



Cohabitation in Canada

Updated January 2013

Cohabitation denotes a couple who live together before or instead of getting married. These relationships are less enduring than marriage. Marriages where the couple did not live together beforehand are more stable than those where the couple did. The following are some of the statistics pertaining to cohabitation in Canada.

- As of 2011, common law families make up 16.7 percent of all census families.¹
- Common law couple families in Québec represent 44.3 percent of the national total.²
- Within Québec, common law couple families represent more than one third (37.8 percent) of all couples in the province. This is much higher than the average for the rest of Canada (14.5 percent).³
- As of 2011, 22.6 percent of people age 25 to 29 are in a common law union.⁴
- Relationships starting with cohabitation are nearly twice as likely to dissolve as those which began with marriage, regardless of whether they eventually marry or not.
"In the 30- to 39-year group, for example, almost two thirds (63 percent) of those whose first relationship was common law had separated by 1995, compared with one third (33 percent) of women who had married first."⁵
- Children born into marriage not preceded by cohabitation are over four times less likely to experience family breakdown before they turn 10 than are children born into a cohabiting relationship.⁶
- After 10 years of marriage:
 - 84.2 percent of marriages not preceded by cohabitation remain intact
 - 73.5 percent of marriages preceded by cohabitation remain intact⁷
- After 20 years of marriage:
 - 69.9 percent of marriages not preceded by cohabitation remain intact.
 - 53.7 percent of marriages preceded by cohabitation remain intact.⁸

Endnotes

¹ Milan, A. and Bohnert, N. (2012). Portrait of families and living arrangements in Canada. Ottawa: Statistics Canada. See Table 1. Retrieved from <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-312-x/98-312-x2011001-eng.cfm>

² Statistics Canada. (2012). Couple families by presence of children in private households, 2011 counts, children (all ages), for Canada, provinces and territories, and census divisions. Retrieved from <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/hltfst/fam/Pages/highlight.cfm?TabID=1&Lang=E&Asc=1&OrderBy=1&View=1&tableID=301&queryID=5&Children=1&PRCode=35>

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Milan, A. and Bohnert, N. (2012). Living arrangements of young adults aged 20 to 29. Ottawa: Statistics Canada. Retrieved from http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-312-x/98-312-x2011003_3-eng.cfm

⁵ Le Bourdais, C., Neill, G. and Turcotte P. with Vachon, N. and Archambault, J. (2000). The changing face of conjugal relationships. *Canadian Social Trends* No. 56, p. 15. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-008-x/1999004/article/4910-eng.pdf>

⁶ Marcil-Gratton, N. (1998). *Growing up with Mom and Dad? The intricate family life courses of Canadian children*. Ottawa: Minister of Industry. p. 16. Retrieved from <http://dsp-psd.tpsgc.gc.ca/Collection/Statcan/89-566-X/89-566-XIE1995001.pdf>

⁷ Weston, R., Qu, L. and de Vaus, D. (2003). *Premarital cohabitation and marital stability*. Melbourne: Australia Institute of Family Studies. Table 1. Retrieved from http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/downloads/hilda/Bibliography/HILDA_Conference_Papers/2003_papers/RWeston.pdf

⁸ *Ibid.*