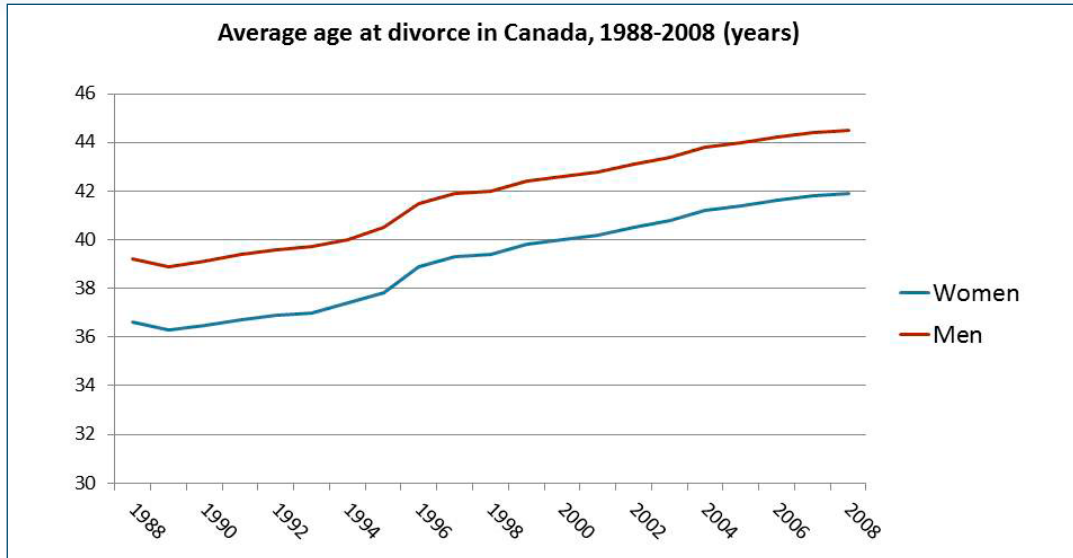


FASCINATING Families

DECEMBER 19, 2012 ISSUE 51

Grey divorce (silver separations)



Source: For 1988: Statistics Canada. Divorces, 1991, Shelf Tables. (Cat. no. 84-213); For 1989 to 1992: Statistics Canada. Divorces, 1992, Shelf Tables. (Cat. no. 84-213); For 1993 to 1995: Statistics Canada. Divorces, 1996 and 1997, Shelf Tables. (Cat. no. 84F0213XPB); For 1996 and 1997: Statistics Canada. Divorces, 1999 and 2000, Shelf Tables. (Cat. no. 84F0213XPB); For 1998 to 2002: Statistics Canada. Divorces 2001 and 2002, Shelf Tables. (Cat. no. 84F0213XPB); for 2003: Statistics Canada. Divorces 2003, Shelf Tables. (Cat. no. 84F0213XPB); For 2004 and 2005: Statistics Canada. Mean age and median age at divorce and at marriage, by sex, Canada, provinces and territories, annual (CANSIM Table 101-6502). Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2008; for 2006 to 2008: Statistics Canada, Health Statistics Division, Canadian Vital Statistics, Divorce Database, Ottawa, Statistics Canada, 2011.

Divorce is no longer the purview of the young. A growing number of Canadians 50 years and older is experiencing life on their own, often for the first time in decades. Statistics Canada figures show a gradual increase in the divorce rate among men aged 50-54 from 7.2% in 1985 to 11.0% by 2005.^{1,2} For women, the rate grew from 5.4% to 8.9% over the same time period.^{3,4}

This shift has triggered a greying of the median age of divorce: in 1991, the median age for men and women experiencing divorce was 38.3 and 35.7, respectively. By 2008, those numbers rose to 44.0 and 41.0 years of age.⁵

Research in the United States has found that among divorces by people aged 40-69, women are initiating the breakup 66% of the time.⁶ There is no simple explanation for this emerging trend. Sociologist Susan Brown looks to the shifts in marital expectations among Boomers for some of the answers. Boomers are the first generation to place greater emphasis on self-fulfillment within marriage than on “sticking it out.”⁷ Women are less financially dependent than they were 20 years ago on their male partners and there is less stigma attached to ending a marriage, especially once the nest is empty.

Family Lens

Adjusting to a late-in-life divorce can be challenging, not only for the separating couple but also for their adult children — some of whom provide care for one or both of their parents. The changes in economic security occasioned by grey divorce are particularly acute for women,

especially as they age: among those aged 78 to 80, divorce or separation results in an average 17% drop in family income compared to what they had when they were 54-56 years of age.

With an aging population, this trend will likely take on a deeper hue over time.

1. Statistics Canada. Age-Specific Divorce Rates Per 1,000 Legally Married Males, Canada, Provinces and Territories. CANSIM Table No.101-6504 (Accessed December 11, 2012) bit.ly/11GXf6G
2. Statistics Canada. “Age-Specific Divorce Rates, Canada and Provinces, 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1988.” Health Reports: Divorces 1987-1988 (1990) Vol.2, No.1
3. Ibid.
4. Statistics Canada. Age-Specific Divorce Rates Per 1,000 Legally Married Females, Canada, Provinces and Territories. CANSIM Table No.101-6505 (Accessed December 11, 2012) bit.ly/TQB9cL
5. Statistics Canada. “Families, Living Arrangements and Unpaid Work.” Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report. Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 89-503-X. Ottawa. Accessed December 7, 2012. bit.ly/WimcRn
6. Montenegro, Xenia P. (2004). The Divorce Experience: A Study of Divorce at Midlife and Beyond. American Association of Retired People. Accessed December 7, 2012. bit.ly/XyHEH6
7. Brown, Susan. (March 3, 2012). The Gray Divorcés. The Wall Street Journal, <http://on.wsj.com/AhKyAz> (Accessed December 7, 2012).
8. Statistics Canada. “Study: Impact of widowhood and divorce on income replacement among seniors, 1983 to 2007.” The Daily (June 20, 2012). Ottawa. Accessed December 7, 2012. bit.ly/NZn9zf