

**Young Canadians' Family Formation:  
Variations in Delayed Start and Complex Pathways**

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on family formation of Canadians born in 1966-85. Studies have shown that in comparison to older cohorts, young Canadians delay their transition to adulthood and they follow more complex pathways in the formation of the family through cohabitation, marriage, and parenthood. However, within cohorts, there are variations in the general trends in timing and trajectories. Using a life course perspective, we explore the influences of social status, cultural orientation, and opportunity structures on family formation. This is done using retrospective data collected through the 2001 General Social Survey on Family History. Techniques of event history analysis, mainly, life tables and non-Markov state-space approach to trajectory analysis are used.

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## Introduction

In our previous studies we have shown that in comparison to older cohorts, young Canadians delay their transition to adulthood and follow more complex life course trajectories. The “typical” life course is experienced only by one-fourth to one-third of a cohort with the younger cohorts more unlikely to do so (Ravanera, Rajulton, and Burch, 1994). Younger cohorts go through events such as home-leaving, school completion, start of regular work, and first unions through cohabitation or marriage and they trace pathways through these events that markedly differ from those of the older cohorts (Ravanera, Rajulton, and Burch, 1998; Ravanera et al, 2002). However, within cohorts, there are variations in the general trends in timing and trajectories to adulthood. For example, an examination of the effects of family changes (such as divorce and mother’s labour force participation) on the early life transitions of children reveals that those whose mothers worked full-time made transition to adulthood at later ages, while family disruption led to earlier school completion, work start and home-leaving (Ravanera, Rajulton, and Burch, 2003).

This paper, while focussing mainly on family formation, expands on our previous studies using a life course perspective. This viewpoint assumes that “(L)ife outcomes are the result of an interactive process that occurs when the individual encounters particular expectations, opportunities, or barriers in the current social context” (Giele, 2002: 71). *Timing* of life events is an outcome of adaptation for achieving individual or collective goals and is affected by *location in time and place* (culture and society), *linked lives* (social relations in institutions and communities), and *human agency* (including influences of work, school, and family) (Giele and Elder, 1998; Giele, 2002).

Furthermore, this perspective assumes that there is a dynamic interplay of social condition or change with cultural construction and individual life course. Social changes, such as those brought about by globalization, occurring at the macro (or societal), meso (or community), and micro (or family and individual) levels have impact on the life course and on its social and cultural construction (Buchmann, 1989). In turn, changes in individual biographies bring about social change through alteration of cultural construction of the life course (Riley, Kahn, and Foner, 1994). Altered patterns of behaviour are transmitted between generations through socialization, and as “a process of lateral diffusion between age peers, whereby innovations adopted ... are transmitted to others and accepted, modified, or rejected” (Hammel, 1990: 459).

Making use of this life course perspective, we analyze the timing and pathways towards family formation of Canadians born in 1966-85. Particular focus is placed on the influences of social class, cultural orientation, and opportunity structures. This is done

using retrospective data collected through the 2001 General Social Survey on Family History.

## **Data and Methods**

The 2001 General Social Survey conducted by Statistics Canada covered a representative sample of 24310 respondents from all of Canada except the Yukon and Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and full time residents of institutions. Although the survey respondents are those aged 15 and over as of the survey dates, this study focuses on those born from 1966 to 1985; that is, 16-35 years old in 2001. Information gathered by the surveys includes various aspects of the family including parents, children, union histories through both common-law and marriage, fertility, and socioeconomic variables. The survey also collected education and work histories. In this study, we use retrospective information on age at experience of events at early life, in particular, the ages at home-leaving, start of regular work, completion of schooling, entry into cohabitation and marriage, and onset of parenthood.

Life tables and non-Markov state-space approach to trajectory analysis are used to analyze the early life courses of men and women belonging to four five-year birth cohorts (1966-70, 1971-75, 1976-80, and 1981-85). The methods for trajectory analysis and the related multivariate analysis of trajectories are further explained in the sections below. But before doing these analyses, we use a simple descriptive method to get a general picture of the family formation of young Canadians in comparison with the older cohorts<sup>1</sup>.

