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Examining the determinants of union dissolution among married and common-law unions in Canada

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Abstract

This paper examines the determinants of union dissolution among first marriage, second marriage, and common-law unions via an event history analysis of the fourth panel of the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID). Results suggest that unemployment and other potentially challenging employment situations are associated with higher odds of dissolution, among first marriage unions in particular. The factors that predict union dissolution are found to differ, both across union types and within common-law unions by region (Quebec versus elsewhere in Canada).
Keywords: *union dissolution, family instability, unemployment, cohabitation.*

Résumé

Cet article examine les déterminants de la dissolution des premiers et deuxièmes mariages et des unions de fait au moyen de l'analyse de l'historique d'un événement du quatrième jury de l'Enquête sur la dynamique du travail et du revenu (EDTR). Les résultats indiquent que le chômage et les autres situations d'emploi potentiellement difficiles sont associés à une plus grande probabilité de dissolution, surtout parmi les premiers mariages. On a constaté que les types de facteurs qui prédisent la dissolution d'une union varient à la fois dans les types d'union et au sein du groupe des unions de fait par région (le Québec par rapport au reste du Canada).
Mots-clés : *dissolution de l'union, instabilité familiale, chômage, cohabitation.*

Introduction

Family structures and marital histories are becoming more complex across Canada as individuals move more frequently into and out of conjugal unions. As a result, common-law unions and second marriages have become an increasingly prevalent form of family life. Despite their increasing prevalence, these unions remain at a higher risk of dissolving than first marriage unions (Le Bourdais et al. 2004; Clark and Crompton 2006; Kerr et al. 2006; Teachman 2008). While it is recognized that these different union types vary in terms of their average socio-economic and sociodemographic characteristics, it is less known whether these union types respond differently, in terms of their risk of dissolution, to various employment and economic conditions. Moreover, with the stark contrast in the prevalence of common-law unions in the province of Quebec compared to elsewhere in Canada, differences in the stability of common-law unions in different cultural contexts can also be examined.

Background

While the increased diversity of family structure and stability has been relatively recent, major theories surrounding the determinants of union dissolution remain rooted in developments dating to the 1970s. Levinger's (1976) theory of divorce attributes the stability of unions to three interrelated factors: cost-benefits of staying in the relationship, barriers against leaving the relationship, and availability of alternative partners. Since Levinger's initial development, the theory surrounding the determinants of union dissolution can generally be classified in terms of economic and psychological/cultural perspectives. Taking an economic perspective, Becker's widely-cited specialization and independence hypotheses (1977; 1985) posit that (a) when both partners work for pay, specialization of roles and, thus, the gains to marriage decrease; and (b) as women gain economic independence from their husbands, they are better "equipped" and therefore more likely to leave a marriage. Numerous studies have found support for Becker's hypothesis when examining married unions (Johnson and Skinner 1986; Heckert et al. 1998; Ono and Stafford 2001; South 2001; Burgess et al. 2003). However, in contrast to Becker's theory, the quality, and therefore the stability, of common-law unions have been found to benefit from a despecialization of roles within the couple. Cohabiting couples appear to benefit more than married couples do from equality of economic and cultural assets within the relationship, and tend to have greater educational homogamy and weaker sex-role ideology than among married unions (Newcomb and Bentler 1980; DeMaris 1984; Shelton and John 1993).

In addition to the division of work within the couple, unexpected stressful economic events have been found to put couples at higher risk of dissolution (Wu and Pollard 2000; Boheim and Ermisch 2001; Jalovaara 2003; Charles and Stephens 2004; Boyle et al. 2008). Among these stressful economic events, job displacement has dominated as a focus and has been linked to dissolution in some studies, though none in the Canadian context. Few studies have attempted to look beyond job loss to the role of other potentially stressful employment situations on union stability, and more specifically, differences in these patterns across various types of unions. Given that individuals in common-law unions tend to maintain a

higher level of economic independence than married couples, stressful individual employment experiences such as job loss could be expected to have a variable influence on the stability of cohabiting versus married unions.

In contrast to economic theories, psychological and cultural theories pertaining to union dissolution conceive that the non-economic aspects of conjugal relationships have become increasingly important as the economic and domestic roles of spouses have grown more similar over time. For instance, paid and unpaid work arrangements within a couple are expected to have different meanings and consequences on union stability depending on individual values and norms. These values are linked to factors like birth cohort, ascribed characteristics (such as the experience of parental divorce in childhood), achieved characteristics (such as educational attainment), and the interaction of these characteristics between spouses (Kiernan and Cherlin 1999; Amato et al. 2001, 2005; Zimmer 2001; Wilson and Waddoups 2002; De Graff and Kalmijn 2006; Hohmann-Marriott 2006; Holley et al. 2006; Osborne et al. 2007). As with economic-based studies, few cultural or psychological-based studies have examined whether the gendered division of labour or difficult economic experiences might differently influence union stability among different union types or in different cultural regions. Given that individuals in cohabiting unions are generally found to be younger, to have lower levels of religious affiliation, and to express lower levels of commitment and satisfaction with their relationship compared to their married counterparts, one could expect individuals in common-law unions to react differently to the same psychological stressors compared to individuals in married unions (Shelton and John 1993; Nock 1995; Dempsey and de Vaus 2004). While we know that couples "do gender" differently depending on the type of conjugal union, and that cohabiting couples tend to divide paid and unpaid labour differently than first marriages do, whether these factors influence union stability differently across union type or across different cultural regions remains relatively unexamined.

