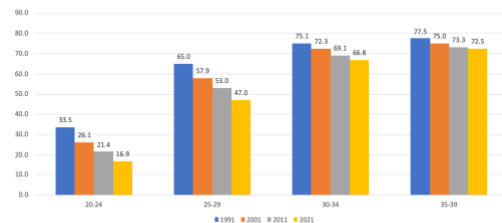


## ARE CANADIANS TURNING AWAY FROM PARTNERED LIVING?

The proportion of younger Canadians living in marital or common-law relationships has declined significantly. Policies that acknowledge and support choices will likely be necessary.

Per Cent of Women Married or in Common-Law Relationship, By Age Group, 1991-2021



The post-World War II period saw a striking increase in the popularity of marriage among young Canadians. The generations coming to adulthood from the late forties to the early seventies married in greater proportions than generations before or after and they did so at remarkably young ages. By 1972, average age at first marriage fell to 21.7 for women and 24.2 for men. The years that followed saw the growing popularity of common-law relationships, and this delayed marriage for some and served as an alternative to marriage for others. Yet young Canadians still appeared committed to partnered living.

As the data in the charts show this commitment to partnered living appears to have remained strong until the early 1990s. Over the last three decades, however, there has been a remarkable decline in the proportions of younger Canadians who are living in a marital or common-law relationship. And this despite growing acceptance in both law and public opinion of common-law and same-sex partnerships, which the census began counting for the first time in 2001.

For women in their late 20s, the proportion living with a partner fell from 65% in 1991 to just 47% in 2021, while for men the decline was from 51.5% to 33.6%. The declines

were smaller for those in their 30s; still, in 2021, one-third of women and 42% of men aged 30-34 were not living with a partner.

Some of the decline that has occurred for those in their twenties is likely related to a delay in the formation of partnerships rather than a rejection of partnered living. Similarly, the ‘point in time’ nature of census data may exaggerate the decline. A 33 year-old who has never married and is living alone at the time of the census might have previously lived in a common-law arrangement. Even with these considerations, the data point to important changes in the choices young adults are making regarding their living arrangements. The most recent census data show rising percentages of Canadians in their twenties and thirties are living with their parents, other relatives or non-relatives, or alone.

The changing living arrangements of younger Canadians are likely to have wide-ranging effects on the economy and society. The financial arrangements of couple households with young children differ from those with several related or unrelated adults, as do the tax and benefit policies that affect them.

These varied living arrangements are likely to present new challenges for households as they seek to service a mortgage or save for retirement. As many younger Canadians move through a series of living arrangements – from living with a partner, to returning to the parental home, to living alone or with a new partner – policy innovation will be required. How policy assists today’s young adults as they travel this road is likely to change in important ways.

Per Cent of Men Married or in Common-Law Relationship, By Age Group, 1991-2021