## **Entry into a Relationship**

Almost all Canadians enter into a relationship. As can be seen in Table 1, 95% of women born until the mid sixties have entered into a first union. The figure is slightly lower for men born from 1946 to 1965 but the proportion of 92% may yet increase, particularly for men born in 1961-65 who were 36 to 40 years old as of the survey date. The proportion of men and women who have entered into a relationship among the cohorts born from 1966-85, the focus of this study, are lower as they have not had as long a time as the older cohorts to enter into a relationship. Even so, about 90% of women and 82% of men born in 1966 to 1970, who were aged 31-35, have already had their first union. Thus, the final proportion of men and women who will have formed a relationship in these youngest cohorts would probably not deviate very much from those of the older cohorts.

What differentiates the young people from their forebears is the type of union that they enter into. Until the cohorts born in the 1960s, the majority of first unions are

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<sup>1</sup> Fractional sampling weights are used in all the statistical procedures as Statistics Canada uses complex sampling procedures for its surveys (Statistics Canada, 2003).

marriages. But among younger men and women, born from 1971 and later, more than 50% of the first unions involved cohabitation, although some did marry the partner they cohabited with. Thus, of the women born between 1971 and 75 who have entered a union, a total of 58% cohabited – 19% married their common-law partner but the rest (39%) remain in cohabiting union as of the survey date. The proportion entering a common-law union increases over cohorts. Of the 47% of women born in 1976 to 1980 who have entered into a union, 78% went for common-law union. And, among the 10% of women who are still in their teens (born in 1981-85) but have already formed a union, 93% cohabited. As those who enter into a union at very young age are not typical of their cohort, it is possible that the final proportions that will have chosen cohabitation over direct marriage would be lower than these 78% and 93% obtained here for women and 83% and 89% obtained for men of the same cohorts. However, on the basis of the trends over cohorts, the final proportion of these young people who will have cohabited in their life time would not be less than 50%.

The widespread practice of cohabitation implies that the pathways toward family formation have become more complex. In the past, forming a family began with marriage. Among young people nowadays, the marker for the start of a one's own family is no longer as clear. For those who do not cohabit, marriage is still *rite de passage* for family formation, but fewer young people go through this direct route. For some, the start of cohabitation means the start of forming a family as it is commonly understood. This is true for those who cohabit and subsequently marry their partner, for those who have remained unmarried but bear children within the union, and for those who may not have children but whose common-law union has lasted for a long period.

To better understand the process of family formation of young Canadians, we trace the different paths that they traverse through the early life events of starting regular work, graduating from a post-secondary education, entering into a first union, marrying, and having a child. We also examine how the trajectories vary by characteristics of the individuals and of the contexts wherein they reside. But first, we look into the trends over cohorts in the timing of the various events to bring into focus the delayed family formation of today's young people and how these are related to changes in the timing of other early life events.

### **Timing of Early Life Course Events**

The fact that young Canadians have delayed their family formation is verified in Table 2 showing the median ages at experience of various life events by 5-year birth cohorts starting from men and women born in 1926-30 until 1971-75. These median ages are not simple observed median ages but derived from single-decrement life table analysis, hence corrected for censoring. (The median ages for the 1976-80 and 1981-85 birth cohorts cannot as yet be estimated as fewer than 50% of them have experienced most of the events.) The age at first union was high among those born in the 1926-30 but the decline, that started early in the century, continued until the cohorts born around the 1950s.

Increases in age at first union occurred in subsequent cohorts and the postponement of entry into a union has continued to the present.

The more significant change, however, is the difference between the age at first union and age at first marriage. For the cohorts born from 1926 to 1950, the age at first union and age at first marriage are virtually the same. But, for the cohorts born from 1951, the gap between the ages at entering a union and getting married has appeared and continued to increase such that among the 1971-75 birth cohorts, the difference has widened to about 4 years for men and 5 years for women (see the appearance of blue squared pattern starting with the 1951-55 birth cohort in Figures 1A and 1B). These big gaps between ages at first union and first marriage reflect the widespread practice of cohabitation among the younger Canadian cohorts discussed in the previous section.

