 60s and 70s. Some are able to maintain a high level of productivity; others suffer from lowered potential, chronic conditions and disability. While some can continue at the same pace of productivity, many should be carrying fewer responsibilities. Instead of encouraging retirement, there may be ways to encourage a change in occupation. Instead of being teachers, professors or day care workers, could persons who are past their prime ages of productivity not be assistants? Rather than being managers, could they be administrative assistants? For others, it may be possible to reduce hours at work, encouraging more time spent volunteering or caring for family members.

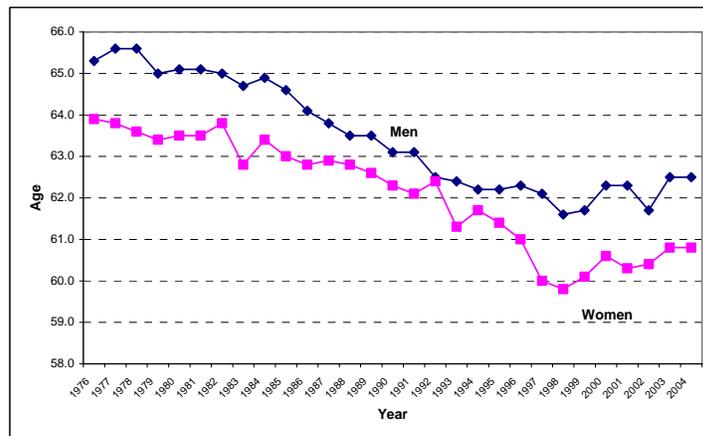
That is, in an economy based on high skills, productivity in the later years could be rather different from earlier productivity; it could be devoted more to caring, both paid and unpaid, in the family and beyond the family. This would partly relieve young parents, who would be better able to balance their family and work lives. It might even encourage more people to become parents, knowing that there is more support, both formal and informal.

The above discussion of the productivity of older persons is concerned with changes in the extent of paid work in the provision of goods or services. It does not imply that older people are dependent or a drag on society and the economy. Many already provide unpaid services to family and community. Many, if not most, elderly pay property and income taxes on their pensions and investment income, if they have any. And they continue to consume, thus paying the goods and services tax and provincial sales tax (where applicable). The comparison of old-age dependency and that of young children (as in the frequently used dependency ratio) needs to be revisited.

Aging of the Boomers: Possible Patterns at Later Life

Another way of viewing the interplay between productivity and reproduction at later life is through a life-course lens. There are signs that the trend toward early retirement and decreasing labour force participation among the elderly, which started as early as the mid-1940s (McDonald and Chen 1994), is beginning to change. As can be seen in Figure 7, the average ages at retirement of men and women reached their lowest points in 1998 and since then, the retirement ages seem to be on the rise. The employment rate at ages 55+ increased from 24.6 to 29.5 between 2000 and 2004 (Perspectives on Labour and Income 2005, p. 54). As Manon (1996) noted, however, the pathways to retirement are becoming more diversified with an increasing proportion of retirement occurring before or after the mandatory retirement age of 65, and with a substantial number of retirees returning to paid work after initial retirement.

Figure 7: Average Age at Retirement, 1976-2004, Men and Women, Canada



Source: Statistics Canada. Labour Force Historical Review, 2004 [machine readable data file] Ottawa, ON: 1/31/20.

As the baby-boom generation (born between roughly 1945 and 1965) enters into retirement, the timing of and trajectories to retirement will most likely deviate from the patterns set by the older cohorts. As Ravanera and Rajulton (2002) noted, the boomers have pioneered in the spread of cohabitation, set the trend toward older age at first marriage and at first birth, experienced higher divorce rates and exhibited greater variations in the timing of these transitions, all of which point to the boomers' propensity to deviate from age norms and life-course patterns. Their lower fertility could also make a difference in later life, as they will have fewer family members (children and grandchildren, nieces and nephews) with whom to spend their leisure days. It would not be surprising, therefore, if the baby boomers lead a lifestyle at later life different from that of previous cohorts. The deviation could come in later disengagement from the labour force, but also in different means of economic inclusion, such as through after-retirement careers, return to colleges and universities, part-time work or other novel work arrangements (Ravanera and Rajulton 2002).

The elderly of the future will be more highly educated, and they may be in better health and might live longer than current elderly persons. But while higher education and good health are necessary for the extension of economic inclusion at later life, they are not sufficient conditions (Ravanera and Rajulton 2002). Other factors could bring about a longer stay in the work force, among which are the coming labour shortage resulting from smaller cohorts following the baby-boom generation and the changing nature of work, mainly through changes in industrial and occupational structures (McDonald and Chen 1994; Foot and Gibson 1994; and Manon 1996). But, these would probably still be insufficient. Employers and the government may need to make changes such as those cited by the OECD to attract the elderly to stay longer in the labour force.

Ideally, such policies will be to not compromise the employment prospects of younger people. While employment is not in general a zero-sum game among the generations, it often is the case that the retirement of the older person makes possible the employment or advancement of the younger.

The Fourth Age

The demarcation between the third and fourth age cannot be made precisely, since it depends more on health than age as such. Not only do we live longer, but part of this longer life involves more years of poor health. At the same time, a shorter period of employment may mean less savings and smaller pension entitlements. And so, many very old persons face growing problems of sickness and disability and dwindling economic resources.

Martel and Bélanger (1999) found that health-adjusted life expectancy increased over the period 1986-1996. They estimated that at age 65 the average person has a dependence-free life expectancy of 13 years, that is, to age 78. Lachapelle and Stone (2001) proposed that the fourth age be defined through activity limitations, more or less serious dependency and loss of the state of good health. They proposed that this threshold changed from an average age of 74 years in 1951 to 78 years in 1996. Another possibility would be to use age 80 as a demarcation; under current conditions that would mean persons living longer than the average life expectancy at birth.

