

Divorce in Canada & the impact on children

Divorce

Some statistics

- The expected percentage of divorce for recent marriages (ending before their 30th wedding anniversary) has increased slightly from 36.1 % in 1998 to 37.9 % in 2004, and 38% in 2008. Essentially 2% since you were born.
 - This differs from province to province
 - The lowest rates are in Newfoundland [21.6%] and the highest rates are in Quebec [48%]
- However, these rates include repeats, in 2005 16% of divorced men had already divorced once before – same for 15% of women.
 - Probability for divorce is higher for remarriage than for first marriage
- Rates for first marriage are closer to 33%

Up or down?

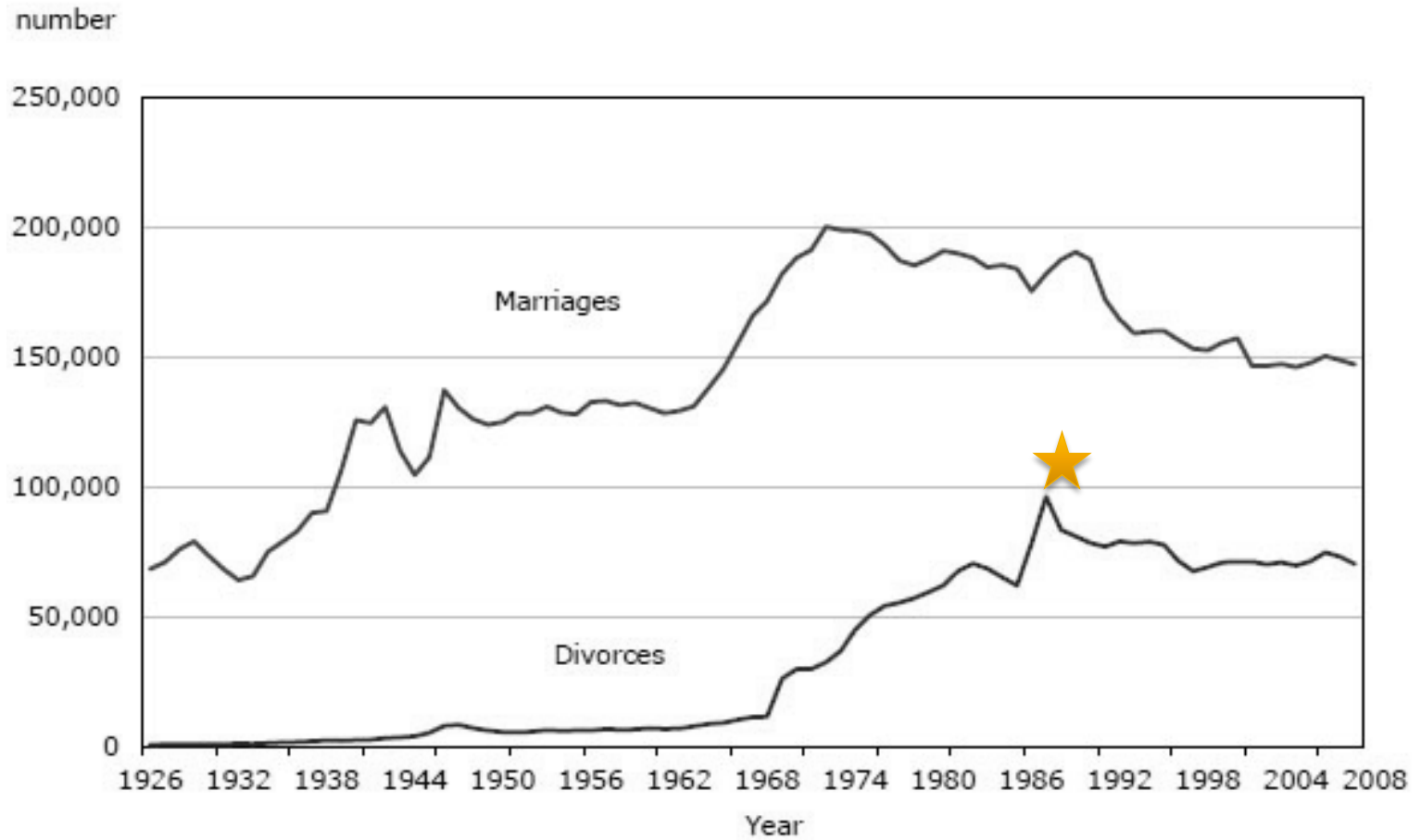
Especially when you look at
Crude Rates per 100 000

- Divorce rates dropped substantially in the 1990s and have remained at this lower level with minor yearly fluctuations.