As indicated earlier, the prevalence of cohabitation poses a problem of determining when family formation starts. If we were to take first marriage as the start, it would seem that young Canadian men postpone forming their family by as long as 4 years and women even more, by 6 years, when compared to the oldest cohort. That the average age at first marriage is no longer a good indicator of the start of family formation is seen, for example among the youngest cohort, in the age at motherhood that is younger than the age at first marriage. This signifies that the occurrence of child-bearing within cohabiting unions is no longer negligible. On the other hand, if first union were taken as the start of family formation, then the delay is just about 1 to 2 years. But this does not reflect the reality either since we know that many cohabiting unions are transitory in that a great proportion of cohabiting unions break up rather quickly, suggesting that they were probably not entered into with the intention of forming a family.

Another aspect that complicates family formation is its dependence on what happens at early life, in particular, the entry into the labour force that is, in turn, affected by the period spent acquiring education. Readiness to form one's own family is generally indicated by a person's having a source of income. This is a norm that holds true particularly for men, and in recent times, seems to apply to women as well. As can be seen in Table 2 and Figures 1A and 1B, the age at the start of having a regular work has increased for both men and women. Compared with those born in 1926-30, persons born in 1971-75 start regular work at age 25, indicating an increase of about 7 years for men and 6 years for women. This delay in start of regular work and the change in the pattern of leaving the parental home imply a change in inter-generational transfers. Men used to start working while still living with parents, possibly contributing to the family's household income for a period of time (about 4 years, for those born in 1926-30) before leaving and forming one's own family. Many women did not work but those who did possibly contributed to the household income as well; and, the contribution of those who did not enter the labour force may have been the performance of household tasks. In many instances, women leave home only at around the time of marriage (Ravanera, Rajulton, and Burch, 2005). In contrast, the late age at start of regular work of today's young people imply a much longer period of dependence on parents. As shown in Table 2, they leave home before having a regular work and are thus unlikely to contribute to the parental household income. Further, many leave home to get higher education that is

possibly subsidized by their parents as well. Finally, they have a greater likelihood of returning to parental home for various reasons such as to save money, because of high house rental costs, or after a breakdown of relationship (Mitchell, 2005).

These changes in the timing of experience of various events again underscore the need to examine more closely the life course traversed by young Canadians. The general sequence of events implied by the median ages provides a good approximation of the pathways followed by the older cohorts but for the younger cohorts the successive median ages no longer show a clear picture of life course trajectories.

## **Family Formation Trajectories**

To trace the various family formation trajectories through the events experienced in early life, we used LIFEHIST, a program that allows the tracing of pathways through a “state space” approach. This procedure assumes that past history is important, a non-Markovian assumption. It is essentially a multiple-decrement life table technique that estimates two parameters: conditional probability of transition from one state to another and mean duration of stay in each state (Rajulton, 2001). The product of a series of conditional probabilities yields the probability of experiencing a selected trajectory; and the sum of the mean durations for a series of states provides the age at which a given trajectory is completed.

A trajectory analysis follows members of a cohort through the various events that they experience (or “states” that they occupy). These states have to be judiciously chosen as a large number of states would invariably lead to unmanageable number of trajectories and would require a large number of cases for a proper analysis. In order to capture the different pathways to family formation that the young people now traverse, we use five early life events: (a) graduation from first post-secondary education, (b) start of regular work, (c) first cohabitation, (d) first marriage, and (e) birth of first child (or start of parenthood). We excluded leaving the parental home because among young Canadians, the dates given when they last left home may not in fact be definitive as returning to parental homes is not uncommon. We included graduation from post-secondary education as its absence in a trajectory implies the non-completion of tertiary education<sup>2</sup>.

