

Continuing consequences of a constraining institution of marriage

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Two perspectives on changes in the institution of marriage

Perspective 1: Marriage is more optional and that has negative consequences

Canada

“What the 2006 census showed was not that the family was changing: It showed that the family was dying. It showed a society in deep dysfunction.”

USA

“Government can support families by promoting policies that help strengthen the institution of marriage...”

UK

“The recent report on welfare produced by the former Tory leader...argues that we are living in a “broken society”, caused for the most part by the undermining of marriage.” (Giddens, 2007, Prospect)

“£20-a-week Tory tax break plan aims to encourage marriage” Guardian, July 11, 2007

Perspective 2: Marriage is optional and that has positive consequences

“Families”, “families of choice”, “do it yourself biographies”, “pure relationships”, individualism/individualized relationships

“One of the most important stories of the past several centuries of Western history is the transformation of the institution of marriage – in particular, the declining centrality of marriage in defining and guiding human behavior and relationships...”. (Thornton, Axinn, & Xie, 2007)

“The coexistence in *one* society of so many alternative ways of [organizing living arrangements, having sexual relationships, raising kids, caregiving] – and the comparative legitimacy accorded to many of them – has never been seen before.” (Coontz, 2004)

These changes and choices lead to equality and freedom from constraints of an unhealthy, unequal institution

The Questions

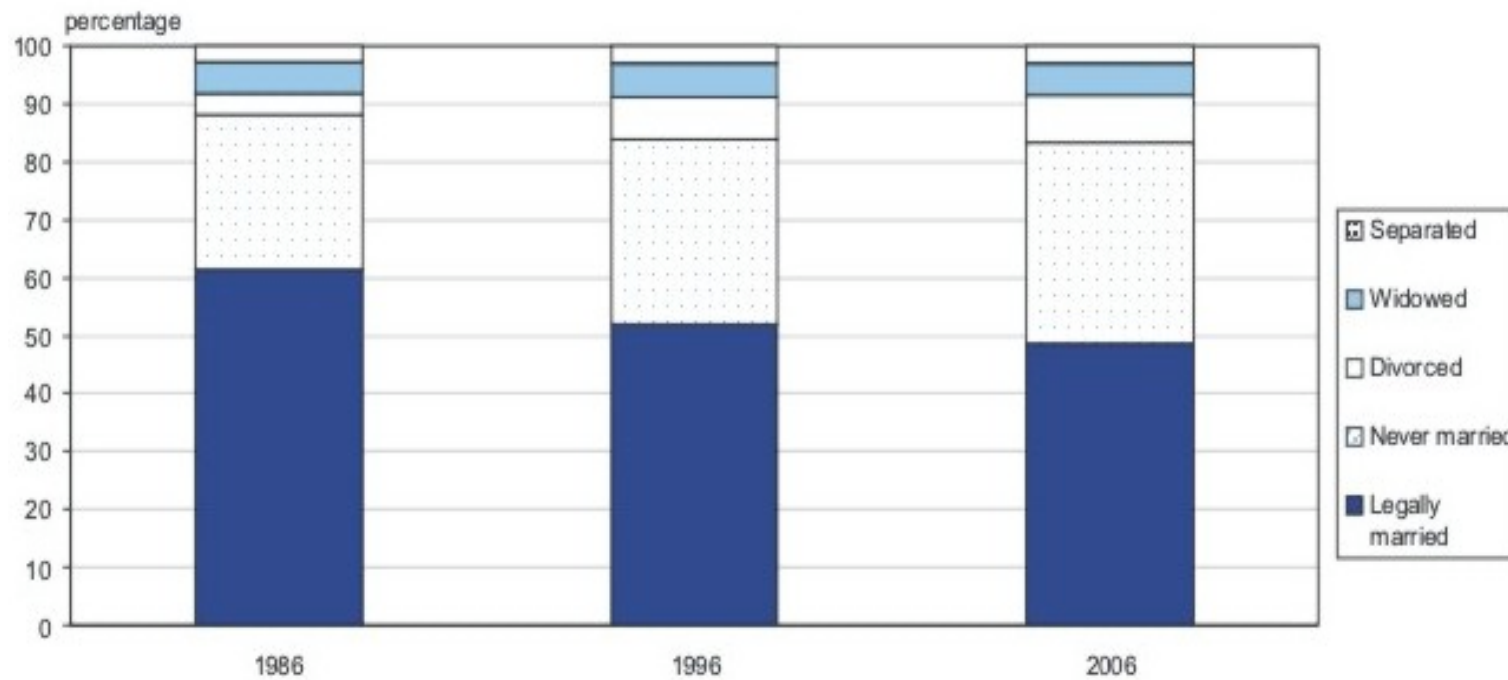
1. How optional is marriage?
2. What are the consequences of more optional marriage?