Moreover, there is emerging evidence that the extent of the differences found between different union types varies substantially, depending on the surrounding cultural context. For instance, in an examination of European countries, Hamplova (2009) found that as cohabitation became more common in a particular society, marriage and cohabitation become more similar in terms of their characteristics. Given the much greater prevalence of cohabitation in the province of Quebec compared to other areas of Canada, one would expect, based on the findings of Hamplova and others, that common-law unions in Quebec might behave more like married unions, both within and outside of the province (Le Bourdais et al. 2004; Kerr et al. 2006; Laplante 2006). Yet Hamplova and Le Bourdais (2008) found, contrary to their hypotheses, that the gap in educational homogamy between married and unmarried Canadian couples was essentially the same within and outside of Quebec. These mixed findings suggest that the link between some, but not all, sociodemographic characteristics of the union may operate as a function of the surrounding cultural context.

Conceptual framework and hypotheses

This study examines differences in the relationship between employment characteristics—specifically, challenging employment experiences and the gendered division of paid labour—and union stability across different union types

and regions of Canada. By analyzing the determinants of dissolution separately for first marriages, second marriages, and common-law unions, this analysis attempts to provide a more detailed account of the characteristics that predict union dissolution risk among different types of spousal families. Further, this analysis attempts to gain a better understanding of the unique phenomenon of cohabitation in the province of Quebec by comparing the predictors of dissolution risk among cohabiting unions in Quebec relative to cohabiting unions elsewhere in Canada.

Given the documented differences in the characteristics of common-law, first marriage, and second marriage unions, it is expected that each of these unions will respond differently, in terms of risk of dissolution, to certain challenging employment and economic experiences and to certain gendered divisions of paid labour within the couple. Specifically, there are three main hypotheses. Firstly, it is hypothesized that first marriage unions will be the most strongly and negatively affected, in terms of union stability, by various difficult economic and employment situations and by a "non-traditional" division of paid work within the couple (non-traditional is defined in the variables section below); this is based on the assumption that Becker's theories of specialization and independence still largely hold among first marriage unions. Secondly, in comparison to first marriages, it is hypothesized that second marriage unions and common-law unions outside of Quebec will be less negatively affected by the experience of difficult employment and economic situations, and that they will benefit, stability-wise, from a "non-traditional" division of paid work within the couple. This hypothesis is rooted in previous literature that finds these unions to benefit, in terms of relationship quality, from more equal economic power between spouses. Thirdly, given the widespread prevalence of cohabitation in the province of Quebec compared to elsewhere in Canada, it is hypothesized that common-law unions within the province of Quebec will be influenced by difficult economic and employment situations, as well as a "non-traditional" division of labour, in a manner similar to that found among first marriages; this is based on the recent findings of Hamplova (2009) that in contexts where cohabitation is widespread, the differences in the characteristics between married and common-law unions become minimal.

Data and sample

Data were drawn from the fourth panel of Statistics Canada's Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID), covering the period 2002–2007. In each of the six years of the panel, data were collected from respondents on their personal, family, labour, and income characteristics. The sample was restricted to couples in which both spouses were aged 18 to 65 and living together in a married or common-law union at the beginning of the panel, and further restricted to couples in which both spouses had valid data for all six years of the panel. Same-sex couples, couples in which one spouse died within the survey period, and couples in which one or both spouses immigrated to Canada after the age of 15 were not included in the sample.[1] All statistics were weighted using SLID longitudinal bootstrap weights.

1. The number of same-sex unions in the sample was too small to analyze. It was assumed that individuals who immigrated to Canada after age 15 would systematically differ in terms of dissolution risk from individuals born in Canada.

The unit of analysis was the couple: characteristics of the male partner, female partner, and both of the partners combined were incorporated together. A union dissolution was recorded if, in a given year, the couple reported a change in marital status from married or common-law to separated or divorced.[2] Separate analyses were performed for three union types and two regions, resulting in four samples: first marriage for both partners (63.5 per cent of all couples), second marriage for at least one partner (31.2 per cent), and common-law unions—within the province of Quebec (8.9 per cent) and elsewhere in Canada (7.8 per cent). Table 1 provides summary statistics that document the differences in the characteristics of the four union types. Generally, compared to first marriage unions, individuals in second marriage unions were older and more likely to have complex fertility histories. Compared to married unions, common-law unions were younger, more likely to be dual-earner, and more likely to contain a female spouse that was highly attached to the labour force. Additionally, common-law couples worked more hours but earned less income on average than married unions.

Given the widespread popularity and prevalence of common-law unions in Quebec, the specific historical circumstances surrounding this phenomenon, and the higher likelihood that children are present in Quebec common-law unions, it was hypothesized that Quebec common-law unions would show greater stability than common-law unions elsewhere in Canada.[3] However, as summarized in Table 2, the results of a logistic regression predicting union dissolution risk among common-law unions revealed no significant differences by region or marital history after controlling for other characteristics.[4] Despite this lack of significant difference in union stability, the possibility remained that the stability of common-law unions would be differently influenced by certain characteristics and experiences in different cultural contexts. Therefore, common-law unions were examined separately, within and outside of Quebec.

