

# **Data Accuracy**

## **Vital Statistics – Marriage Database**

### **2003**

(Survey number 3232)

#### Same-sex marriages

Following provincial court rulings in 2003, vital statistics registries in Ontario and British Columbia started registering marriages of same-sex couples. In 2004, subsequent rulings by courts in five provinces (Québec, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland and Labrador) and one territory (Yukon) expanded the number of jurisdictions registering same-sex marriages. A court ruling in New Brunswick allowed same-sex marriages, a month before federal legislation legalized same-sex marriages across Canada, on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2005. Canada became the third country in the world, after the Netherlands and Belgium, to legalize same-sex marriages across its territory.

Ontario marriage registration forms do not include a data element to identify whether the marriage is opposite-sex, male same-sex, or female same-sex.

#### Coverage

Since the registration of marriages is a legal requirement in each Canadian province and territory, reporting is virtually complete. Under-coverage is thought to be minimal, but is being monitored. Under-coverage may occur because of late registration. Some marriages are registered by local authorities, but the paperwork is not forwarded to provincial or territorial registrars before a cut-off date. These cases for 1996 represent approximately 430 marriages, 9 years after the year of marriage (accumulated late records), or three-tenths of one percent of the total records. Under-coverage will occur when Canadian residents marry outside of Canada. There are no estimates for this, but is thought to be relatively small. Statistics Canada does not receive any data from other countries for these marriages. Over-coverage occurs when non-Canadian resident couples marry in Canada and when there are duplicate marriage records.

Unlike the other vital statistics databases, marriage data are presented only by province of occurrence, and not by province of residence. The variable “province of residence” has not been captured by several provinces over the years, the largest being Ontario. Without complete reporting, records for non-residents cannot be consistently excluded from the Canadian marriage statistics. This type of over-coverage, however, can be estimated by studying the resident status for records from the provinces and territories that do capture these variables. Using 2003 data, 4.7% of the records had the groom and/or bride, or one or both of the same-sex spouses as non-resident (3,695 / 79,164 marriages). In over one-half of these marriages (2,112 couples or 2.7% of all records), both the groom and bride or both same-sex spouses were non-residents. These might be tourists or

recent emigrants who return to Canada to wed. Where both spouses were non-residents and residents of the same country, 70% were from the United States and 13% from the United Kingdom. For Australia, Germany and Japan that percentage is 2% each. Assuming that all the non-resident couples continued to reside outside of Canada after the marriage, and that some percentage of the non-resident/resident couples decided to reside in Canada, this type of over-coverage can be estimated at approximately 2% to 5% percent of all marriages in Canada. This estimation assumes that those provinces that do not report the residence of each spouse have the same proportion of non-residents than the ones that do report it. This proportion, however, may vary from one jurisdiction to another. As such, it is important to note that some provinces have a greater percentage of marriages that take place between non-Canadian residents.

Over-coverage due to non-resident marriages is increasing, possibly because Canada is one of the few countries in the world to allow same-sex marriages. In jurisdictions that reported resident-status in 2003, in 4.7% of marriages one or both of the partners were non-residents, compared with 4.2% in 2002. Much of that increase is accounted by non-resident same-sex marriages in British Columbia. In that province, the percentage of marriages that took place between non-resident partners climbed to 5.7% (1,214 marriages) in 2003 from 3.6% (789 marriages) in 2002. Most of that increase is due to the fact that over one-third (425) of the marriages between non-resident partners were of same-sex couples. It is likely that Ontario also saw a similar rise in non-resident marriages with the introduction of same-sex marriages, but Ontario does not collect the data necessary for such an analysis.

Over-coverage from duplicate records is minimal to none. Duplicate marriage registrations are identified as part of the regular processing operation on each provincial and territorial subset, as well as by additional inter-provincial checks. Possible duplicate registrations are verified against microfilmed registrations or optical images, or by consulting with the provinces and territories.

## Response rates

### Item response

For 1997 to 2003, the response rates were 99% to 100% for most of the demographic variables on the marriage database (age, previous marital status). The response rates for birthplace of the groom and bride have improved from 92% in 1996 and 1997 to over 97% in 1998 to 2003. As discussed previously, the residence data are not captured in some provinces, giving national response rates of approximately 54%. Four provinces (New Brunswick, Québec, British Columbia and Yukon) do not report the religious affiliation variables, resulting in a 64% response rate nationally. A data table for the remaining jurisdictions (with response rates close to 93%) is produced annually as part of the standard data release.