

Data Accuracy

Vital Statistics – Marriage Database

2004

(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 20th, 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 2004 data, 4.7% of the records had the groom and/or bride, or one or both of the same-sex spouses as non-resident. In over one-half of these marriages (or 2.8% 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, 69% were from the United States.. 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 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 2004, the response rates varied from 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 was 97%. The residence data are not captured in some provinces, giving national response rates of approximately 54%.

In 2004, four provinces (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, British Columbia and Yukon) did not report the religious affiliation, resulting in a national response rate of less than 60%. In addition, it was not possible to identify the religious affiliation for opposite-sex marriages in Ontario. Therefore, the CANSIM table on the number of marriages by religion of groom and bride for opposite-sex marriages was terminated as it was not representative at the Canada level.