To better infer the causal nature of relationships, the majority of time-varying explanatory variables (such as labour force status in the previous year) were lagged, i.e., taken from the year prior. Explanatory variables also included non-lagged variables such as age and union duration.[5] A final "best fit" model of explanatory variables was standardized across each of the four samples (first marriages, second

Unions that began as common-law at the beginning of the survey but married while under observation remained in analysis, categorized as common-law unions.

2. For both marriages and cohabiting unions, only marital statuses of "separated" or "divorced", paired with a matching "end-date" of the union, were considered as valid dissolutions. The possibility of missing dissolutions among common-law unions is undoubtedly higher than among married unions, as common-law unions are more likely to omit this marital status and instead report "single" status. As a result, the estimate of dissolution rates among common-law unions is considered conservative.
3. Approximately 50 per cent of all common-law unions in the sample resided in the province of Quebec.
4. Other characteristics included those in the standard analytical model described in Table 4.
5. Additional models were estimated that substituted age of the female partner at the beginning of the union in place of current age of the female partner. Age at the beginning of the union was found to be a non-significant predictor of dissolution for all of the union types. The estimated coefficients for the explanatory variables were not substantially different from the model described in Table 2, indicating that the effects of these variables are quite robust, whether current age or age at the beginning of the union are controlled for.

Table 1. Summary Statistics (weighted proportion/mean), total over 2002–2007 period.

	Union Type			
	First Marriages	Second Marriages	Common-Law Never-Married	Post-Marital Common-Law
Union Dissolved in Reference Year	0.05	0.06	0.16	0.12
Ever Had Child – Both	0.94	0.85	0.71	0.74
– One Partner Only	0.07	0.10	0.01	0.15
Preschool-Aged Child Living in Home	0.18	0.12	0.39	0.13
School-Aged Child Living in Home	0.42	0.38	0.42	0.33
Adult Child Living in Home	0.06	0.05	0.01	0.02
Became Empty-Nest Household	0.06	0.03	0.01	0.03
Child Born Prior to Current Union				
– Both Partners	0.06	0.33	0.04	0.29
– One Partner Only	0.05	0.39	0.11	0.33
Female – No. of Children Ever Born	2.14	2.00	1.29	1.54
Couple Owns Home	0.92	0.90	0.77	0.75
Female has University Educational Attainment	0.22	0.16	0.24	0.16
Male has University Educational Attainment	0.24	0.17	0.21	0.19
Dual Earner Couple	0.74	0.73	0.82	0.81
Male: Annual Hours Worked	1829	1828	1936	1923
Female: Annual Hours Worked	1185	1322	1475	1432
Female: Annual After-Tax Income (2007$)	28299	29474	29114	27624
Male: Annual After-Tax Income (2007$)	50666	47697	40627	42021
Couple's Combined Annual After-Tax Income (2007$)	79594	77171	60779	65422
Female Earns More than Male	0.22	0.29	0.24	0.30
Female Labour Force Status = Employed All Year	0.63	0.67	0.70	0.71
Male Labour Force Status = Employed All Year	0.77	0.73	0.79	0.78
Both Partners Have Job Closely Related to Education	0.46	0.39	0.43	0.38
Female Held Multiple Jobs During Year	0.09	0.11	0.07	0.07
Male Held Multiple Jobs During Year	0.08	0.08	0.09	0.09
One Partner Unemployed During Year	0.08	0.10	0.13	0.12
Male has Managerial Job	0.23	0.24	0.17	0.18
Female Not Working FTFY	0.59	0.53	0.48	0.46
Male Not Working Full-Year Full-Time	0.33	0.38	0.32	0.33
Female Current Age	46	48	35	45
Male Current Age	48	51	37	48
Female Age at Beginning of Union	24	33	25	33
Male Age at Beginning of Union	26	36	27	36
Female Place of Birth = Canada	0.94	0.93	0.99	0.98
Male Place of Birth = Canada	0.95	0.96	0.98	0.97
Neither Partner Reports Disability	0.66	0.53	0.75	0.61
Region (Atlantic ommitted)				
– Quebec	0.24	0.12	0.75	0.46
– Ontario	0.35	0.40	0.09	0.24
– Prairies	0.19	0.23	0.07	0.15
– British Columbia	0.11	0.16	0.05	0.10
Female Self-Rated Stress = "Very Stressful"	0.12	0.16	0.14	0.08
Male Self-Rated Stress = "Very Stressful"	0.15	0.17	0.19	0.16

marriages, common-law unions within Quebec, and common-law unions outside of Quebec).[6]

The principal challenging employment characteristic examined was whether either spouse experienced unemployment in the previous year.[7] In addition to unemployment, two other employment characteristics were hypothesized to be potentially stress-inducing: one or both spouses having a job in the previous year that was not closely related to his or her education,[8] potentially representing job dissatisfaction or underemployment; and one or both spouses holding multiple jobs simultaneously in the previous year, potentially representing work-life conflict or time strain.[9] In terms of the gendered division of labour within the couple, a "non-traditional" division of paid labour within the couple was indicated principally by the female partner earning more than the male partner or the female partner working full-time, full-year in the previous year. Job tenure and managerial job status of the male spouse in the previous year were also examined to ascertain the level of job security and occupational prestige of the male partner, deemed "male breadwinner" status. Measures of income security included an indicator of whether the couple owned their home in the previous year and the combined after-tax income of the couple in the previous year, adjusted for family size.