Using the measure based on health, Lachapelle and Stone (2001) estimated that two percent of the Canadian population was in this fourth age in 1951, compared to 2.7 percent in 2001. It is expected to rise to six percent in 2051. Using a measure based solely on age, the percent of the population aged 80 and over increased from one percent in 1951 to three percent in 2001; but it will reach over eight percent by 2051.

Rather than calculating this stage through years since birth, it might be measured from the other end of life. There comes a time when life needs to be calculated not from the beginning, but from the end, as people do when they plan for retirement. Disability and chronic conditions call for less involvement in production, but persons at these ages are not necessarily dependent. Some remain able to care for others, in their family and beyond. The purpose should be to downplay ideas like “freedom 55” or retirement at age 65, and to establish more flexibility over the life course. Freud held that the keys to human fulfilment were love and work (but not necessarily paid work). This is as true in the third and fourth ages as any other.

Caring of and for the Elderly

In an extensive review of the literature on population aging, Ulysse (1997) concluded that the family “represents one of the ‘circuits’, if not the primary circuit through which intergenerational solidarity is structured, based on a range of gifts and exchanges (goods, time, services, money) which circulate in both a descendant and ascendant pattern” (p. 51). Further, he noted that the elderly are often taken care of by their family, despite the presence of public and institutional care facilities, and that middle-aged women play a key role.

In an analysis of the 1996 General Social Survey on Social and Community support, Rajulton and Ravanera (2006) showed a similar finding. In spite of the dramatic changes taking place in the family, the family support system still works in Canada. Canadians are involved in all types of support, the most common being the functional type; that is, more than 80 percent give and receive tangible help. Women generally give *and* receive more help for personal care and provide more help for child care. However, this study showed that men are involved in the support system as well and are particularly more involved in things that do not involve personal care, such as financial management, and in arranging for and co-ordinating formal services. As regards the elderly, the same study found that, irrespective of their income, the elderly are involved in different forms of support, the largest involvement falling into the *functional* type; that is, they give or receive various types of help. At the same time, there is not necessarily a sharp distinction between affective and functional since caring for someone’s needs is often done out of affection and with affection.

Caregiving of various kinds continues to be a great part of women’s tasks (Fast et al. 2004). There are signs, however, that women may no longer be as inclined as in the past to continue this role. In a comparison of two cohorts (1910-1919 and 1920-29) of women, for example, Hareven (2000, pp.145-147) found that the younger cohort, though expressing similar values, felt less inclined or less able to do the caring. She proposed that this reflects an increasing individualization in family relationships and reliance on

public agencies and institutions to take on the responsibilities for elderly care. Beck-Gernsheim (2002, pp. 64-85) came to the same conclusion: in both child and elderly care, she foresaw a huge gap in the supply of caregivers as women increasingly adopt values of freedom and equality and take on paying jobs for their own security.

5. Policy Issues

As already indicated, research on caring, earning and learning over the life course raises a number of policy issues. There are general questions, such as the role of government in setting the right conditions for families to exist and thrive. And there are specific questions relating to such things as parental leave, child care and child tax benefits. Questions of caring, earning and learning relate to the agenda on exclusion and inclusion, they relate to social capacity in terms of families being part of Canada's social foundations, and they relate to the role of caregivers, for both children and the elderly. In each case, questions may be raised regarding the respective roles of government, market, community, workplace and family in individual welfare. How does one support families that are so different, especially vulnerable families, those who have disabilities or difficulties in terms of earning, learning and caring? We make the case that all families need the security of supportive policies and a supportive society, but there are also real differences based on such things as number and timing of children, and available resources.

Broadly speaking, it is useful to consider three ways of handling risks: individual self-sufficiency, family support and a social safety net. A central question is the sharing between families and the state in the care of people who are dependent because of age, disability or health. In part, the state seeks to encourage family support of dependants and to encourage self-reliance. But there are contradictions: persons who look after family dependants will be less self-sufficient in the labour market. Given the three bases for support — individual, family, society — and a fourth, community, added by Jane Jenson (2004b), the state needs to assist individuals and families in ways that also maximize self-reliance.

In her extensive review of Canadian family policies, Baker (1995) considered three areas: laws relating to marriage, divorce, reproduction, adoption, custody and child support; support of family income through tax provisions, child benefits and leave benefits; and direct services, such as child care, child protection, home-care health services and subsidized housing. Beaujot (2000, pp. 331-351) discussed policies that relate to earning and work (employment, work incentives, workplace benefits, parental leave, part-time work, work-life balance) and to caring (child benefits, welfare provisions for children, child care).

Contrasting orientations to family policy across societies, Gauthier (1996) compared a traditional model to an egalitarian model, then introduced a third model defined as “pro-family but non-interventionist” where interventions are limited and targeted only to families in need. Jenson (2004a) spoke of paradigms defined by either family responsibility or societal investment in children.

Beaujot (2000, pp. 351-356) made a case for policies that push toward a gender balance of earning and caring. As we opt for a society where there are fewer inter-spousal dependencies, and more equality between men and women, it is useful to take note of

continuing legal provisions based on a traditional breadwinner model. This may apply to widowhood benefits, pension splitting and tax deductions for a dependent spouse. While these provisions are a means of accommodating dependency in couples, they can also discourage rather than promote the economic independence of women and men. Similarly, poorly subsidized parental leave and the lack of benefits for part-time work can reduce the likelihood that couples will share the leaves and part-time work associated with childbearing, as they seek to maximize the family income. In divorce, making joint custody the default condition would signal the continuing responsibility of both parents for the well-being of children. Joint custody would also signal that separations may sever the link between adults, but not those between adults and children.

Specific Policy Issues

The following sections present a brief discussion of a few specific issues: balancing work and family life, supporting lone parents, intergenerational equity and the role of the private sector. We then discuss in greater detail two related topics of particular interest to the authors: low fertility and pronatalist policy.

