

## THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE IN CANADA

1 Marriage and family are key structures in most societies. While the two institutions have historically been closely linked in Canadian culture, their connection is becoming more complex. The relationship between marriage and family is an interesting topic of study to sociologists.

### What is a Family?

2 The question of what constitutes a family is a prime area of debate in family sociology, as well as in politics and religion. Unlike social conservatives, who tend to define the family in terms of a strict configuration of status roles, sociologists tend to define family more in terms of the manner in which members relate to one another. Here, we will define family as a socially recognized group (usually joined by blood, marriage, or adoption) that forms an emotional connection and serves as an economic unit of society. Sociologists identify different types of families based on how one enters into them. A *family of orientation* refers to the family into which a person is born, whereas a *family of procreation* describes **one** that is formed through marriage.

### Forms of Marriage

3 North Americans typically equate marriage with monogamy, when someone is married to only one person at a time. In many countries and cultures around the world, however, having one spouse is not the only form of marriage. In a majority of cultures (78 percent), polygamy, or being married to more than one person at a time, is accepted (Murdock, 1967), with most polygamous societies existing in northern Africa and east Asia (Altman and Ginat, 1996). Instances of polygamy are almost exclusively in the form of polygyny. Polygyny refers to a man being married to more than one woman at the same time. The reverse, when a woman is married to more than one man at the same time, is called polyandry. The reasons for the overwhelming prevalence of polygamous societies are varied but they often include issues of population growth, religious ideologies, and social status.

4 While the majority of societies accept polygyny, the majority of people do not practice it. Often fewer than 10 percent (and no more than 25 to 35 percent) of men in polygamous cultures have more than one wife; these husbands are often older, wealthy, high-status men (Altman and Ginat, 1996). In Canada, polygamy is considered by most to be socially unacceptable and it is illegal. The act of entering into marriage while still married to another person is referred to as bigamy and is prohibited by Section 290 of the Criminal Code of Canada (Minister of Justice 2014). Polygamy in Canada is often associated with those of the Mormon faith, although in 1890 the Mormon Church officially renounced polygamy. Fundamentalist Mormons, on the other hand, still hold tightly to the historic Mormon beliefs and practices and allow polygamy in their sect. Still, the prevalence of polygamy among Mormons is often overestimated due to sensational media stories. It is estimated that there are about 37,500 fundamentalist Mormons involved in polygamy in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, but that number has shown a steady decrease in the last 100 years (Useem, 2007).

## Cohabitation

5 Living together before or in lieu of marriage is a growing option for many couples. Cohabitation, when a man and woman live together in a sexual relationship without being married, was practiced by an estimated 1.6 million people (16.7 percent of all census families) in 2011, which shows an increase of 13.9 percent since 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2012). This surge in cohabitation is likely a consequence of the decrease in social stigma about cohabitation. For instance, cohabitation is no longer associated with sin, pathology, or parental disapproval. Cohabiting couples may choose to live together in an effort to spend more time together or to save money on living costs. Many couples view cohabitation as a “trial run” for marriage. Today, approximately 28 percent of men and women cohabitated before their first marriage. By comparison, 18 percent of men and 23 percent of women married without ever cohabitating. The vast majority of cohabitating couples eventually get married, and about half of cohabitators **do so** within three years. Only 15 percent of cohabitators do not transition into marriage within three years (U.S. Census Bureau 2010).

## Divorce

6 Divorce, while fairly common and accepted in modern Canadian society, was once a word that would only be whispered and was accompanied by gestures of disapproval. Prior to the introduction of the Divorce Act in 1968 there was no federal divorce law in Canada. In provincial jurisdictions where there were divorce laws, spouses had to prove adultery or cruelty in court. The 1968 Divorce Act broadened the grounds for divorce to include mental and physical cruelty, desertion, and/or separation for more than three years, and imprisonment. In 1986 the Act was amended again to make “breakdown of marriage” the sole ground for divorce. Couples could divorce after one year’s separation, and there was no longer a requirement to prove “fault” by either spouse.

7 These legislative changes had immediate consequences on the divorce rate. In 1961, divorce was generally uncommon, affecting only 36 out of every 100,000 married persons. In 1969, the number of divorces doubled from 55 divorces per 100,000 population to 124. The divorce rate peaked in 1987 after the 1986 amendment at 362 divorces per 100,000 population. Over the last quarter century, divorce rates have dropped steadily reaching 221 divorces per 100,000 population in 2005. The dramatic increase in divorce rates after the late 1960s has been associated with the liberalization of divorce laws and the shift in societal makeup including the increase of women entering the workforce. The decrease in divorce rates can be attributed to two probable factors: an increase in the age at which people get married, and an increased level of education among those who marry—both of which have been found to promote greater marital stability.

8 So what causes divorce? According to researchers participating in the University of Virginia’s National Marriage Project, couples who enter marriage without a strong asset base (like a home, savings, and a retirement plan) are 70 percent more likely to be divorced after three years than are couples with at least \$10,000 in assets. The addition of children to a marriage is also instrumental in exacerbating the conditions conducive to divorce. For example, married couples with twins or triplets are 17 percent more likely to divorce than those with children from single births. Another contributor to the likelihood of divorce is a decline in marital satisfaction over time. As people get older, they may find that their values and life goals no longer match up with **those** of their spouse.

## QUESTIONS

Answer the following questions according to the reading text. The questions are in the order the information appears in the text. For all of the questions, you just need to copy directly from the passage; you do not need to paraphrase or change the form of any words. Give precise answers and write the answer only; do not write anything else.

1. Sociologists' definition of family differs from that of social conservatives in that while the former stresses the nature of relationship among members, the latter stresses \_\_\_\_\_.

2. The writer argues that, of the forms of marriages mentioned in the text, \_\_\_\_\_ is hardly accepted in any societies.

3. The writer concedes that in Canada polygamy is still approved of by \_\_\_\_\_, yet the extent of how common it is is exaggerated as a result of \_\_\_\_\_.

4. According to the author, what led to an increase in the number of cohabiting people in Canada between 2006 and 2011?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Before the Divorce Act of 1968, what two things were considered as justifications for divorce?

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

6. Between 1961 and 1987, divorce rates in Canada increased dramatically. Apart from the changes in the social structure of Canada, \_\_\_\_\_ is/are also argued to have played a role in this increase.

7. The author points out that not having a strong asset base is one of the causes of divorce. The passage also identifies two other factors. What are these?

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Referrals:

What does each of the following underlined in the text refer to?

8. one (par. 2) = \_\_\_\_\_

9. do so (par. 5) = \_\_\_\_\_

10. those (par. 8) = \_\_\_\_\_