Finally, several measures of family composition and history were controlled for in the analyses. Given the conflicting findings on the role of children in dissolution risk found in previous studies, the age and nature of children born to each spouse were distinguished.[10] Relevant variables examined included whether a preschool, school-aged or adult child was present in the home in the previous year, whether the couple became an "empty-nest" household in the previous year, and whether one or both partners had a child born prior to the current union. Demographic controls

6. Exceptions to the standardized model were as follows: (i) for the non-Quebec common-law union model, a cubic function of union duration was included, as this better accounted for the effect of duration on dissolution risk than the quadratic function used for other union types; (ii) both of the common-law models controlled for type of common-law union (never-married versus post-marital); and (iii) the first marriage model included Quebec residence, becoming an empty-nest household in the previous year, and the presence of adult children in the home in the previous year. These covariates were not included in other models, due to perfect prediction resulting from an inadequate number of cases.
7. This measure of unemployment is based on a monthly flag and does not take into account the duration of the unemployment spell, nor the type (e.g., seasonal unemployment).
8. The closeness of one's job to one's education is a subjective assessment as perceived by the person. This variable is problematic in that it does not detail whether the current job requires lower or higher skills relative to one's education, or simply different skills, or how someone with a non-specialized high school diploma or less than high school education might determine a job to be closely related to their education.
9. A person was considered to have held multiple jobs simultaneously in a given year if, in any month, the person held more than one job for a consecutive period of 15 days or more. This does not take into account the schedules of each job (i.e., full-time or part-time); http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75f0026x/2006000/4069080-eng.htm#multj28).
10. Most literature finds that the presence of any child in the home protects couples against dissolution (see Lillard et al 1995; Berrington and Diamond 1999; Clark and Crompton 2006). However, Boheim and Ermisch (2001) found the presence of children to increase dissolution risk, and Ono (1998) found that the odds of dissolution peaked when the youngest child was between the ages of 13 and 18.

Table 2. Relative odds of union dissolving (odds ratios) among common-law unions.

Male's Job Duration in Prev. Yr. (1 unit = 5 years)		0.994
Managerial Job Status of Male in Prev. Yr. (Ref: No)	Male has Managerial Job	1.895
Female Labour Force Status in Prev. Yr. (Ref: Working FYFT)	Not Working FYFT	1.381
Unemployment Status of Couple in Prev. Yr. (Ref: Neither Partner Unemp.)	One Partner Unemployed	0.739
Job in Previous Year Closely Relates to Education (Ref: Neither Partner)	One Partner has Closely Related Job	1.076
	Both Partners have Closely Related Job	0.838
Multiple Job Status of Couple in Prev. Yr. (Ref: Neither Partner)	One Partner held Multiple Jobs	1.558
Combined After-Tax Income of the Couple Adjusted for Family Size (1 unit = $1000)		1.001
Distribution of Earnings within Couple in Prev. Yr. (Ref: Male earned more)	Female earned more than Male	1.299
Homeowner Status of Couple in Prev. Yr. (Ref: Rented home)	Owned home	0.731
Pre-school Aged Child Present in Home in Prev. Yr. (Ref: No)	Yes	0.541
School Aged Child Present in Home in Prev. Yr. (Ref: No)	Yes	1.174
Child Born to Either Partner Prior to Union (Ref: Neither)	One Partner	1.258
	Both Partners	1.332
Combined Stress Level of Couple in Prev. Yr. (lowest to highest)		1.303*
Disability Status of Couple in Prev. Yr. (Ref: Neither Reports Disability)	One Partner	0.419&
	Both Partners	0.111
Duration of Union (in years)		0.451**
Duration of Union squared		1.054*
Duration of Union cubed		0.999&
Type of Union (Ref: Common-Law Never-Married, Outside of Quebec)	CL Post-Marital, Outside of Quebec	0.683
	CL Never Married, Quebec	0.871
	CL Post-Marital, Quebec	0.695
Age of Female Spouse (in years)		1.206
Age of Female Spouse squared		0.997&
N=1,551		

&=p<0.10, *=p<0.05, **=p<0.010, ***=p<0.001

included age of the female partner, duration of the union, region of residence (for married unions only), disability status of both partners in the previous year, and the combined level of self-rated stress of both partners in the previous year.

Analytical method

Discrete-time survival analysis, also referred to as event history analysis, was used to examine the determinants of union dissolution for first marriages, second marriages, and common-law unions within and outside of Quebec. This method categorizes the data into discrete blocks of time—in this case, the six individual years of the panel. This method accounts for each couple's unique history by measuring the evolving duration of the union, and removing couples from the analytical samples after they experience dissolution. Measurement of the risk of dissolution for couples began at the start of the panel in 2002; as a result, couples only contributed to the estimation of dissolution risk for the union durations that corresponded to their time as survey respondents (e.g., a couple that entered the survey with a union duration of 10 years and remained intact for the entire panel contributes to the estimate of dissolution risk for union durations of 10 to 16 years). Following this configuration of survival time, the determinants of union dissolution were predicted via binary logistic regression to estimate the odds that a couple holding a given set of characteristics in the previous year would dissolve in the following year of the survey relative to couples not holding those characteristics.[11] The dependent variable in all of the analyses was an indicator of whether the couple reported being separated or divorced within a given year of the survey period.