Balancing Work and Family Life

If we look at gender and family change through both economic and cultural lenses, there seems to be an interest in both more equal opportunities at work and in increased parental time with children. Most would seem to prefer an “adaptive” model, described by Hakim (2003), that is neither work-centred nor family-centred but that allows for both family and work. Both work and care are time-intensive activities, and there are concerns regarding time deficits and for both work and family activities.

In terms of parental leave in Canada, there has been an increase in the average months of leave as the benefits of Employment Insurance have been extended to one year from the previous benefit of six months (Marshall 2003). In 1993-96, for example, 60 percent returned within six months and 86 percent within a year, whereas in 2001 only 24 percent returned within six months but 77 percent within a year (Marshall 1999, 2003). A two-tiered system has evolved, with some having only access to the Employment Insurance benefit, and others having considerable top-up from employers. In support of families, a call for a universal system of parental leave with 75 percent of regular pay seems appropriate.

Canada is unique in having no universal benefit for children, either as a family allowance or as a tax deduction. The earlier benefits along these lines were converted into the child tax benefit, which is based on income. A case could be made for enriching the child tax benefit and extending it to middle-class persons with children. This would help toward equalizing their standard of living compared to people without children, in recognition of their child-rearing contribution to the wider society. These types of benefits allow parents to spend less of their time in the market and more time with their young children.

For mothers with children under 6 years of age, there is also considerable interest in reduced hours of work, as long as these reduced hours could come with good benefits.

Employers take advantage of part-time workers, in part because they are allowed to discriminate in terms of salary and work benefits. It would appear that the greater opportunity for part-time work in Northern as compared to Southern Europe is part of the reason for higher fertility in Northern Europe.

Clearly, child-care services need to be part of this picture. The differences between Quebec and the rest of Canada indicate that services will be used if they are provided at a reasonable cost. Jenson (2004a) proposed that a paradigm shift is occurring, from the view that children are the responsibility of the parents, to an “investing-in-children” perspective. In the earlier paradigm, families have primary responsibility and the state takes over when the parents are unable to do so. In the social investment paradigm, there are financial inducements to use high quality non-parental child care. Jenson proposed that the two paradigms currently co-exist, thus the differential views. Some opt for stronger state involvement in early childhood education and child care. Others are more interested in alternatives that would enable parents to look after children themselves, through enriched parental leaves, part-time work with good benefits and direct transfers to parents.

Support for Lone Parents

We also need to enhance our special provisions for lone parents (Beaujot and Liu 2002). Two provisions benefit lone parents. One is the equivalent-to-married tax deduction that is granted on behalf of the first child of a lone parent, just as one would claim a tax deduction based on having a dependent spouse. Another is the 75 percent replacement rate for Employment Insurance in the case of a main breadwinner who has low income and is receiving child tax benefits. These provisions are small in comparison to those of some other countries. For instance, Denmark doubles the family allowance for the first child of a lone-parent family. Other Canadian provisions involve capturing income from the absent parent. While this is clearly important, it does not help if the absent parent is unable to pay or manages to escape making the child support payments. Advance maintenance payments provide a stronger guarantee since they are provided directly by the state to the lone parent, regardless of the extent to which they can be recaptured from the absent parent.

Intergenerational Equity

The discussion in the previous section raises issues of generational equity. A case can be made that, despite their smaller numbers, young adults are not faring so well as previous generations. Costs of higher education, for example, have risen appreciably. Greater societal investments in post-secondary education would allow young people to leave home sooner, and to finish their education more efficiently without the distraction of part-time jobs. Greater investments in the school-to-work transition, especially for the benefit of those who leave school early, would reduce the uncertainties of the initial years on the labour market. Stronger investments in young families, including subsidies for parental leaves, tax benefits, reduced work hours and child care, would enable people in this stage of life to achieve their work and family goals. Such subsidies would be based on unique ways in which the human life course has evolved, with a long life expectancy, and long youth dependency subsidized by a long period of post-reproductive productivity.

Sometimes, this productivity in the troisième age can occur through direct care of grandchildren, as was the historical case. At other times, it can occur through extending the regular work life, or it can occur through volunteer work or new careers with reduced responsibility.

These are difficult questions, in part because an aging society tends to think especially of ways in which the lives of older people can be improved, and we tend to ignore the needs of the young who are less numerous and have limited political voice. For instance, in the countries with greater employment protection, which benefits workers who have more seniority, there tend to be higher relative levels of youth unemployment (Breen and Buchmann 2002). As there are now smaller relative numbers of people at young adult ages, it is important to recognize that investments in the early stages of the life course provide the best basis for long-term security.

One consideration in the realm of inter-generation transfer is housing. We pay high costs for household privacy and our strong tendency toward separate living. One barrier to more forms of joint living (with older children, parents, grandparents and other relatives) is the existence of strong single-residential zoning laws which discourage the creation of semi-autonomous living units within a larger household (e.g., granny flats or separate quarters for young adults). More flexibility in this regard might be useful, given the large number of lone parents and isolated elderly. A different way of looking at it is to distinguish two types of co-residence: living in the same housing unit (same kitchen, entry, etc.) or living in separate housing units as so defined within the same structure. The latter can yield a large measure of privacy and autonomy, while providing economies of joint living (e.g., one furnace etc.).

The Role of the Private Sector

At the individual level, income security — or the lack thereof — is partly a result of the individual's own efforts (past and present), and partly a result of the total socio-economic context. This context consists of policies and programs of various levels of government, but also the policies and programs of the private sector, as these relate to employment, wages and benefits. Increasingly, the context includes global economic conditions. In other words, the context of individual or family income security is a complex system.

Attempts to promote the well-being of Canadian individuals and families, therefore, must take account of the whole system if they are to be effective, and discussions of the issues must include the systemic effects of the private sector (see Box 3).

