

Marriage statistics fall into two principal categories. The first consists of census data enumerating the single, married, widowed and divorced in each age group. For any particular census year such figures do not give any indication of current events but describe the results of marriage over many years. They have the advantage that, since the period of time covered is extensive, year-to-year fluctuations are to some extent eliminated. For Canada, data for successive censuses from 1871 onwards are available, and can be used to give a picture of the general trend over a long period. Current events are recorded in the annual statistics of marriage registrations; these are available for the whole of Canada since 1926 and reflect short-term changes due to immediate economic causes. The crude marriage rate is, however, an unsatisfactory measure of changes in the probability of marriage. It may rise or fall while the true marriage rate remains constant or vice versa. When both census data and annual first marriages are available, as is the case in Canada since 1926, a more refined analysis is possible. It is now a generally accepted view that the best method of obtaining true marriage rates is to draw up nuptiality tables in accordance with the principle on which life tables are constructed. The true marriage rate is then given by the proportion of women who marry at least once out of a thousand girls alive at 15 years of age (gross nuptiality), or out of a thousand new-born girls (net nuptiality). The gross nuptiality rate describes the probability of marriage in a group of girls, all of whom live to old age, while the net rate takes into account the reduction of the spinster population by deaths as well as by marriages. As with gross and net reproduction rates or life tables, nuptiality tables are a measure of conditions prevailing only in the specific years to which they refer. Consequently, the populations described by these tables are those that would occur if the probabilities of marriage were to remain constant for a considerable time. As nuptiality rates do in fact change, no actual population is likely to be found corresponding to the nuptiality table. But, as is also true of life tables, these tables are the most convenient way of expressing marriage conditions at a given time.

If nuptiality tables were extensively available, they would form the best basis for the study of nuptiality in all its aspects. Since this is not the case, a conspectus of marriage in Canada must utilize data collected in a variety of ways. Under the heading immediately following, the position of Canada as compared with other countries is considered; then the history of marriage in Canada, and later more detailed studies based on the data of 1930-32 are summarized.

A Comparison of Canadian Marriage Statistics with Those of Other Countries

Table I shows, for a number of countries for recent census years, the proportion of women who have been married. Like all vital data, the proportion of married women at any given time clearly depends very greatly on the age composition of the population. To render the data comparable it is necessary to adjust the figures to eliminate the influence of age. There are several ways of doing this. In the following table it has been done by giving the percentage of married women in each country that would be obtained if all the populations had the same age composition as that of England and Wales in 1901.