Results

Prior to the analysis of the characteristics predicting union dissolution for each union type separately, the union types were first aggregated for the purpose of estimating, via logistic regression, the differences in the risk of dissolution by union type; the results are summarized in Table 3.[12] As with the analysis of common-law unions summarized in Table 2, common-law couples were sub-cat-

Table 3. Relative odds of union dissolving (odds ratios), all union types.

Type of Union (Ref: First Marriage)	Second Marriage	1.722*
	CL Never Married, Outside of Quebec	4.482***
	CL Post Marital, Outside of Quebec	1.512
	CL Never Married, Quebec	3.26***
	CL Post Marital, Quebec	3.527**
N=8,397		

&=$p<0.10$; *=$p<0.05$; **=$p<0.010$; ***=$p<0.001$

11. An odds ratio of 3.23 can be interpreted in the following manner: The group of interest holds 223 per cent higher odds of experiencing dissolution relative to the reference group of that particular variable (i.e., the reference category ratio is 1.00). In contrast, an odds ratio of 0.75 means that the group of interest holds 25 per cent lower odds of experiencing dissolution relative to the reference group of that particular variable.
12. All odds ratios described in the text are significant at the $p<0.05$ level, unless otherwise indicated. Though not displayed, this regression model included all of the covariates present in the standardized regression models presented in Table 4.

egorized by their marital history (never-married versus post-marital) and by region of residence (Quebec versus elsewhere in Canada). Relative to first marriages, all other union types had significantly higher odds of dissolving, with the exception of post-marital common-law unions residing outside of Quebec. However, the magnitude of this elevated risk varied considerably across union types. While second marriages had 72 per cent higher odds of dissolution relative to first marriages, common-law unions residing in Quebec had 226 per cent and 253 per cent higher odds of dissolution for never-married and post-marital unions, respectively. The union type with the highest relative risk of dissolution was never-married common-law unions residing outside of Quebec, which had 348 per cent higher odds of dissolving compared to first marriage unions.

Figure 1 displays the Kaplan-Meier survival function for each of the union types. Figure 2 displays the post-prediction (predicted probability) baseline hazard model for each union type. Figure 3 displays the post-prediction (predicted probability) baseline hazard model for each union type, accounting for an interaction of union type with union duration. It can be seen that the Kaplan-Meier and baseline hazard models produce different rankings of survival (or stability) by union type. The post-prediction baseline hazard estimate ranks post-marital common-law unions outside of Quebec as having a lower probability of dissolution than second marriages, while the opposite was found in the descriptive Kaplan-Meier survival function. Additionally, the post-prediction baseline hazard estimate ranks never-married common-law unions in Quebec as being more stable than post-marital common-law unions in Quebec; the opposite situation was found in the Kaplan-Meier model.

Accounting for the differential relationship of each union type with time (union duration) reveals numerous subtleties not captured in the previous figures, as seen in Figure 3. First and second marriages experienced a fairly stable risk of dissolution over time (i.e., the risk of dissolution is fairly consistent regardless of the duration of the union). In contrast, common-law unions experienced a defi-

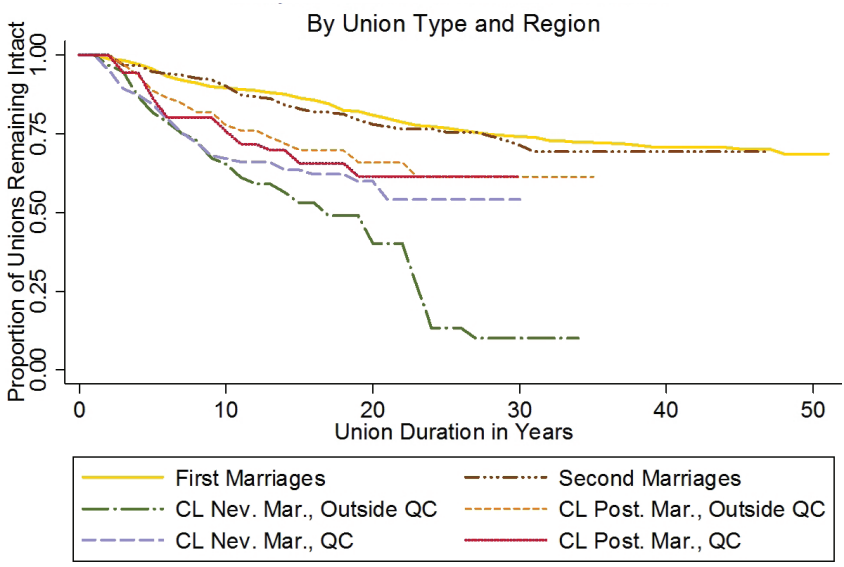
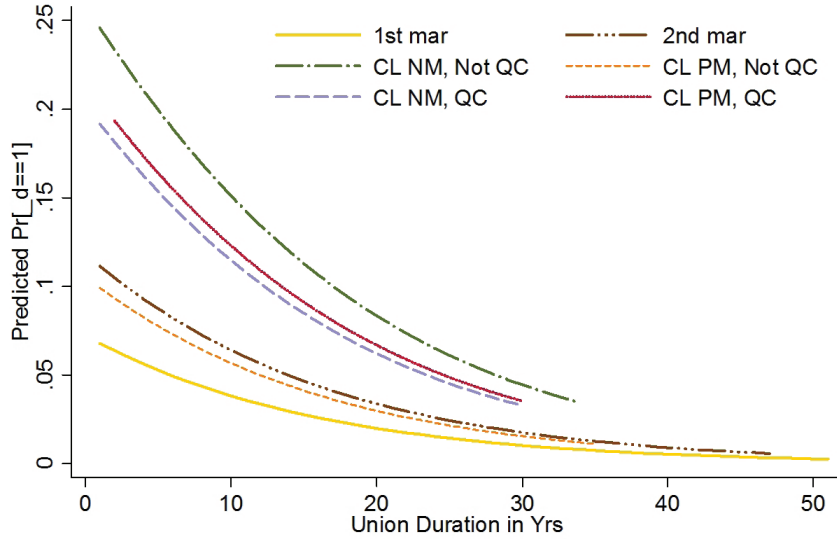