The Answers

1. Our choices regarding marriage remain constrained.
2. These continued constraints have negative consequences.

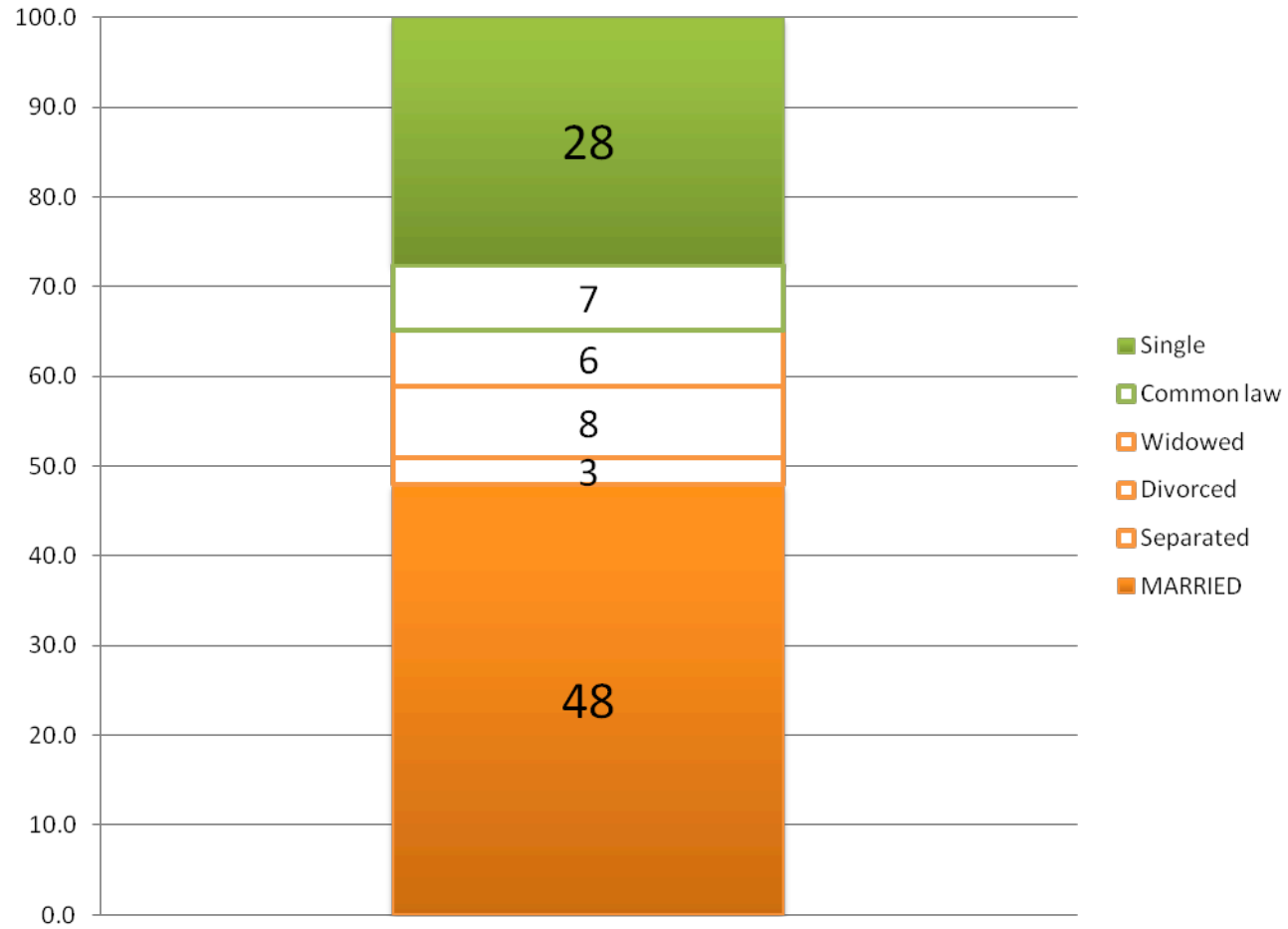