Box 3: The Elephant in the Room: The Private Sector and Income Security

In *Knowledge Plan, 2005-2008*, there are references to market forces (e.g., p.12). But these tend to be described in neutral or even positive terms, and treated as more or less inevitable. There is little consideration given to the fact that many aspects of the current labour market are the outcomes of systematic and deliberate actions on the part of employers.

In the TD Bank report (2005b) cited earlier, there is clearer recognition of the serious erosion of the job market facing Canadians, such that “working is no guarantee of an adequate standard of living in Canada” (p. 26).

“The reasons range from the stagnant growth in real median wages recorded over the last two decades, to a decline in the quality of employment, with temporary and non-standard work on the rise, and non-wage benefits, like participation in employee health insurance and registered pension plans, on the wane.... [T]he phenomenon of working poverty, particularly among those working full-time, is troubling (p. 26).

Given this report’s title and main focus, it is understandable that it goes on to consider primarily government policies and programs that affect income security – social assistance, CPP, OAS, income taxes, etc. But, given a recognition that the private sector is partly to blame for the situation they find “troubling,” it is surprising that nowhere is it suggested that the private sector might modify some of its policies to help alleviate the problem. Nor is it suggested in either report that governments might put pressure on the private sector to do so, through incentives or disincentives.

There is irony in the fact that “job creation” is the chief justification for various federal government programs providing subsidies to large corporations (including tax relief), whereas cutting jobs and downgrading their quality and security is perhaps the leading management tool for “cost-cutting” and “restructuring.”

As the TD Bank report rightly notes, government income security programs were never intended to be a substitute for work, except temporarily or for those unable to work. But, given current labour market conditions, as characterized above, either government programs must pick up the slack for more and more working Canadians, or there will be further stagnation or erosion.

A healthy economy does not in itself assure economic well-being for the average Canadian worker. In another recent report from TD Bank (2005a), it is noted that over the last fifteen years, real GDP per Canadian has risen 25.5 percent, while real after-tax income has risen only 3.6 percent, this despite the fact that the labour force was becoming better educated and older (more experienced). Clearly, prosperity is not being shared.

Box 3 (cont'd): The Elephant in the Room: The Private Sector and Income Security

Is it the role of government to fix problems caused in part by private sector policies?

Governments also should take care that their various programs do not work at cross-purposes. David Foot (2005) has recently questioned the timing of federal government plans to increase immigration on the grounds that it could work against the integration of children of baby-boomers, native-born Canadians, into the labour market. What is the point of creating even more competition among young workers (since immigrants also typically are in their 20's and 30's)? In short, is Manpower and Immigration working at cross-purposes to HRSDC?

Thomas K. Burch

Low Fertility

Fertility is lower than in the past partly because of the delays in family formation and the higher proportions of people who are not living in married or cohabiting relationships. The delays in early life transitions, including first childbirth, reduce the likelihood that people will have their desired number of children. The United Nations (1994, p. 30) promoted “the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children.” In countries with low fertility, do young people have the effective freedom to have the children that they desire? Several European countries, France in particular, have begun to ask whether the social and economic policies make this possible. Relevant issues include the availability of housing, career entry questions, work-life balance issues (including leaves), part-time work and child care, and subsidies for some of the basic costs of children.

Fertility needs to be related to determinants at the individual, family and societal levels, and gender needs to be a significant part of discussions on childbearing. Lapierre-Adamcyk and Lussier (2003, p. 100) observed succinctly that redefining the role of women to include that of producer in the workplace, in addition to being a wife and mother, changes the value of a child and the range of possibilities for contributing to society. The significant differences in the timing of first births between women in teaching as compared to business or law suggest that occupations provide different amounts of flexibility to accommodate family roles (Ranson 1998). It may also be that there are different orientations among women: family-centred women will have children in any case, career-centred women will have few if any children, and *dual-role* women will have children if the circumstances are favourable; the latter are more likely to be responsive to “women-friendly” policies (Esping-Anderson 2001, pp. 52-53; Hakim 2003).

Several topics regarding reproduction need to be related to questions of economic production and the changing nature of work. To what extent is the postponement of fertility due to difficulty in finding a decent job? To what extent are difficulties in balancing work and family linked to low fertility? Would the creation of more family-friendly policies in the work world lead to a rise in fertility? Would greater equality between men and women lead to higher fertility? Does a more equitable sharing of household tasks lead to a fertility rate closer to replacement? For instance, McDonald

(2000) proposed that fertility is particularly low when there is more gender equity in the broader society than in families. Using data from the United States, Torr and Short (2004) found a u-shaped relationship; both the most modern and the most traditional housework arrangements are positively related to the likelihood of a second birth.

When considering the potential effects of policy, comparisons across societies and over time are particularly important (Gauthier 1996). After considering the policy context of fertility in five countries (France, Germany, Poland, Spain and Sweden), Grant et al. (2004) proposed that government policies can slow declines in fertility rates, but that no single policy works, and the effects take place slowly. This Rand publication also proposed that “policies indirectly aimed at fertility which target improvements in broader conditions may have beneficial fertility effects” (Grant et al., p. xiv). In a broad ethical context, Henripin (1989, p. 123) proposed that true individual freedom occurs when the state both supports contraception and has policies favouring fertility, commenting that in matters of procreation, a really free society makes it possible for its members to have children if they wish to and not to have children if they don’t want to do so. A pro-family policy would probably include fiscal structures that take into account the number of dependent children when taxation is used to redistribute across families and individuals.

In comparing the United States and Canada, Torrey and Eberstadt (2005) observed that the higher levels of childbearing in the United States are partly a function of higher rates at young ages; they are also consistent with a younger age at first marriage, less cohabitation, lower unemployment and higher average incomes in the United States. At the same time, Canada’s more supportive social policies do not translate into higher fertility.