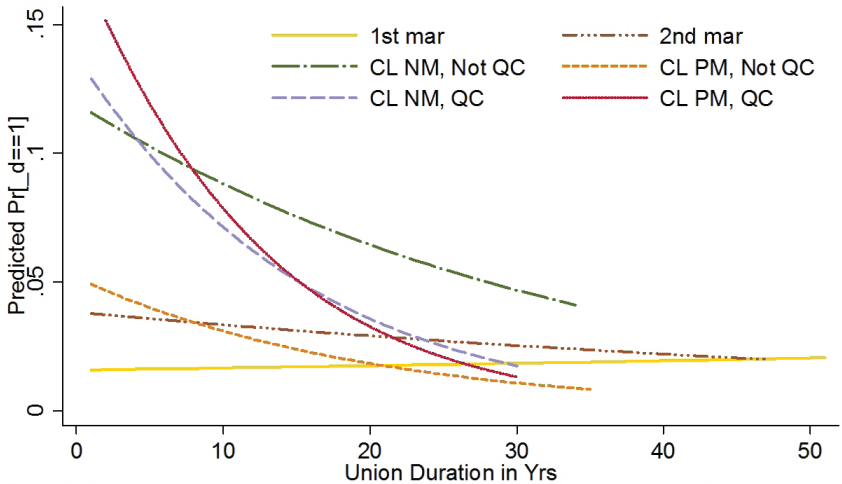
Figure 1. Kaplan Meier survival function.



Computed at mean values of continuous independent variables and reference category of categorical independent variables

Figure 2. Predicted probability of dissolution by union type.

nite depletion in risk at longer union durations, with a sharper negative slope for common-law unions residing in Quebec (both never-married and post-marital) and a relatively gentler negative slope among common-law unions residing elsewhere in Canada. Additionally, within common-law unions, Quebec unions had a higher initial risk of dissolution than unions elsewhere in Canada, but this pattern reversed around the 10-year duration point, after which Quebec unions displayed a lower relative risk of dissolution than unions elsewhere in Canada. Finally, while post-marital common-law unions outside of Quebec began with a higher risk of



Computed at the mean value of continuous independent variables and at the reference category (0) for categorical independent variables
Proportionality Not Assumed (Model Includes Interaction of Union Type with Time (Union Duration))

Figure 3. Predicted probability of dissolution by union type. Baseline hazard function.

dissolution than first and second marriages, as union durations increased, these union types converged around the same approximate level of risk. This disaggregation of marital history among common-law unions was not maintained for the principal survival analyses, due to the low sample size that resulted for the various categorizations when using lagged predictive measures.

Table 4 summarizes the results of the logistic regression models of union dissolution for first marriages, second marriages, and common-law unions within and outside of Quebec . The employment characteristics of the couple were found to be instrumental in the prediction of union dissolution for all union types, though (as was expected) these patterns did not operate in a systematic fashion across union types. Results indicate that if one partner experienced unemployment in the previous year, this was associated with 230 per cent higher odds of dissolution among first marriages and 205 per cent higher odds of dissolution among common-law unions outside of Quebec relative to couples where neither partner was unemployed in the previous year. If both partners held a job in the previous year that was closely related to his or her education, this was associated with 76 per cent lower odds of dissolving among first marriages and 84 per cent lower odds of dissolving among Quebec common-law unions relative to couples where neither partner held a job closely related to his or her education. The opposite was true among common-law unions outside of Quebec, where both partners holding a job closely related to their education increased the relative odds of dissolution by 93 per cent. Finally, if one partner held multiple jobs simultaneously in the previous year, this was associated with 288 per cent higher odds of dissolution among first marriages and 84 per cent higher odds of dissolution among non-Quebec common-law unions relative to couples in which neither partner held multiple jobs simultaneously in the previous year.

Turning to the division of paid labour and earnings within the couple, again, patterns differed by union type. Viewing the characteristics of the male spouse specifically, first marriages seemed to benefit stability-wise (as was expected) from a strong "male breadwinner" or "traditional" division of labour, as each five-year increase in the job tenure of the male partner was associated with 2 per cent lower odds of dissolving even after controlling for age. Similarly, it was only among first marriage unions that the male partner holding a managerial job in the previous year was associated with 58 per cent lower odds of dissolution. In terms of the characteristics of the female spouse, further evidence of the first-marriage preference for a traditional division of labour was found: First marriage unions in which the female partner was *not* working full-time full-year (FTFY) in the previous year experienced 42 per cent lower odds of dissolving relative to unions in which the female partner was working full-time. Contrary to expectations, common-law unions residing outside of Quebec also experienced 66 per cent lower odds of dissolving if the female partner was not working FTFY. The opposite was the case among second marriages, where the female partner not working FTFY was associated was 152 per cent higher odds of dissolving. Furthermore, first marriages in which the female spouse earned more than the male spouse in the previous year experienced 55 per cent higher odds of dissolution, compared to couples in which the male spouse earned more than the female (marginally significant p-value of <0.100), though this was also the case among second marriages (95 per cent higher odds of dissolution).