The Changes and Continuing Constraints

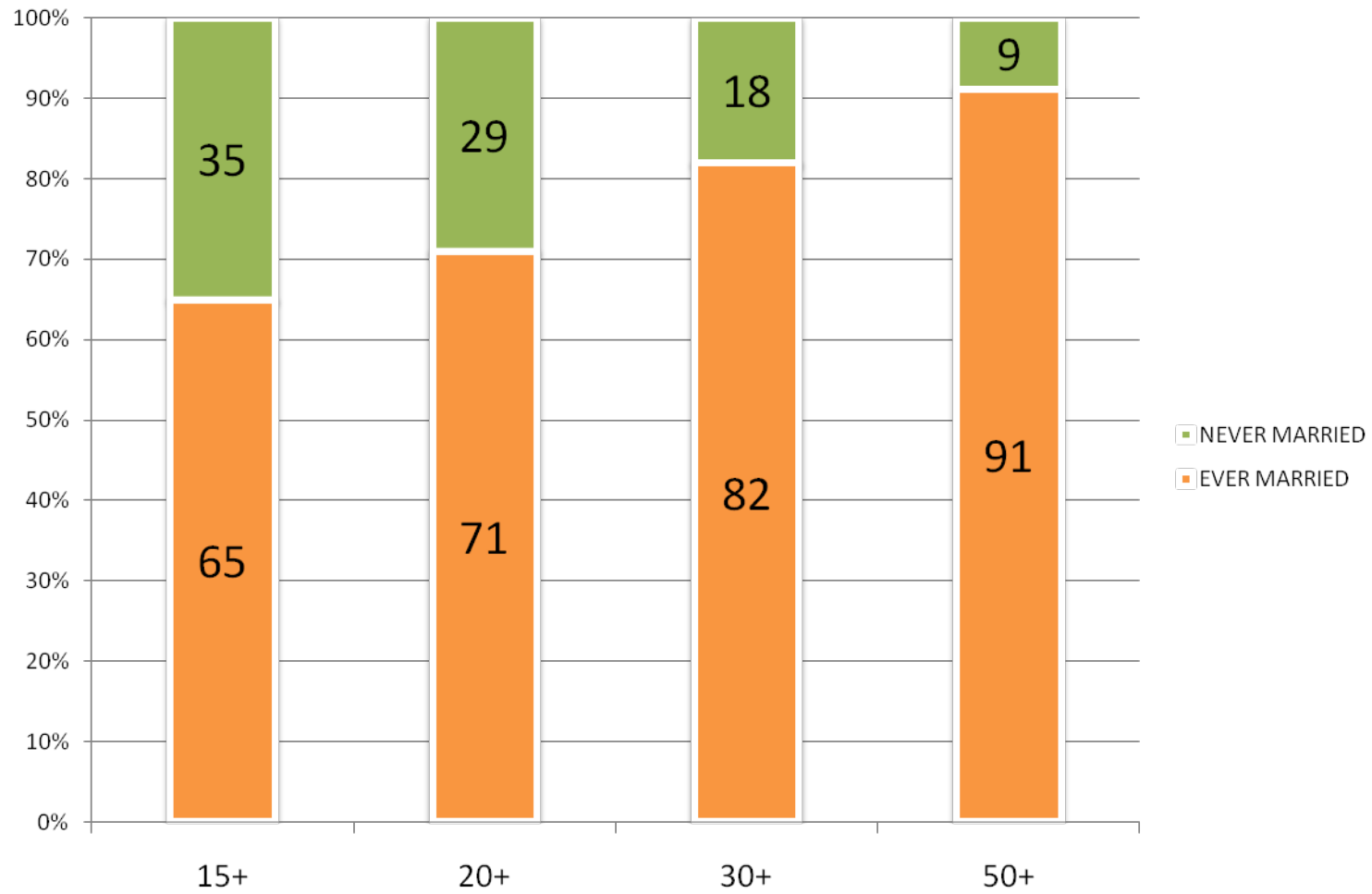
Canada



Sources: Statistics Canada, censuses of population, 1986, 1996 and 2006.