Making comparisons across 13 European countries, Adsera (2005) found more postponement of childbearing where there is more restrictive employment protection legislation, typically favouring older workers, and where there is more economic uncertainty in the form of persistent unemployment. Adsera also found that first births occur sooner where there is strong availability of secure employment through the state. Transitions to second and third births are facilitated by a greater availability of part-time work and more generous maternity benefits. Bringing the United States into the comparison suggests that childbearing may be higher in the context of either a welfare state that works in terms of the interests of young families or a neo-liberal economy that works in terms of employment security (Adsera 2004).

The case of Sweden in the late 1980s and early 1990s suggests that a reduction in state support for families can especially undermine childbearing (Hoem and Hoem 1996). Once there was more confidence in the state’s support, fertility returned to somewhat higher levels. The strong subsidies in France can also be linked to higher childbearing. This gives young couples a sense of being supported by the broader society. In the United States, the low unemployment rates and the availability of employment have given young people the confidence that they can find a job following a period of unpaid leave after childbirth. It may be that Canada has neither the strong family-supportive policies of certain European countries, nor the neo-liberal economy that is providing security to

young people as in the United States. Canada's welfare state is especially oriented toward the elderly, rather than to young families. For instance, among the eight countries compared, the social expenditure on non-elderly as a percent of GDP is second lowest in Canada, while the prevalence of low-income in families with children is second highest (as shown in Table 4), both for two-parent and one-parent families (Picot and Myles 2005, pp. 6, 10). In contrast, among these eight countries, the prevalence of low income among Canadian elderly is second lowest.

Table 4: Poverty Rates (% of population poor¹) in Eight Rich Countries, by Age Group, at the Turn of the Century

Nation (year)	Overall ²	Children and Their Parents ³		Elders ⁴	Childless ⁵	Mixed ⁶
		1 Parent	2 Parent			
United States (00)	17.0	41.4	13.1	28.4	11.1	14.9
United Kingdom (99)	12.3	31.3	8.9	24.6	7.7	7.0
Canada (97)	11.9	38.9	9.5	5.2	12.1	5.9
Netherlands (99)	8.9	26.8	7.9	3.2	9.5	14.2
Germany (00)	8.2	31.6	2.8	12.2	9.0	7.5
Belgium (97)	7.9	12.5	6.6	13.1	7.3	6.3
Sweden (00)	6.4	11.3	2.1	8.2	9.7	2.4
Finland (00)	5.4	7.3	2.2	10.1	7.6	2.1
Overall Average	9.8	25.1	6.6	13.1	9.3	7.5

Notes:

¹Poverty is measured at 50 percent median adjusted disposable income (ADPI) for individuals. Incomes are adjusted by $E=0.5$ where $ADPI=unadjusted\ DPI\ divided\ by\ household\ size\ (s)\ to\ the\ power\ E: ADPI = DPI/s^E$.

²All types of persons regardless of living situation.

³Children are under age 18. They and the non-elderly adults living with them in the same household are separated into one- and two-parent columns.

⁴Adults aged 65 and over living in units with a head age 65 and over.

⁵Childless are couples or singles where the reference person is under age 65.

⁶Mixed households include persons living in multiple generation families.

Source: Smeeding (2003, Table 2).

Making a Case for Policy that Supports Childbearing

Current discussions of population aging and of the prospect of a slowing or even declining Canadian population generally emphasize two responses. The first is “accommodationist,” looking for ways to adapt to demographic changes seen as inevitable. The second views immigration as a partial solution. Immigration, of course, can easily affect population size and growth. But patterns of immigration (numbers and ages of immigrants) that would appreciably slow or reverse population aging are impractical. Feasible patterns of immigration over the next decade or so would have little effect on the relative number of persons over 65. While immigrants are often seen as less “expensive” than births, these calculations can easily underestimate the costs of assimilation, in the educational system and through meaningful employment, for the first and second generations.

A rise in the fertility rate, by contrast, would favour both population growth and a younger population. Yet there is little discussion of measures that might help raise the fertility rate from current historic low levels — a total fertility rate of approximately 1.5.

HRSDC's Knowledge Plan, 2005-2008, for example, discusses the low fertility rate at several points, but does not discuss policies and programs that might promote higher fertility.

There are many reasons for this lack of discussion. Some would see pronatalist policies as threatening gains made by women in independence, freedom in choice of lifestyle, and full participation in the labour force. Others point to the relative failure of most historical attempts to raise birth rates by means of direct financial incentives: Europe in the 1930s, Quebec more recently. Still others cite the modern concept of reproductive freedom; individuals and couples should do what they wish in matters of partnering and reproduction, without government interference: "Government has no business in the nation's bedrooms." There is a widespread assumption that Canadians are having very small families because that is what they want.

But changing gender roles make it unlikely that the costs of higher fertility would fall largely on women, and pronatalist policies are not limited to baby bonus programs. A wide range of social and economic policies could provide a foundation for family formation, including the birth of children, for those who wish it.

No one would argue that couples are economically motivated to have children. In purely economic terms, children represent mostly costs with few financial returns. But economic factors can provide powerful disincentives to childbearing, discouraging union formation (marriage and other long-term relationships) and childbearing. The fact that the current fertility rate is 1.5 does not necessarily mean that the average Canadian couple wants such a small family. The observed behaviour is a product of constraints as well as preferences, and might well be different if some major constraints were eased.

It should be noted that even modest increases in the fertility rate could yield demographic benefits of higher natural increase (or lower natural decrease) and a slowing of the population aging process. It would take a 40 percent increase from current levels to reach fertility required for long-term replacement through natural increase. An increase of half that size — adding 0.3 children to the average fertility rate — would have significant benefits.

The suggestion here is to investigate broad social and economic policies and programs that might provide a broader foundation for family formation by persons now discouraged from that life choice. The aim is not higher fertility as such, for strictly demographic reasons, but a society in which individual reproductive freedom is maximized, not just the freedom to marry and have children, but the freedom to do so on reasonable terms. If society were more supportive of young people especially, the fertility rate might pretty much take care of itself.