Table 4. Relative odds of union dissolving (odds ratios) by union type.

		First Marriages	Second Marriages	Quebec Common-Law Unions	Non-QC Common-Law Unions
Male's Job Duration in Prev. Yr. (1 unit = 5 years)		0.989**	1.014&	0.990	1.004
Managerial Job Status of Male in Prev. Yr. (Ref: No)	Male has Managerial Job	0.420**		3.443	0.651
Female Labour Force Status in Prev. Yr. (Ref: Working FYFT)	Not Working FYFT	0.580**	2.516**	2.488	0.343***
Unemployment Status of Couple in Prev. Yr. (Ref: Neither Partner Unemp.)	One Partner Unemployed	3.300***	0.653	0.444	3.050**
Job in Previous Year Closely Relates to Education (Ref: Neither Partner)	One Partner has Closely Related Job	0.361***	1.354	0.263	3.266**
Multiple Job Status of Couple in Prev. Yr. (Ref: Neither Partner)	One Partner held Multiple Jobs	3.881***	0.585	2.190	1.838&
Combined After-Tax Income of the Couple Adjusted for Family Size (1 unit = $1000)		1.004	1.008*	0.999	1.01
Distribution of Earnings within Couple in Prev. Yr. (Ref: Male earned more)	Female earned more than Male	1.548&	1.953**	1.279	0.83
Homeowner Status of Couple in Prev. Yr. (Ref: Rented home)	Owned home	0.352**	0.363***	1.860	0.237*
Pre-school Aged Child Present in Home in Prev. Yr. (Ref: No)	Yes	1.086	3.440&	0.259*	1.234
School Aged Child Present in Home in Prev. Yr. (Ref: No)	Yes	2.183*	1.599	1.861	1.870*
Adult Child Present in Home in Prev. Yr. (Ref: No)	Yes	0.329**			
Child Born to Either Partner Prior to Union (Ref: Neither)	One Partner	0.364*	3.190**	0.294*	2.326&
	Both Partners	0.292**	1.716	0.340	2.629
Couple Became Empty-Nest Household in Prev. Yr (Ref: No)	Yes	1.977**			
Combined Stress Level of Couple in Prev. Yr. (lowest to highest)		1.262***	1.451**	1.660**	0.905
Disability Status of Couple in Prev. Yr. (Ref: Neither Reports Disability)	One Partner	0.936	1.798*	0.095*	0.915
	Both Partners	1.011	1.171		0.493
Duration of Union (in years)		1.221*	1.143	0.590***	0.388**
Duration of Union squared		0.996&	0.995*	1.015**	1.073**
Duration of Union cubed					0.999**
Type of Common-Law Union (Ref: Common-Law Never Married)	Post-Marital Common-Law			1.098	0.491&
Quebec Residence (Ref: No)	Yes	1.685*			
Age of Female Partner (in years)		0.763	1.313	1.070	1.676**
Age of Female Partner (squared)		1.003	0.997	0.998	0.994**
&=p<0.10, *=p<0.05, **=p<0.010, ***=p<0.001		N=5824	N=1810	N=816	N=712

Results also provide limited support for the theory of economic deprivation. Couples who owned their home in the previous year experienced lower odds of dissolving among first marriages (65 per cent lower), second marriages (64 per cent lower), and non-Quebec common-law unions (77 per cent lower) compared to couples who did not own their home in the previous year, providing one of the most consistent predictors of dissolution risk across union types. Generally, however, the combined after-tax income of the couple adjusted for family size did not significantly impact dissolution risk after controlling for other factors. The exception was among second marriages, where each $1,000 increase in the combined after-tax income of the couple increased the odds of dissolution by less than one per cent (0.8 per cent).

Conclusion and discussion

The results support the main hypothesis that couples from different union types and cultural regions would respond in different ways, in terms of union dissolution propensity, to the same employment and economic situations. More specifically, as was hypothesized, first marriages unions that experienced potentially challenging employment situations in the previous year—whether unemployment, holding multiple jobs simultaneously, or having a job that did not match one's education—experienced heightened odds of dissolution. While past Canadian studies have linked forms of economic deprivation to increased dissolution risk, this is the first Canadian study to link the experience of unemployment by either partner (regardless of gender) to union dissolution risk. However, contrary to hypotheses, this pattern was also found among common-law unions outside of Quebec but not among common-law unions within Quebec.

Results confirmed the secondary hypothesis that the stability of first marriages would be enhanced by having a traditional gendered division of paid labour within the couple, whether measured through the characteristics of the female spouse, male spouse, or differences between the spouses. However, again contrary to hypotheses, this pattern was not the case among common-law unions within the province of Quebec. Furthermore, while second marriages emerged as being protected, stability-wise, by a non-traditional division of labour, common-law unions from either cultural region were generally not significantly influenced by the configuration of paid labour within the couple. The general lack of significant findings concerning the division of labour and earnings among common-law couples suggests that individuals in cohabiting unions do not appear to consider a particular gendered division of paid work to be instrumental to the functioning of the couple. These findings highlight the diversity of behaviours found among different types of marital unions and suggest that a traditional gendered division of labour is still present and highly influential in the stability of first marriage unions.