Table 3A for women and Table 3B for men show the (a) conditional probabilities of transitions from one state to another and (b) the mean durations of stay in each state. These conditional probabilities have been corrected for censoring and thus provide the best possible estimates of true probabilities, unless there is a very heavy censoring.

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<sup>2</sup> Completion of post-secondary education was not included in the single-decrement life table analysis presented in Table 2 because age at graduation from post-secondary education has not varied greatly among cohorts. A single-decrement life table of school completion regardless of the level of education attained would have been more informative. However, the 2001 General Social Survey did not collect information on school completion among those who did not graduate.

Multiplication of these conditional probabilities provides an estimate of the probability of traversing a specific trajectory. And, summing up the mean durations of stay in each state provides a good estimate of the mean age at completing the trajectory (since the means are computed from the conditional probabilities that have been corrected for censoring).

Tables 3A and 3B show the most common (a) direct trajectories to marriage in Panel 2, (b) trajectories to marriage preceded by cohabitation in Panel 3, and (c) trajectories to parenthood that are not preceded by marriage in Panel 4. These trajectories capture the more prevalent pathways to forming a family among the cohorts born in 1966-70 and 1971-75. For the 1976-80 birth cohorts, the first transitions and selected second transitions are shown because they are useful indications of trends over cohorts. Higher order transitions are not shown as many of them are censored at third and higher order transitions; that is, many of them have not had the time to experience more than two events. Similarly, the results for the 1981-85 birth cohort are not shown as many have not experienced the five events included in the analysis.

**Direct Routes to Marriage.** As can be seen in Table 3A and 3B, forming a family through marriage without going through cohabitation is still common among young Canadians, though the probability of going through this pathway is decreasing. Among women, for example, the total probability of five direct trajectories to marriage is 0.43 for the 1966-70 birth cohort, whereas it is 0.39 among the 1971-75 birth cohort (see the last row of Table 3A, page 1). The single most common trajectory for both cohorts of women is the *graduation* → *work* → *marriage*, with a probability of about 0.15. As for men, the most common is the *work* → *marriage* trajectory (with about 0.20 probability), that is, marriage not preceded by graduation from post-secondary education. While smaller proportion of women goes through this trajectory, more of them go through an even more direct route; that is, directly marrying without having graduated from post-secondary education or going for regular work. For the 1966-70 birth cohorts, for example, this trajectory has a probability of 0.08 for women but only 0.03 for men (see row D of Panel 1 in Tables 3A and 3B). In general, the probabilities of shorter routes to marriage – that is, marriages that are not preceded by either graduation or work – have decreased for the younger cohort (the 1971-75 birth cohort), especially for women.

**Marriage Preceded by Cohabitation.** The probability of marriage preceded by cohabitation is still lower than that of direct marriage even among these young cohorts. The total probabilities of the most common trajectories to marriage through cohabitation are just 0.09 and 0.11 for the 1966-70 and 1971-75 cohorts respectively (see last row of Panel 2 in Tables 3A and 3B). However, these figures could increase. As seen in Table 1 above, the preferred first union of the younger cohorts (particularly the 1981-85 birth cohorts) is cohabitation rather than marriage.

**Births within Common Law Unions.** That families are formed without the formality of marriage can be seen from the relatively high probability of parenthood among cohabiting couples. The total probability of the most common trajectories to parenthood outside of marriage ranges from 0.13 to 0.16 (see Panel 4 of Tables 3A and 3B). These probabilities increase (by 0.06 for women and by 0.02 for men), if one were

to add the probability of births outside of any form of union. Of the three most common trajectories, the *work*→*cohabitation*→*birth* has a higher probability than the *graduation*→*work*→*cohabitation*→*birth* trajectory, especially for men, which means that those who graduate from post-secondary education are less likely to become parents outside of marriage. It is possible that the proportion of births within common-law unions might be higher in the succeeding cohort given the widespread practice of cohabitation among young Canadians. For men, the probability is higher for the 1971-75 than the 1966-70 birth cohorts. For women the probability is lower for the younger cohort, however, their probability (0.13) may increase if those who were censored in cohabitation go later on to become parents without going through marriage.