Many social programs aim to assure older persons some basic level of independence and dignity. But surely the independence and dignity of young adults is just as important. It could be added that low fertility means that many older persons are being denied the deep satisfaction that comes with grandparenthood, and an associated tighter bonding with

their grown children. In general, extreme low fertility leads directly to a reduced number of collateral kin, attenuating the extended family. In short, low fertility is not just a demographic problem; it is a human problem.

Such an approach does not fit neatly into HRSDC's program description, which deals mainly with the welfare of existing families. A different approach would deal not just with the welfare of families already in existence, but with potential families — those that might have existed or might yet exist in a different social and economic climate. Moreover, with the partial exception of lone parents, those targeted do not fall into any of HRSDC's named target groups: children, seniors, persons with work-related disabilities, recent immigrants, Aboriginal people or the unattached 45 to 64 (most of whom will be beyond the prime reproductive years). The target group is the average Canadian young adult. These are people who are not disadvantaged in general, but may be disadvantaged with respect to family formation in a socio-economic environment less than congenial to family formation.

6. Needed Family Research: Themes, Priorities and Research Styles

Life is a process, both the life of the individual and the life of the family or household. An individual's life can last upward of a hundred years — over 52 million minutes — in each of which a person chooses, acts and reacts. The Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk (2004, pp. 375-376), in his novel, *Snow*, compares human life to a snowflake, each one distinct, with a limited lifetime from formation to disappearance, its form “determined by the temperature, the direction and force of the wind, the altitude of the cloud, and any number of mysterious forces.” But a human life is more complicated than that of a snowflake.

Families and households intertwine many individual lives and are thus more complicated still. It is even difficult to say when a family or household begins and when it ends, unlike human lives.

It is no wonder that there is much we do not know about the Canadian family. But, as the body of this report shows, progress has been made.

Life-course analysis, as described above, has been a major step forward. It yields but a skeletal view of the lives of individuals and families. But that view at least focusses on crucial events or transitions, events that mark major changes in status for the individual, and that have major consequences into an indefinite future. The choices underlying these events have been termed “fateful choices.” The movie that one chose to see last weekend, or the colour of shirt one chooses to wear on a given day typically have few if any lasting consequences. To marry or not to marry, to have a child or not, to divorce or not, to finish secondary school or not — these decisions and turning points in one's life have consequences for a whole lifetime.

The main outlines of the individual life course and the family/household life cycle in Canada have been well documented, thanks mainly to census and sample survey data provided by Statistics Canada. Beginning in the 1980s, Statistics Canada conducted several cross-sectional sample surveys (involving a sample of respondents contacted once in a given year) pertaining to family and the life course. Many of these provide temporal depth through the addition of retrospective questions about past behaviour. The focus on these questions, of course, is on information that can be reliably recalled at a later time, for example, age at school leaving, age at first full-time work, marital history, number of children born and so forth. In the nature of the case, it is difficult or not impossible to gather survey information on such things as attitudes and expectations in the distant past, or even factual information relating to less important life experiences, for example, exact dates of casual employment, such as summer jobs in youth.

More recently, Statistics Canada has launched longitudinal or panel studies, in which a sample of respondents is interviewed several times (in waves) over a period of several months or years. These are thought to provide more accurate information on the specific

transitions referred to above. But most important, they enable researchers to investigate how current attitudes and expectations affect future behaviour as measured in a later round of the survey, thus getting closer to a causal understanding of how and to what extent subjective factors affect behaviour. By the same token, they provide for a closer look at the consequences of earlier behaviours, and their effects on current attitudes and expectations and on present behaviours.

Despite the wealth of new information provided by these sources, there is much more to learn. Existing data might be compared to descriptions of the tip of an iceberg. To begin with, more events or transitions need to be added to the life-course descriptions highlighted in Chapter 4, for example migration and other changes of residence, on which data already exist, or marital infidelity as a factor in divorce, for which we have very little data – understandably so, given the official governmental status of most social surveys in Canada. It is unlikely that Statistics Canada could or would routinely ask Canadians such questions as “Have you ever committed adultery?” Yet extramarital affairs often are an important factor in the divorce process.

Beyond more descriptive data on events and transitions, there is a need to drill down to deeper levels of the processes and mechanisms involved in the myriad decisions we make over our lives. What are the goals, emotions, thought processes, expectations, social pressures that drive us? To what extent do we really choose our life paths, and to what extent are we programmed — by family, peers, churches, government, popular culture and the media? To what extent are our choices severely limited by poverty, dysfunctional families or the labour market?

Answers to these and other questions will require empirical research that will supplement and complement the sample survey research discussed above, but also the development of theories and models that can, if only provisionally, explicate underlying processes and mechanisms not easily captured in empirical data or statistical models.

What follows is a list — of necessity partial and selective — of what we see as important family research priorities, both as to substance and style of research.

Substantive Themes

Topics on which more research is needed include the following, numbered for easy reference.

1. What is “the family”? What does this term mean to Canadians? This is not so much a matter of seeking hard definitions, which in any case are changing and somewhat arbitrary, as it is of trying to map the mental landscape of Canadians in the face of changes wrought by the second demographic transition, and in a time of ever increasing cultural diversity in Canada. Especially important is the role of kin outside the immediate nuclear-family household of spouses/partners and children.

