

# Family Matters: Being common law, married, separated or divorced in Canada

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Everyone who has ever been part of a couple has experienced a transition from being single to being a partner at some point during their lives. A growing number of Canadians have also experienced separation and divorce. Each of these life changes can have an impact not only on the individual themselves but also on other members of their family.

Almost three in four Canadians aged 25 to 64 live with a partner. However, partnership arrangements have evolved significantly in recent decades. Marriage rates have declined, while living common law, as well as union dissolution through separation and divorce, have become increasingly common. The General Social Survey (GSS) provides important detailed information on these experiences, including data on living common law before marriage and repartnering after separation or divorce.

This May and June, the *Family Matters* series will address themes related to marital status in Canada. Today's release includes two infographics, one on marriage and common-law unions and one on separation and divorce.

## Most Canadians aged 25 to 64 are married or live common law

Of the 19.9 million people aged 25 to 64 in Canada in 2017, the majority were married (56%) or living common law (15%). Conversely, 13% had never been married or lived common law, 6% were separated or divorced from a marriage, 8% were separated from a common-law union and 1% were widowed and not in a new union.

There has been a shift towards common-law living in recent years. According to the census, over one-fifth of all couples (21.3%) were living common law in 2016, more than three times the share in 1981 (6.3%).

Whether in marriages or common-law relationships, women tend to partner at an earlier age than men. According to the 2017 GSS, women were 28 years old, on average, when they married their current spouse and 31 years old, on average, at the start of their current common-law union. In comparison, men, on average, were aged 30 at the start of their current marriage and 32 years of age when entering their current common-law relationship.

## More people are living common law before marriage

Many adults now choose to live common law before marriage. According to the 2017 GSS, 39% of married 25 to 64 year olds lived common law with their current spouse before tying the knot. This was up from 25% in 2006.

Those who had lived common law with their spouse had done so for an average of 3.6 years prior to marrying, up from 2.5 years in 2006.

Later in May and in June, the *Family Matters* series will release information on separation and divorce for the population aged 55 and older and on repartnering after divorce and separation.



**Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [4501](#).**

The infographics "[Family matters: Being married or common-law in Canada](#)" and "[Family matters: Being separated or divorced in Canada](#)" are now available online.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; [STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca)) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; [STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca)).