**Cohabitation, not Always a Prelude to Family Formation.** Some young people have cohabitation as their first transition – the proportion over cohorts being 7% for men and ranging from 11% to 16% for women. These young people’s cohabiting union is rarely followed by marriage to their first common-law partner. As can be seen in the last panel of Tables 3A and 3B, for most of them, the next transition is either the start of regular work or the completion of post-secondary schooling. Transition to marriage or birth within the first union is very low (results not shown).

**Age at Completion of Trajectories:** Thus far, we have discussed the probabilities of transitions to various states and probabilities of traversing specific trajectories. Tables 3A and 3B also show the durations of stay in each state, which when summed up, provides the age at reaching the final event in the trajectory. In general, the more the number of events included in a trajectory, the longer the time it takes to experience the last event. Thus, the age at marriage of those who go through both graduation and work are generally higher than those who skip one or the other event. For instance, women in the 1966-70 birth cohorts marry at almost 25 years of age when they go through the *graduation*→*work*→*marriage* trajectory, whereas those who take the *work*→*marriage* trajectory, that is, without completion of post-secondary education, marry at about age 23.

Similarly, those whose marriage is preceded by cohabitation marry at higher ages than those who marry without cohabiting. Thus, women belonging to the 1966-70 birth cohort who go through the *graduation*→*work*→*cohabitation*→*marriage* trajectory marry at almost 29 years of age, or almost 4 years later than those who go through the *graduation*→*work*→*marriage*. However, if one were to take cohabitation as the start of family formation when the union is followed by marriage, then family formation starts at about the same or even at earlier age, particularly among the younger cohorts. Thus for women born in 1971-75, those whose trajectory is *work*→*cohabitation*→*marriage* cohabit at about 22 years of age, which is the same age at start of family formation of those who went directly for marriage, that is, those whose trajectory is *work*→*marriage*.

The trends in the timing are similar for men although at higher ages than those of women.

## Multivariate Analysis of Trajectories

As mentioned above, the life course of an individual is influenced by location in time and place, linked lives, and human agency. That is, the pathways taken are influenced not only by the individuals' characteristics but also by the circumstances of their families and the environment that they find themselves in. Data derived through a cross-sectional survey such as the one used here do not allow a comprehensive analysis of all the relevant factors influencing trajectories. But, a glimpse into some of these factors is possible through a multivariate analysis of trajectories.

Table 4 shows the results from the logistic regression analysis of a specific group of trajectories against all other trajectories for men and women born between 1966 and 1975. Specifically, the dependent variable is a combination of two trajectories: (1) *graduation* → *work* → *marriage* and (2) *work* → *graduation* → *marriage*; that is, for the regression procedure, those who followed these two trajectories are identified and assigned a value of 1, while all others are assigned a value of 0. These two trajectories, hereafter also called “*traditional trajectory*” for easy reference, are traditionally preferred as both these pathways go through completion of post-secondary education and start of regular work before marriage that is not preceded by common-law union. In comparison to older cohorts, trajectories to marriage without cohabitation are traversed by smaller proportion of younger cohorts. However, these two trajectories combined are followed by a still substantial number of young women (16%) and men (13%) thereby allowing this type of analysis.

As independent variables, we have included birth cohort, family-related variables (social status, family structure), variables to capture culture and location (religion, migration status, region of residence), and variables that denote values (importance of family, importance of paying job). These variables are meant to signify the availability of resources that facilitate acquisition of higher education and entry into labour force, and the presence of values that favour marriage over cohabitation. We assume that these two main streams of influence acting together are determinants of the trajectory to marriage passing through completion of post-secondary education and start of regular work.

*Birth cohort* captures the time dimension of the life course. Given the emerging trend over cohorts in favour of cohabitation (discussed above), we expect that, in comparison to the 1966-70 cohort, the 1971-75 cohort would be less likely to follow a more direct pathway to marriage and that the difference would be statistically significant.

