From Zero to Sixty in Four Decades but the Same Time to the Finish Line: Change and stability in the type and timing of first partnership across Canadian cohorts

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2011 Canadian General Social Survey
(Cycle 25 Family)

DATA & METHODS

• Confidential restricted access file used in the Statistics Canada Research Data Centres
• Respondents were born between 1911 – 1996
• Retrospective partnership histories

Analytic Sample
18,740 complete cases

Independent Variables
Region of birth
Quebec
Canada not Quebec
Outside of Canada
Education
Less than High School
High School
Some Post Secondary
Bachelors Degree or Higher
Birth Cohorts
1930s – 1980s

Dependent Variables
• Type of first union
• Age at first marriage
• Age at first partnership

Methods
• Weighted tabulations of type of first partnership
• Kaplan-Meier estimator of the survival function

MOTIVATION

• It is well known that recent cohorts of Canadians have been delaying marriage compared to Canadians born in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s.
• Non-marital cohabitation has become increasingly popular in Canada, especially in Quebec, both as a pathway to marriage and as a union separate from the marriage process.
• Little is known about whether increases in cohabitation have offset declines in marriage among the most recent cohort of Canadians or whether age at first union has increased to the same extent as marriage.
• In the U.S., the proportion ever-partnered and the median age at first partnership has stayed remarkably stable. Is this the same in Canada?

Research Questions
1. How do Canadians form first partnerships, through marriage or cohabitation? How has this changed across birth cohorts?
   a. Are patterns among those born in Quebec different from other Canadians?
   b. Are there educational differences in type of first partnership, and have these differences changed across cohorts?
2. How have age at first marriage and age at first union changed across cohorts? Has the rise in cohabitation offset delays in first marriage?
   a. Are there regional differences in timing of first union and first marriage?
   b. Are there educational differences in first partnership timing and have these changed across cohorts?

RESULTS

• Place of Birth
  • The likelihood of cohabitation has increased over time for all Canadians, but more dramatically among the Quebec-born.
  • This trend has slowed among those born in the 1970s

• Education
  • Highly educated women were more likely to cohabit in earlier cohorts, less likely in later cohorts
  • Least educated men most likely to cohabit across all cohorts, least likely to be ever-partnered by age 35

• Type of First Union
  • Changes across cohorts are more dramatic among the Quebec-born, but the trend has slowed among the most recent birth cohort
  • The trend across birth cohorts towards starting conjugal life through cohabitation is more dramatic among those born in Quebec.
  • However, increases in cohabitation as first union type have slowed for the Quebec-born in the most recent cohort, and partnering patterns in Quebec and the rest of Canada have stopped diverging.

KEY FINDINGS

• Increases in cohabitation have offset declines in marriage for women, but less so for men
  • The proportion of women forming any type of union by age 35 has remained relatively stable over birth cohorts.
  • Among men, increases in the proportion forming cohabiting unions has not kept pace with decreases in marriage formation, leading to a decline in cohabitation among single men at age 35.
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  • The trend across birth cohorts towards starting conjugal life through cohabitation is more dramatic among those born in Quebec.
  • However, increases in cohabitation as first union type have slowed for the Quebec-born in the most recent cohort, and partnering patterns in Quebec and the rest of Canada have stopped diverging.

• Educational differences depend on gender
  • For men, across all cohorts, higher education is associated with a higher propensity to marry rather than cohabit. Among more recent cohorts of men, low levels of education prevent union formation.
  • For women born between 1930 and 1959 there is a negative association between education and the likelihood of marriage but this reverses among more recent cohorts. Among more recent cohorts of women, those with the least education are the most likely to be partnered by age 35.
• Median age at first marriage has increased dramatically, but median age at first union has remained remarkably stable
  • Median age at first marriage as increased to a greater extent among the Quebec-born, but median age at first union is younger on average than other Canadians.
  • The association between education and age at first union is generally positive and stable across cohorts but educational differences in age at first marriage have reversed across cohorts.

REFERENCES


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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