TABLE 2 Crude Divorce Rates per 100,000 Population since 1921

Year	# of divorces	Rates per 100,000 population
1921	558	6.4
1941	2,462	21.4
1961	6,563	36.0
1968*	11,343	54.8
1969	26,093	124.2
1981	67,671	271.8
1985**	61,980	253.6
1986	78,304	298.8
1987***	96,200	362.3
1990	80,998	295.8
1995	77,636	262.2
1997	67,408	224.8
2000	70,292	228.4
2002	70,155	223.0
2005	71,269	220.7

* Reform of Divorce Laws ** Divorce Act ("no fault") *** Peak year Source: Table 101-6501, Statistics Canada, 2008



- 1968 divorce laws reformed
- 1985 new “no fault” divorce law
- 1987 peak year★

Which way are we going?

- Whether rates will go up or down depends on socio economic, political, cultural & demographic factors
- as well as individual preferences & values

Why it may start to increase...

- Risk factors for higher levels of divorce include whether or not couples cohabit and whether or not their parents divorced
 - More young people plan to cohabit prior to marriage
 - There are more “children of divorce” today who will be growing up and marrying in the future

What about the children?

- Research shows that some children adjust to their parents' separation or divorce better than other children.
- The 2 most salient (notable) negative consequences of divorce are...
 1. an increased risk of poverty
 2. an increased risk for the development of problems for the children involved

1. An increased risk of poverty

- The economic resources available for parenting are often reduced after divorce
 - divorced women and their children are the fastest growing group of poor people in Canada
 - within 2 years of a divorce /separation 43% women had experienced a decrease in household income compared to 15% of men [conversely a rise by 9% of women and 29% of men]
 - However, in a decade where most families have two breadwinners, men who divorce lose far more financially than in the past, especially those married to high earning women
- For families already burdened by poverty – divorce causes more poverty
 - The younger the children are at the time of divorce the more likely they are to be poor
 - Single parents who are poor have an income that is **40% below** the [poverty line](#)* – DIRE POVERTY
 - 35% of all female lone parent families lived in poverty in 2004 while many hovered just one step above

LICO Low Income Cut Offs

- This is a measure that changes based on the population of a location
- It is what the “poverty line” is measured by, families that make less money than this are considered to be living in poverty

Before Tax Low-Income Cut-Offs (LICOs), 2006					
	Population of Community of Residence				
Family Size	500,000 +	100,000-499,999	30,000-99,999	Less than 30,000*	Rural
1	\$21,202	\$18,260	\$18,147	\$16,605	\$14,596
2	\$26,396	\$22,731	\$22,591	\$20,671	\$18,170
3	\$32,450	\$27,945	\$27,773	\$25,412	\$22,338
4	\$39,399	\$33,930	\$33,721	\$30,855	\$27,122
Before Tax Low Income Cut Offs (LICO), 2010					
3	\$34,646	\$29,836	\$29,652	\$27,132	\$23,849
4	\$42,065	\$36,266	\$36,003	\$2632,943	\$28,957
	Toronto	Oshawa	Clarington	Lindsay	Fenelon

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2. An increased risk of problems for children

- Although most children do *not* experience serious problems as a result of divorce, it is a strong risk factor and a source of stressors
- Divorce is above all, an emotionally painful transition that can create lingering feelings of sadness, longing, worry, and regret that coexist with competent psychological and social functioning
- Average differences are not huge, but children whose parents are divorced are *more likely* to
 - Suffer from depression, anxiety & other emotional disorders [10 of 14 girls and 4 of 13 boys at FFSS according to Methetal (2014)]
 - Exhibit behavioural problems including hyperactivity, aggressiveness, fighting and hostility
 - Become young offenders
 - Do less well in school and remain in school for a shorter period of time
 - Experience more relationship problems

2. An increased risk of problems for children

- Adults whose parents divorced during their childhood and teen years, tend to...
 - Have a child out of wedlock (not married) more often, particularly during adolescence
 - Achieve lower education
 - Be more often unemployed and do less well financially
 - Have more marital problems and divorce more
 - Are more likely to have lost contact with their father and to report a less happy childhood
 - Leave home earlier (affects schooling due to money)

Important note...