Inclusion of family-related variables assumes that an individual's early life course is influenced by the material, social and human capital investment of parents on their children. Children whose parents have resources to invest on them are more likely to go through a trajectory that involves higher education. This investment is indicated by the *social status* variable derived from mother's education and father's occupation *when the respondent was aged 15*. We ranked mother's education and father's occupation into low,

middle, and high, which are then combined to obtain the social status variable<sup>3</sup>. The *family structure* variable, that is, whether the respondent lived with both parents until age 15, is also an indicator of parental investment on children, mainly of the social capital and possibly, also of financial investment given that, in Canada, single-parenthood is associated with poverty. Thus, everything else being equal, living with both parents would be positively associated with the *traditional trajectory*.

*Religion* and *migration status* are both meant to capture the difference in values. Those who are not affiliated with any religion are most likely to hold less traditional values. And, most recent immigrants to Canada are from countries that hold more traditional family values. *Region* of residence is meant to capture the differences among regions in opportunities for higher education and work. But, there are regional differences in culture as well. In particular, Quebec stands out as different from the rest of Canada in its higher levels of common-law unions, suggesting a difference in values between the mainly French- and the mainly English-speaking Canadians.

The last two variables are measures of values derived through a factor analysis of attitudes about family and work. The first factor score (representing *importance of family values*) has high loadings on the items that specify the importance of having at least one child, lasting relationship, and being married; and, the second factor has the highest loading on the *importance of a paying job* (which was the only item related to work values asked of everyone in the survey). In the logistic regression analysis, these two measures of values are added as model 2 to all the other variables as model 1 to detect whether the effects of the other culture-related variables are mediated through these two direct measures of values.

**Linked Lives and Parental Resources.** That the circumstances of the family of origin influence an individual's life course trajectory can be seen in the results shown in Table 4. High social status and living in intact families are both associated with a greater likelihood of marrying only after having gone through higher education and entry into the work force. Parental resources facilitate the attainment of higher education but it is possibly examples set by parents and the experience of being a child in a single-parent

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<sup>3</sup> Mother's education was ranked as low (some high school or lower), middle (high school graduate or some post-secondary) or high (post-secondary graduate or higher). And, based on the prestige scores established by Goyder, Thompson, and Dixon (2003) and applied to the Standard Occupational Classification provided in the survey, father's occupations was ranked as follows: *Low* (Sales and Services Occupations, Occupations Unique to Processing and Manufacturing, Occupations Unique to Primary Industry), *Middle* (Trades, Transport, and Equipment, Business, Finance, and Administrative Occupation, Artistic, Culture, Recreational, Sport, and Occupations in Social Sciences, Education) and *High* (Management Occupations, Natural and Applied Sciences, and Health Occupations). The two rankings were added and the final social status rank was assigned as follows: low (1,2), middle (3,4), high (5,6). A score of one is possible when information on mother's education is missing. Where mother's education is missing, the measurement of social status is based only on father's occupation. Where both mother's education and father's occupation were missing, social status was imputed from the information on the respondent's education and occupation, and as it turned out, almost all of them were assigned to either low or middle social status.

family that determine whether a trajectory passes through cohabitation or directly to marriage. However, these effects are highly significant only for women, although the direction of the effects of the two variables for men is similar.

**Values and the Life Course.** In comparison with those who belong to “Other Religion” (a category that combines all religions other than Protestant or Catholic), men who profess no religion are less likely to go through the *traditional trajectory*. Here, the effect is very likely on the type of union entered into rather than on education or work. Similarly, men born in Canada are less likely than the immigrants to go through this trajectory. The effects of the variables (No Religion and Born in Canada) are reduced (that is, odds-ratios increase), though not to the extent of insignificance, when direct measures of values are included in the regression (compare model 1 with model 2 in Table 4). For women these two variables do not show significant effects. However, the direct measures of values do have significant effects for both men and women. The higher the importance given to family and the lower the importance given to a paying job, the more likely men and women would traverse the *traditional trajectory*.