Pressure to marry





28-34 year old not married women
(Sharp & Ganong, 2007)

“Sometimes you question yourself because you are thinking, ‘Why is it that I am 32 and I can’t find someone?’ So that is the hard part because then you start thinking, ‘Well, maybe something is wrong with me because I can’t find someone.’”

“I think almost unfortunately we end up telling ourselves if you are not married, you almost feel like you are not normal.”

“transition to singlehood” (Lorraine Davies, 2003)

Never married

7.3% (mean)

.02% China

17.2% S. Africa

.07% Tanzania

19.3% Malta

.08% India

20.7% Sweden

(27%, Eurostat)

Mean age at marriage

25.4 years (mean)

19.9 China

32.3 Sweden

The Consequences

The case of dating violence

Pressure to marry is associated with higher rates of dating violence.

People will be more likely to be and stay in bad relationships when they feel pressure to marry and have a short time in which to find a spouse

Literature - Violence more common in non-marital relationships

One perspective –

Changes and alternatives to marriage are problematic

Partners who are not married and relationships that are not marriage have problematic characteristics that increase violence

Other perspective – Alternatives as a “testing ground”

Brownridge, 2002,

comparing Quebec and other Canada

- Cohabitation has higher rates of violence
- Having previous relationships associated with less violence

“Perhaps this reflects a growing process in the selection and/or development of violence-free relationships”

Kenney and McLanahan, 2006 (DeMaris, 2001)
Cohabitation as a premarital, testing ground

- Violence associated with lower likelihood of marrying
- Marriages more likely to end because of violence than cohabiting relationships.

Add to this...

Higher rates of violence in premarital relationships are a result of a strong and dominant institution of marriage and a corresponding pressure to marry within a condensed period of time.

- Violence is higher in non-marital relationships because partners want to marry.
- Individuals may be more likely get in and to stay in unhealthy and violent premarital relationships when faced with strong institutionalized pressures to marry within a short time frame or face being one of a small percent of people who have never married.
- Once married, people will get out of relationship if there is violence because they have already married and so it is less important to stay in a bad relationship.

Question:

Are rates of violence in premarital relationships higher in societies where there is more institutional pressure to marry?

Focus:

Dating relationships prior to marriage

Data

Physical violence in dating relationships
(any, severe)

University students in 32 countries
IDVS, CTS2, Straus, 2007, 2008

Institutionalized pressure to marry,
UN World Fertility Report 2003

1. Expectations of marry:
 % women 45-49 never married
2. Time available to select a spouse:
 Mean age at first marriage

Control, Gender empowerment (UN index)

Findings

The lower the expectations to marry
(more never married),

Lower rate of any physical assault in dating
relationships (-.368*)

Lower rate of any physical victimization (-.394*)

Lower rate of severe assault (-.533**) and
severe victimization (-.510**)

The more time available to select a partner
(later the mean age at marriage),

Lower rate of any physical assault (-.255) and
victimization (-.359*) in dating relationships

Lower rate of severe assault (-.374*) and severe
victimization (-.508**)

More agreement that “Marriage or a long term relationship is necessary to be happy”

Higher rates of severe assault in dating relationships (.390)

Results the same if consider % men never married
and mean age of marriage for men.

Effects stronger and significant for women

Pressure to marry may fall particularly on women.

Never married

	WOMEN	MEN
Average	7.3%	8.8%
China	.02%	4.0%
USA	10.0%	12.0%
Canada	10.6%	13.9%
Sweden	20.7%	29.0%

Mean age at marriage

	WOMEN	MEN
Average	25.3	28.2
China	23.3	29.6
USA	26.3	28.6
Canada	26.8	29.6
Sweden	32.3	34.5

Conclusions

Our choices regarding marriage remain constrained.

These constraints have consequences.

As we consider change, we also need to recognize and understand continuing constraints in the institution of marriage and family because these continue to have consequences.