After controlling for the other characteristics in the model, the combined income of couples was generally not linked to their dissolution risk. That said, a proxy for economic security, homeownership, was linked to lower odds of dissolution among all union types, with the exception of common-law unions in Quebec. The causal nature of the relationship between homeownership status and union stability is debatable. Arguably, an individual will only commit to a signifi-

cant long-term joint investment with his or her spouse if they have considerable confidence in and commitment toward the long-term stability of the union. On the other hand, it is possible that individuals might defer from separating from their spouse (even though they might wish to), in part due to the financial ties and obligations relating to their joint homeownership. The addition of information on other aspects of individual and shared wealth within the couple, not currently available with the SLID, would improve the understanding of the role of joint and individual economic security in dissolution risk.

The results relating to homeownership were one of several cases in which common-law unions in Quebec were found to respond differently (against hypotheses) than first marriage unions to various experiences in terms of dissolution risk. Yet these unions did not behave similarly to common-law unions outside of Quebec, either, for the most part. Despite having no significant differences in the overall risk of dissolution, common-law unions within and outside of Quebec interacted very differently with the explanatory variables of interest; in fact, these two union types demonstrated more dissimilarities than perhaps any other combination of the union types examined. While this analysis calls into question previous notions that Quebec common-law couples show greater stability than common-law unions elsewhere in Canada, or that Quebec common-law unions function in essence as married couples do in terms of the characteristics which influence stability, these findings do strongly suggest that the stability of Quebec common-law unions are affected by socioeconomic and employment characteristics in a uniquely different way than among first marriages, second marriages, or common-law unions elsewhere in Canada.

In stark contrast to expectations, the pattern of results seem to suggest that common-law unions outside of Quebec behaved more like first marriages in terms of determinants of union dissolution than either second marriages or Quebec common-law unions: both first marriages and non-Quebec common-law unions were negatively effected by several challenging employment experiences, and both were protected by homeownership. It is suspected that these similarities were driven in large part specifically by post-marital common-law unions outside of Quebec, which were found to be the sole union type that did not differ significantly, in terms of dissolution risk, from first marriages.[13] In contrast, common-law never-married unions outside of Quebec had an enormously higher risk of dissolving than first marriages, and therefore are expected to also interact differently with regards to the role of employment and socioeconomic characteristics in dissolution risk if examined in isolation. These differential results found among common-law unions by family history and region highlight the importance of considering common-law unions as a heterogeneous group (King and Scott 2005). With a larger sample size than that available in this study, it would be advantageous to further examine the differences (in terms of stability and other characteristics) among common-law unions, not only by cultural region but also in terms of age group and marital and fertility history to gain a more nuanced understanding of the determinants of union dissolution within this diverse conjugal group.

13. The majority of common-law unions outside of Quebec were comprised of post-marital unions for at least one partner.

Limitations

Panel 4 of the SLID follows individuals for six consecutive years (2002–2007). While this allows prospective longitudinal analysis, having only a six-year "window of opportunity" to observe a couple's dissolution is limiting. Due to this relatively short observation period, dissolution was a relatively low probability event for all groups, but especially among first marriages (less than 5 per cent experienced dissolution in the survey period). Having a low probability event as the dependent variable in the analysis caused many preliminary explanatory variables of interest, such as low-income status, to be dropped due to perfect prediction.

Additionally, the predictors of dissolution were essentially limited to measures from the year prior to a couple dissolving. This was done for practical reasons, as looking back two, three, or four years prior to dissolution limited the number of valid cases that could be examined to a prohibitive degree. However, in the case of female labour force behaviour especially, it is preferable to look back three to four years rather than one year prior to the dissolution, as there is some evidence that females may alter their labour force behaviour in anticipation of an impending divorce (Kraft and Neimann 2009). More generally, it is unrealistic to assume that only the events that occur to couples one year prior to dissolution are important in predicting union dissolution risk, or that such events will influence all couples at an equal pace.

Conjugal dissolution is a monumental event in the life course of individuals that is motivated by an endless variety of personal characteristics of both partners—personality, values, goals, and unexpected events, among other factors. While it was attempted in this study to account for some of these personal characteristics, the majority of explanatory variables were objective rather than subjective in character. The SLID currently provides few opportunities for respondents to provide a subjective assessment of themselves, and those few opportunities are limited in scope.[14] Finally, given the period of strong economic growth in the period represented in this panel (2002-2007), the results may not be generalizable to other periods of time. For example, Fischer and Liefbroer (2006) have found evidence that the relative costs of divorce to individuals are higher in periods of economic recession. The results of this study provide a first detailed examination of the role of employment and socioeconomic characteristics in the stability of different types of unions from different cultural regions of Canada.

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14. For example, the SLID currently contains only a single measure of self-rated health and self-rated stress, with a highly simplistic scale ("poor", "fair", or "good") that does not differentiate between type of health (mental/physical) or the source of stress (work/family/time crunch, etc.). Moreover, the SLID contains no information on the values of respondents (such as religiosity, conservatism, gender-egalitarianism, commitment to marriage, etc.), which have been found to be some of the strongest predictors of dissolution in previous studies (Budinski and Trovato 2005; Clark and Crompton 2006; Boyle et al. 2008).

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