2. How is the “family household” (a group of related persons living in the same house or apartment) positioned in the broader kin network? What are the expectations, interactions and sentiments among members? What are the transfers among kin in terms of money or other forms of help? How do these compare to expectations, interactions, sentiments and transfers within the family household? That is, the household structure needs to be separated from the sense of obligation people have to each other and the effective transfers that occur. What about the many Canadians who live alone, that is, in a house or apartment by themselves, or the many Canadians who have no kin or only a few, or whose kin live at a great distance? Statistics Canada’s General Social Surveys have provided data on these issues, but they are far from complete.
3. What are the determinants of the various life-course transitions? Even more, how do these determinants fit together in the complex process by which people finish high school or not, marry or not, have children or not, succeed or not at work — to mention only a few of the key transitions? We know many of the correlates of these events, but not the underlying mechanisms. In addition, we need to study not only the transitions but family life across the life course. Do complex transitions make families stronger or weaker, and why? How and why do these transitions differ between women and men? Is it true that men have lost interest in children and commitment?
4. What do Canadians want of the family? What do they expect? How realistic are their expectations? How are their expectations shaped by popular culture and the mass media? How are they shaped, and perhaps limited, by economic, legal and social institutions? Do Canadians of different ages and genders get what they want, or are they often disappointed? Answers to these kinds of questions will require research designs that involve interviewing at greater depth than is possible in large, telephone-interview surveys.
5. With whom do people have earning and caring links, and how does the sharing of earning and caring occur? How do Canadians perceive real or imagined conflicts between paid work and family life, and between paid and unpaid work within and beyond the family household, but also, between adult siblings in different households in regard to care of aging parents? What are the real and imagined conflicts in the division of household responsibilities between spouses or partners? To what extent are women in particular disadvantaged by these conflicts? How do Canadians try to cope with these conflicts? What are the negative consequences for adults and children?
6. Despite the much-touted “loss of functions,” the contemporary family still plays a central role in the early rearing of children. And so children are particularly vulnerable to family malfunction. What are the most serious problems affecting children, and how do they arise? What can be done to protect children, by the parents, by day cares and schools, by social agencies, by employers? The “standard” model of an effective family assumes the presence of two adults. What are the special

vulnerabilities of children in lone-parent families? Under what conditions do these children thrive? What are the special problems facing step-families? What about children in families headed by non-married couples, where legal rights and responsibilities can be hazy?

7. How do children fare in the case of separation and divorce, now affecting a large minority of Canadian marriages? How do the partners fare? To what extent have modern laws and practices dealt with the special disabilities faced by women in divorce? What are the causes of Canada's relatively high divorce rate? Can anything be done about it?
8. How do family dynamics affect the home leaving of young adults? Of special concern is premature home leaving, often associated with family conflict, dropping out of school and marginal employment. How do parents facilitate or complicate a successful launch into independent living? How do young people cope with the lowered levels of living typically associated with leaving the parental home? What are the respective roles of cohabitation and formal marriage in achieving full adult status?
9. What role does the family play in furthering or hampering the education of youth and their successful integration into the labour force?
10. Why do young people marry? What specifically are they seeking that they cannot find in cohabitation or the single life?
11. Do young Canadians want children; how many? To what extent are current low fertility rates the result of their values, goals and attitudes, and to what extent are they the result of difficult economic circumstances (especially labour and housing markets) with special impact on the early stages of family formation?
12. As the Canadian population ages — especially as the baby boomers age — what is the emerging family role of the elderly in family life? What proportion of older persons are physically and financially able to provide support to the younger generation, in securing adequate housing, caring for grandchildren, etc.? Do the elderly indirectly harm the younger generations, as some have argued, by voting their own interests in the matter of government programs for the elderly, while giving less support to education, day care and the like? Do older people without children or grandchildren think and act differently? How do families over generations accumulate advantages for themselves?
13. How do families cope with the eventual decline and death of elderly relatives? What is the decision-making process in the transition of the elderly from their long-term residences to condos, apartments, assisted-living units and to full-care institutions? How are the transitions of elderly persons linked to health questions and to connections with family? Do families discuss these issues and plan for the future?

14. How do families act in a mediating capacity in relation to the institutions of society? To what extent are second demographic transition families less able to be effective agents of social integration? Lesthaeghe and Neels (2002) proposed that the first demographic transition increased social cohesion, but the second transition reduced cohesion. How do families mediate between individuals and other networks?
15. How does the diversity of families need to be described, in terms of family form, heritage, socio-economic status, location/distance, division of labour, disability, etc. How do macro-economic changes, such as increases in non-standard work, influence the possibilities of caring?
16. What is the role of government in setting the right conditions for families to exist? How could it support families that are so different in such matters as age at first birth, number of children and available resources? More generally, how does one help vulnerable families, especially those who have disabilities or difficulties in terms of earning and caring?

Research Styles

A well-rounded knowledge of the contemporary Canadian family, of the forces shaping it and of its effects on individuals, the community and society, will require a multi-pronged approach. No one discipline and no one research strategy can do the job alone.

Much of the knowledge reviewed in this report derives from the application of one powerful research style, characterized by the statistical analysis of census and large-scale sample survey data. Arguably, this has become the dominant research approach in contemporary North American social science. Its dominance reflects its scientific power.

But survey research is not without its limitations, and other approaches with other emphases are needed for a broader, deeper and more useful knowledge of family life. A few key ones are highlighted below.

Multidisciplinary Approaches

A challenge in drawing up a framework is how to incorporate the varied disciplinary approaches to the study of families. As can be seen in the above discussion, economists have dealt with explaining determinants of marriage, and sociologists have delved into family values and norms, gender differences within families, and the various ways by which families inter-play with social class, culture, communities, neighbourhood and networks. A cursory glance at some of the studies on families shows that social psychologists examine consequences of family functioning and family structures on the development of children, and epidemiologists and health scientists investigate families as determinants of physical and mental health of both adults and children. Social anthropologists and historians study families of the past to help understand present day families. Legal research looks into implications of changing families including rights of cohabiting couples, gay families and custody over children; and political scientists examine how family members function as citizens, their participation in community life

and the changing role of the state vis-à-vis the change in roles of families in the welfare of individuals.