- Some of these negative effects would have already been in place before the divorce
- Many of these consequences are actually related to poverty
- They do not apply to all these children, they are only at a greater risk of developing problems
- There is a difference between distress and disorder

Sources of these negative outcomes

1. Poverty
2. Diminished parenting
3. Parental conflict
4. Pre existing problems
5. Genetics



Poverty

Typical negative outcomes of children of divorce essentially resemble those of children in poverty

- Additional stressors may include...
- needing to move and adjust to new school
- less desirable housing or living conditions
- less safe neighbourhood, more delinquency
- fewer neighbourhood children thriving at school
- possibly more noise and pollution
- children and mother's health may be affected
- more stress
- parent who works long hours to make ends meet and is less available



Diminished Parenting

Diminished parenting occurs when divorce creates a series of stressors particularly for the custodial parents

This can result in parent(s) who are...

- preoccupied and emotionally burdened
- suffering from depression
- spending time looking for a new mate and therefore less available



Also, can result in stressors and preoccupations that diminish...

- parenting time, skills, expressed affection & supervision



Also, can result in increased...

- instability, harshness, permissiveness



Some abandon responsibilities and some become “pals”

Parental Conflict

Parents who continue or begin quarreling & verbally abusing each other in front of their children cause *immense* distress to their kids

When children are caught in the middle, this can result in...

- Depression
- Hostility
- Aggressiveness & other acting out behaviours

Parental hostility during the marriage provide unhealthy role models

- Children learn that disagreements can only be solved by fighting

Parental alienation can occur when one parent more or less brainwashes a child against the other & prevents that parent from seeing the child and the child from loving that parent

- this can have dire consequences for the child's mental health in the future



Divorces that end severe inter parental conflict may have positive consequences for children

However, when the parents are low conflict divorce is seen by the child as very unexpected, unwelcome and unnecessary

- It also indicates a lack of commitment or which may not be the best example for the child for their own future relationships



Preexisting problems

- Some parents already have a dysfunctional home which has been negative for the children,
 - This doesn't necessarily improve when the parents separate
 - Parent may have issues, troubled personality
- Divorce just seems to make this worse



Genetics

BUT.. Nothing is fixed in stone!

Lastly, a proportion of people who divorce do so because they are temperamental, conflictual or impulsive people

- These parents pass on these genetic traits to any biological offspring
- These children run the risk of being predisposed to being problematic, and then live in a conflict ridden home that is disorganized, and fosters their negative predispositions
- When divorce happens in these situations the home gets worse and the child's problems do as well – vicious circle



Does Age or Gender Make a Difference?

- Early research seemed to indicate that boys might experience more difficulties than girls.
 - Children between the ages of 4 and 10 may be the most negatively affected because they are not mature enough to understand their loss and their changing family situation.
 - In the school-age years, boys are more likely to be aggressive and get into fights,
 - while girls are more likely to experience depression.
- But by adolescence, both boys and girls are more likely to engage in negative conduct and experience bouts of sadness.
 - Adolescent girls are likely to be involved in earlier sexual behaviour, leading to a greater risk of teenage pregnancy and teen parenting,
 - Then there are some girls who emerge out of the divorced, mother-headed households as exceptionally resilient young women.
 - This is true for young men as well.

Debates are on going about the negative effects and the extent of the damage...

Some conflicting findings...

Wallerstein vs Hetherington

Judith Wallerstein

- 1/2 of all children suffer serious long term consequences from their parent's divorce
 - poor social and emotional development, poor school results, substance abuse and having their own marriages end in divorce, affects a child's ability to trust others and makes it difficult for them to commit

E. Mavis Hetherington




- children of divorce can be divided into three groups... winners, survivors and losers
 - losers thankfully are the smallest of the groups according to her research
- research show that **after 2 years the majority of children of divorce are functioning reasonably well**
 - her studies reveal that for every young adult from a divorced family who is experiencing problems, there are four who are not

Hetherington continued...

- Her statistics show that 25% of children of divorce have serious social, emotional, or psychological problems, compared to 10% of children who come from intact homes
- Most single mothers are providing good homes for their children and should be celebrated



Parent's ability to co-operate

- Parent's ability to co-operate affects the adjustment of the children
- Divorces can be characterized by parents who are
 1. High conflict 
 2. Business like 
 3. Friendly 
- Parents who are business like or friendly cause a lot less stress for their children and therefore less trauma



There is no such thing as a typical divorce

- Each family goes through their own process
- Some find it really hard while others find it a new beginning
- It is a developmental process that unfolds over time
 - it begins when parents begin to contemplate divorce, continues through the divorce till the creation of a post divorce family

What really counts?

No matter what the family structure is it is the quality of parenting that is the most important factor in a child's adjustment in life

- Children who have at least one positive, warm and authoritative parent regardless of the status of the parent's marriage are likely to be competent and well adjusted during childhood and later in life

