Quality Measures
Vital Statistics – Divorce Database
(Survey number 3235)

Coverage

Since divorce is a judicial process, reporting is virtually complete. Undercoverage is thought to be minimal. Undercoverage may occur because of late registration, when divorces are registered by local courts, but the paperwork is not forwarded to the CRDP. Undercoverage may also occur when one spouse resides outside Canada; because a divorce applicant must be resident in the jurisdiction in which he/she applies for divorce, some divorces of Canadian residents occur outside Canada when the former spouse applies for and obtains a divorce in another country.

Statistics based on divorce data do not necessarily provide an accurate index of marital dissolution, since they are based only on unions that have been legally contracted and legally terminated by divorce. Separations of married partners are not registered events in Canada unless the separation ends in divorce. Neither are formations of common-law unions registered in Canada; such unions comprise a significant proportion of unions in Canada, to varying degrees from one province or territory to another. Persons in common-law relationships are not at risk for divorce from such unions since no legal procedure is required to dissolve such unions. Documentation with the divorce statistics advises analysts to use caution when making cross-cultural comparisons as consensual unions may represent a large proportion of all unions in some communities.

Over-coverage from duplicate records is minimal to none. Duplicate divorce registrations are identified by the CRDP as an essential part of their registry processing. At Statistics Canada, a further check ensures that no duplicate registration numbers are in the database. In 2004, 16 pairs of duplicate records were detected in the Divorce database by Statistics Canada. Following the recommendations of the CRDP, STC retained only one record per set of duplicates.

Response rates

Item response

For 2004, the response rates were 99% to 100% for most of the demographic variables on the divorce database (jurisdiction of divorce, duration of marriage, age at marriage of husband and wife, age at divorce of husband and wife, previous marital status of husband and wife, and reason for marriage breakdown). Data relating to custody of dependents and dependent children, however, are not complete because court offices do not always provide the required data elements. In 2004, there were 4,528 divorces (6.5% of total divorces) involving dependents, but the custody order information was insufficient to determine their numbers and ages. Furthermore, custody arrangements are not always recorded on the divorce registration form if the custodial arrangements were not pursuant to a court order. Consequently, divorce registration data underestimate the total number

of custody orders as well as the total number of dependents affected by divorce. In addition, dependents of persons in common-law unions and of separated but still legally married couples are excluded from these statistics. These issues are documented with the divorce statistics.

Other Accuracy Issues

Same-sex divorces

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 (Quebec, 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 20th, 2005. As with marriage statistics, divorce statistics may be slightly affected by this change, as eventually some of these marriages may end in divorce.

Reason for divorce

Only one reason for divorce was captured by the system in 2004. While multiple reasons may have been cited when the application was made, only one was retained in the system.