

Quality Measures

Vital Statistics – Marriage Database

(Survey number 3232)

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 330 marriages, 6 years after the year of marriage (accumulated late records), or two-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 it is thought to be relatively small. Statistics Canada does not receive any data from other countries for these marriages.

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 data 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 2000 data, approximately 4% of the records had either a non-resident groom or a non-resident bride (3,381 / 86,452 marriages). In almost half of these marriages (1,633 couples or 2% of records), both the groom and bride were non-residents. These might be tourists or recent emigrants who return to Canada to wed. Where both spouses were non-residents, 61% were from the United States, 13% from the United Kingdom, 4% from Germany, and 3% each from Australia, China (mostly Hong Kong), and Japan. Assuming that all the non-resident couples continued to reside after marriage outside of Canada, and some percentage of the non-resident/resident couples decided to reside in Canada, this type of over-coverage can be estimated at two to four percent of all marriages in Canada.

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 2000, 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 96.5% in 1998 to 2000. As discussed previously, the residence data are not captured in some provinces, giving national response rates of approximately 55%. Four provinces (New Brunswick, Québec, British Columbia and Yukon) do not report the religious affiliation variables, resulting in only a 60% to 62% response rate nationally. A data table for the remaining jurisdictions (with response rates around 90%) is produced annually as part of the standard data release.

Other Accuracy Issues

Same-sex marriages

Court decisions in 2003 have expanded the definition used in the legal registration of marriage to include same-sex couples and since then British Columbia and Ontario registrars of vital statistics have been accepting marriage registrations from same-sex couples. Statistics Canada and the provincial and territorial registrars are currently considering the implications of these changes for the gathering of statistics on marriage.