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I do... Take two? Changes in intentions to remarry among divorced Canadians during the past 20 years

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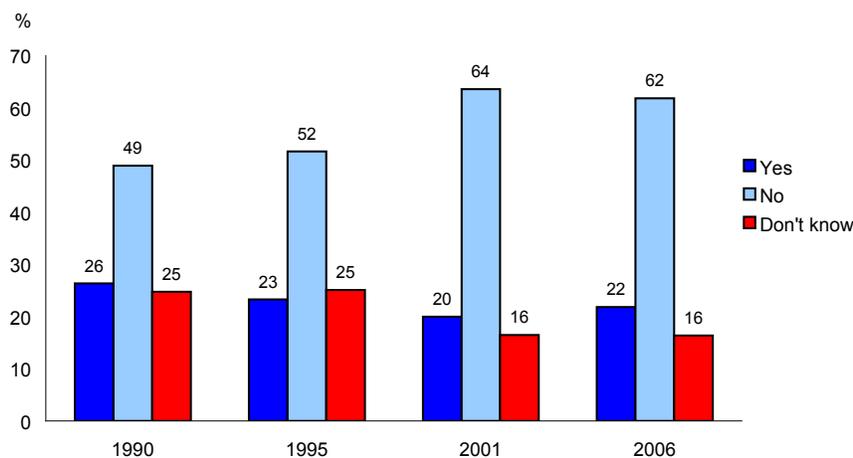
I do... Take two? Changes in intentions to remarry among divorced Canadians during the past 20 years

About 40 years ago, marriage was much more common: most children were born to, and grew up with, married parents. That has changed. Divorce has risen sharply, common-law unions have become more and more popular, and many children are born outside of marriage. Other children at a young age see their parents divorce.

According to General Social Survey (GSS) data, divorced Canadians represented 7% of the total population aged 15 and over in 2006. In fact, divorce affects more people than what recent data leads us to believe: about 13% of Canadians aged 15 and over had experienced at least one divorce during their conjugal life, and nearly half of them had remarried. Among the divorced who have not remarried, some are still in search of the "right one" or seem comfortable with the idea of being partnerless, while others are living in a common-law union with or without the intention of marrying.

One indicator of the way Canadian families are changing is in people's perceptions of marriage, as evidenced by their intentions to marry or remarry. In a context of increasing marital instability over the past decades, are divorced people less likely to intend to remarry than in the past? To the question "Do you think you will ever marry again?" less than a quarter of divorced Canadians answered "Yes". Between 1990 and 2006, the proportion of divorced people stating that they intend to remarry decreased from 26% to 22%. In contrast, more than 6 out of 10 divorced Canadians stated that they do not wish to remarry, which has been on the rise since 1990, when it was about 5 out of 10 divorced Canadians.

Chart 1
More than half of divorced Canadians stated that they do not intend to remarry

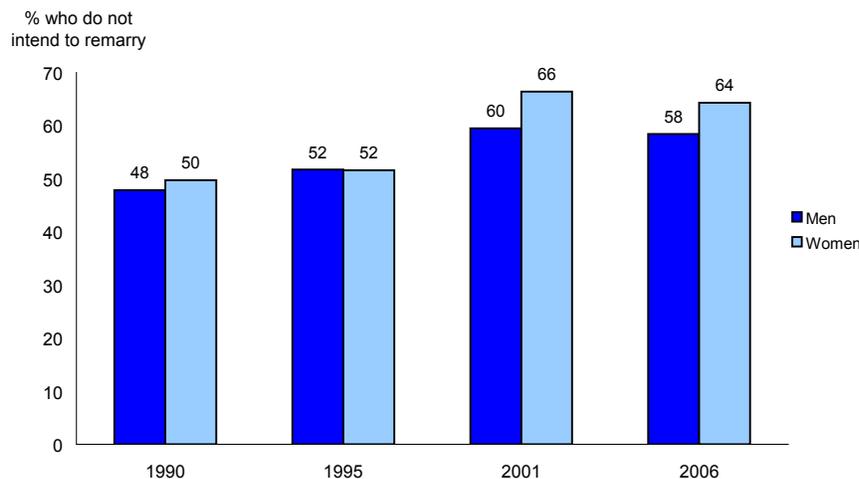


Source: Statistics Canada, *General Social Surveys, 1990, 1995, 2001 and 2006.*

Nevertheless, as shown in the graph above, fewer divorced Canadians were undecided about their intentions to remarry. In 1990 and 1995, 25% of them stated that they did not know whether they would remarry. Since 2001, nearly 16% of divorced people remain unsure.

In 1990 and 1995, approximately the same number of divorced men and women stated they did not want to retake marriage vows. Since 2001, a difference has been developing. In 2006, 64% of divorced women stated they did not want to remarry compared to 58% of their male counterparts. This observation is a good representation since data has shown that more divorced women than men are in this situation; men remarry more often and more quickly.

Chart 2
Men are more likely than women to remarry



Source: Statistics Canada, *General Social Surveys, 1990, 1995, 2001 and 2006*.

If divorced Canadians plan to remarry less often today than in the past, it is because many are choosing common-law unions rather than marriage when starting a new relationship. Proportionally, they even outnumber singles living outside of marriage, regardless of age. According to the 2006 GSS, about 30% of divorced persons are living in common-law unions, compared to 22% of single people. More divorced persons living common-law are considering the possibility of remarrying. In 2006, 31% of divorced Canadians living common-law stated they intended to remarry, whereas the figure for the single divorced counterparts was 18%.

In Canada, Quebecers have the least desire to remarry. In 1990, more than 6 out of 10 divorced Quebecers stated they did not intend to do so. Over time, remarriage continues to lose ground among divorced Quebecers: almost three quarters of them excluded remarriage from their future conjugal intentions. Among the other provinces, this decline in remarriage is also taking place, but to a lesser degree (42% in 1990 and 57% in 2006). As seen throughout the country, common-law unions are becoming more and more an alternative to remarriage.

Certain factors can influence the choice to remarry. Thus, GSS data shows that fewer and fewer divorced persons with children plan to re-wed. Likewise, intentions to remarry among divorced Canadians decreases with age. Also, people who have divorced multiple times are more likely to respond negatively to the question on intention to remarry.

Although intentions are only indicators of people's will to do something, it is nevertheless true that in this context, they do shed some light on changes in Canadians' attitudes towards remarriage.

The data in this analysis was taken from various General Social Surveys on the family. Cycle 20 is the fourth GSS cycle to collect data on Canadian families (the first three cycles were 5, 10 and 15). Cycle 20 covers much of the same content as previous cycles on families with some sections revised and expanded. The above analysis uses a sample of divorced respondents that increases from cycle to cycle: 975 respondents in cycle 5, 979 in cycle 10, 2,305 in cycle 15 and 2,464 in cycle 20.

In this analysis, legal marital status was used to identify divorced persons. By definition, they are persons who have obtained a legal divorce and have not remarried.

References

Statistics Canada (2002), *Changing Conjugal Life in Canada*, Catalogue no. 89-576-XIE.

Statistics Canada (1999), *Canadian Families at the Approach of the Year 2000*, Catalogue no. 96-321 MPE, no. 4.

How to obtain more information

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