A framework that encompasses interdisciplinary approaches to study families is the “transaction concept” proposed by Suzanne Peters (1996) as a basis for the study of family social and economic dynamics. The framework is comprehensive in that it covers a wide range of transactions that transpire within families (categorized into domains) and the various conditions (at different dimension levels) that shape the transactions. Peters did a comprehensive review of previous family studies and how they fit into the framework, and made recommendations in terms of developing the concepts and measures of transactions. Though more recent research on families have not fully utilized the potentials of the transaction approach, several studies on families could well fit into the transaction framework, for example, studies on time use and on social and community support. Furthermore, the transaction approach can fit into the more general framework that we propose. For instance, one of the areas of research that we include inter- and intra-generation transfers can make use of the transactions defined by Peters (1996, p.7) as “social interactions through which resources are transferred from one person(s) to other(s) to meet needs.”

Data and Methods

Considerations of data and methods are essential to the development of a framework. Quantitative data, such as those gathered through censuses, vital statistics, administrative records and surveys both cross-sectional and longitudinal would continue to be useful in family research. Linking of data from various sources has enriched the databases of studies on families, permitting analysis at the level of individuals, families and communities. Thus, merging information aggregated from the census data to records of individuals gathered through surveys has allowed the investigation of the effects of the environment on individuals. However, analytical challenges remain. While conceptual underpinning calls for examination of the effects of say, neighbourhood or communities, census data could be aggregated mainly on the basis of geographic configurations that do not necessarily coincide with these socially defined groups.

Linking quantitative and qualitative data have also been recognized as possibly the best means of understanding transactions that transpire within families, yet no such linking on a national level has as yet been done.

Advances in computing facilities and in techniques of quantitative and qualitative analysis, ranging from descriptive to multivariate and multi-level analysis, have also benefited family research. Given the aim of family research of informing policies, techniques that would link results of micro-level analysis on individuals and families to macro-level generalization would be of great interest. Micro-simulations such as those developed by Statistics Canada, namely, LifePaths and Social Policy Simulation Database and Model (SPSD/M), seem to be one such useful technique. This micro-simulation approach could be used to study transfers within family households and in kin networks that go beyond the household.

Styles of Social Research and the Design of Effective Interventions

Presumably the research mandate of HRSDC is one of policy and applied research, that is, research geared toward practical ends.² Although clearly valuable, much current social science research falls short in serving these ends. A central problem is the absence of well-developed models of process and of mechanisms. In particular, statistical models of social survey data do a good job at description, including the description of relationships among variables. They tell us how measured inputs are related to measured outputs. But typically they say little about the often complex processes that connect the two. Process and mechanisms remain in a “black box.”³

Stated differently, many statistical models can describe and predict, but they cannot explain in any deeper sense than accounting for variance in a dependent variable. The political scientist Eugene Meehan pointed out many years ago (1968) that models yielding predictions enable humans to adjust to changes that are foreseen, but they do not provide guidance for possible interventions to forestall the changes. For that, one needs explanatory models and to know not just that something is likely to happen, but why it is likely to happen. A similar point has been made more recently by an economist (Olsen 1988) who points out correctly that if we don't know *why* some relationship or trend exists, we don't know *whether* it will continue to exist in the future. The need for greater attention to process and mechanisms has recently been treated at length by Hedström and Swedberg (1998).

Effective research on mechanisms will differ from standard social survey research in two important ways.

1. It will deal with smaller, but still broadly representative samples, such that intensive interviewing is possible and practical. The costs of nationally representative probability samples of tens of thousands of respondents has led to a reliance on telephone interviews using random digit dialing, and interviews that are necessarily short (typically less than an hour). Questions are largely closed-ended, and time and medium do not favour extensive probing. More and different information can be obtained in a personal interview by a skilled interviewer.

For example, the orientation of young Canadians toward family formation could better be elicited by more intensive interviews — their values, attitudes, hopes and fears, and the role of other people and institutions. Research on fertility values by Beaujot (2000, pp. 108-110, 248-250) is an example of the kind of fieldwork that is needed.

2. Since mechanisms and processes underlying family formation may involve variables that are not easily measured, even in intensive interviews, effective research must rely on systematic theory construction and theoretical (as contrasted with statistical) modelling. This is particularly so because the processes involved are dynamic, with strong non-linearities and feedback. A temporal single-equation linear statistical model cannot represent important features of process. Yet an understanding of process is crucial to the design of effective interventions.

Computers have fostered the growth of new techniques for theoretical modelling (or simulation). One promising and underutilized approach in social science is that of dynamic systems modelling, with such user-friendly software as Vensim, Goldsim, Modelmaker, etc. (For an early discussion of such models in sociology, see Hanneman, 1988). The dynamics systems approach could be particularly effective in mapping the complex interrelations among programs and policies in the public and private sectors, and among government programs at various levels. It also lends itself to the study of the life-course dynamics of individuals, including goal-setting and goal modification based on previous experience.

As noted above, another promising approach is micro-simulation, especially newer, more behavioural forms, such as agent-based or rule-based modelling. An exploration of this new modelling tool, with specific application to demography (including marriage) is by Billari and Prskawetz (2003).

Model-based studies of medium-size samples, as suggested above, would serve to complement current large-scale sample surveys on the one hand, and traditional qualitative policy research on the other.

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Note: Unless noted otherwise, all URLs were confirmed in August, 2006.

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Endnotes

¹ For a brief summary of some of the most important differences, see Burch (1980).

² A useful distinction was made some years ago by the American sociologist Amitai Etzioni. Roughly, policy research investigates and makes recommendations regarding goals, while applied research is concerned solely with means to reach previously established goals. In the present context, useful policy research could be done on the meaning of “individual and family well-being,” and how the two are related. HRSDC’s promotion of a social indicators program would be a major step forward. In the absence of such indicators, narrow concepts of well-being based on national income-accounting tend to predominate.

³ A partial exception is research using structural equations models (e.g., path analysis), which aim to elucidate causal processes over time. But these still use only readily measured variables, with any other, possibly important, variables relegated to an error term. In any case, many of the most popular multivariate techniques are essentially single-equation models (e.g., Cox regression).