



# HOME ECONOMICS: AS THE FAMILY GOES, SO GOES THE ECONOMY

MAY 29, 2019

## EVENT SUMMARY

When complex social issues such as social mobility and child wellbeing show up in the public square, the role of family stability gets little attention. Yet family wellbeing and economic stability are inter-connected. Canadian data suggests that marriage and income have important correlations and linkages. In fact, wealthier Canadians are much more likely to be married compared to lower income Canadians.

### Marriage Divided and In Retreat

On May 29, Dr. W. Bradford Wilcox, professor of sociology at the University of Virginia, presented some fascinating research to an overflow audience at the Ottawa office of Cardus. He dove into the data regarding the growing marriage divide between wealthy and working class families. Data shows the most educated people are more likely to marry while the least educated are much less likely to marry. Wilcox suggested that marriage is in retreat and “devolving into a separate-and-unequal family regime, where the highly educated and the affluent enjoy strong and stable households and everyone else is consigned to increasingly unstable, unhappy, and unworkable ones.”

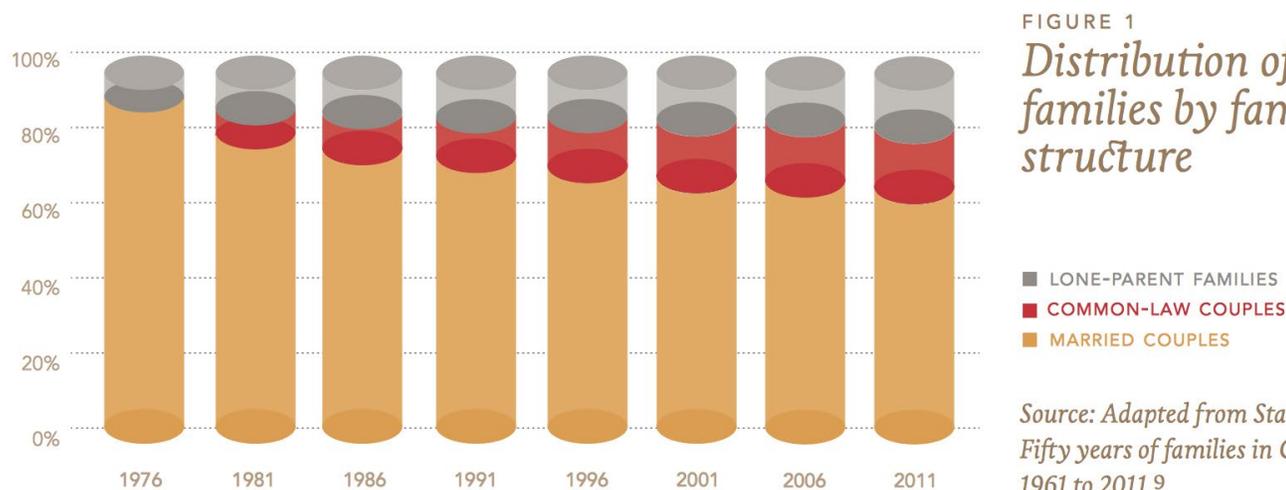


FIGURE 1  
*Distribution of census families by family structure*

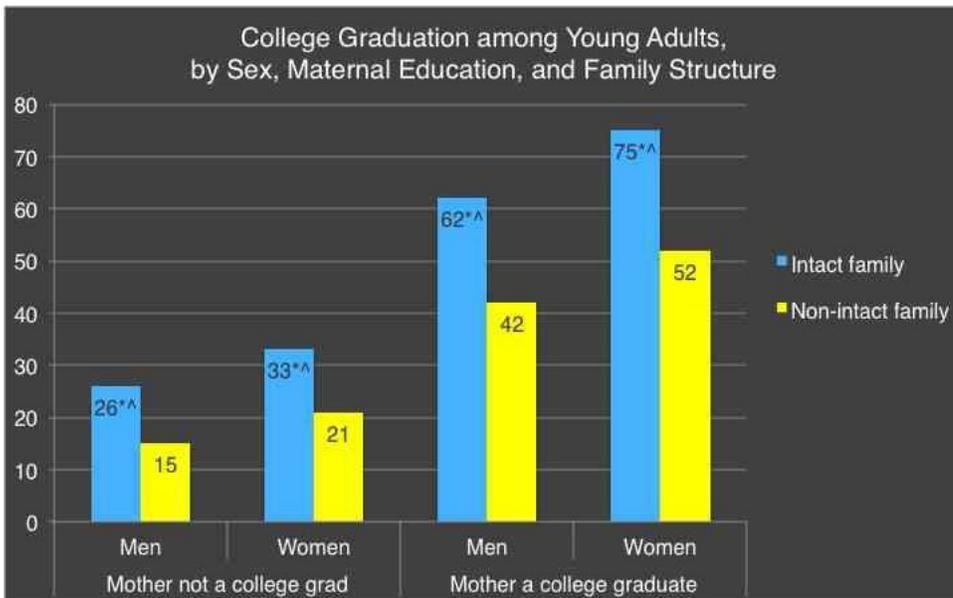
Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada, *Fifty years of families in Canada: 1961 to 2011*.<sup>9</sup>

Cross and Mitchell, 2014

### Why the Marriage Divide?

Economic and cultural forces are at work. Wilcox argued, “Culture, economy, civil society and public policy are eroding marriage among the poor and working-class, but not so for the upper middle class.”

All this matters because intact families are associated with better outcomes for children and adults. The chart below is an example of the relationship between intact families and educational attainment.



Source: Wilcox, 2013

Wilcox argued that the benefits of stable, intact families extend to the wider community. He noted that there is evidence that “Children from single and two-parent families are more likely to succeed if they live in communities dominated by two-parent families.”

### What can be done?

Wilcox proposed five areas for policy action:

- Ensure public policy doesn’t penalize or discourage marriage
- Strengthen vocational and apprenticeship education as evidence suggests these programs can increase the economic and family formation fortunes of working class men
- Consider a wage supplement for low income workers
- Strengthen civil society institutions
- Public and private campaigns to expand civic and cultural supports for marriage

Wilcox concluded, “Given the role that marriage plays in fostering growth, prosperity, and economic mobility, we need to renew the economic, policy, civic and cultural foundations of marriage and family life for the 21 century.”

Cardus desires to see strong, stable families that contribute to a flourishing society. We are grateful for Dr. Wilcox’s presentation and continued research in this important area.

We gratefully acknowledge the Priscilla and Stanford Reid Trust for supporting this event.