**Opportunity Structures and Cultural Values.** For both men and women, the likelihood of going through the *traditional trajectory* is significantly lower in Quebec. This mainly reflects the greater prevalence of cohabitation in Quebec, indicating a difference in values between Quebec and the rest of Canada. That this effect operates through cultural or social values is further suggested by the significantly lower likelihood of the *traditional trajectory* among Roman Catholics (see model 1 for men) than among those of Other Religion, Catholicism being the predominant religion in Quebec. In men’s model 2, the same influence of values (over and above those captured by the factor scores on *importance of family* and *importance of paying job*) is possibly spread out between these two variables (*Roman Catholic* and *Quebec*) thereby reducing the effect of each variable separately.

An effect that requires a comment is the higher likelihood of men in Ontario to follow the *traditional trajectory*. The same direction of effect holds true for women as well. This effect may be an indication of a combination of greater opportunities for higher education and work and of more traditional values among the residents of Ontario.

**Trend over Cohorts.** While the multivariate analysis has focussed on the *traditional trajectory*, we do know that this trajectory is followed by a decreasing proportion of young men and women, and this is shown in Table 4 by the likelihood of traversing this trajectory that is significantly lower among the 1971-75 than the 1966-70 birth cohort. This happens even though (as can be seen in Tables 3A and 3B) the probabilities of graduation from post-secondary education have increased among the younger cohorts, implying that the decrease in this trajectory is due to an increase in cohabitation that will most likely continue.

## Conclusion

This paper examines the variations in the occurrence, timing, and complex pathways to family formation of young Canadians. A simple descriptive analysis shows that, like their forebears, almost all of the younger cohorts would most likely enter a union. Unlike the older cohorts, however, many of them would enter their first union through cohabitation rather than marriage. As for timing of transitions, the single-decrement life table analyses of various early life events indicate that the ages at start of regular work, first union, first marriage, and first births have all increased among the younger cohorts. The analyses show that the median age at first marriage is a good marker for start of family formation among older cohorts but not for the younger cohorts. This is signified by an average age at parenthood that is lower than age at marriage, indicating that the prevalence of births within cohabiting unions is no longer negligible among the younger cohorts. However, neither is the start of cohabitation a good marker of the start of family formation because many such unions do break up.

The trajectory analysis through the five early life events of graduation from first post-secondary education, start of regular work, first cohabitation, first marriage, and birth of first child (or start of parenthood) shows several trajectories toward family formation. A number of pathways leads to direct trajectories to marriage, trajectories to marriage preceded by cohabitation, and trajectories to parenthood that are not preceded by marriage. These trajectories capture prevalent pathways to forming a family among the cohorts born in 1966-70 and 1971-75. While no one trajectory is traversed by a majority, the traditionally preferred trajectory that passes through graduation from post-secondary education and start of regular work before marriage that is not preceded by cohabitation is traversed by sufficiently a good proportion of young men and women to allow a multivariate analysis of the trajectory.

The multivariate analysis identified factors associated with the traditional trajectory, specifically, those that signify availability of resources that facilitate acquisition of higher education and entry into labour force, and the presence of values that favour marriage over cohabitation. One of the striking findings is that the differential impact of the covariate by gender. Women's trajectories are influenced by social status and family structure, in other words, by linked lives and parental resources. Not so for men whose trajectories are influenced by religion and migration status. The trajectories of both men and women, however, are unequivocally affected by the value systems they hold for themselves regarding family and work.

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**Table 1: Distribution of Type of First Union  
By 5-Year Birth Cohort and Gender, 2001**

	Total Respond- ents	Number of First Union	First Union as % of All Respond- ents	Marriage Only	Common- Law, then Marriage	Common- Law Only
<b>Females</b>						
<b>1926-45</b>	2727	2608	95.6	97.6	1.2	1.2
<b>1946-65</b>	5220	4975	95.3	72.8	14.7	12.5
<b>1966-70</b>	1205	1081	89.7	51.3	20.8	27.8
<b>1971-75</b>	1152	900	78.1	41.9	19.4	38.7
<b>1976-80</b>	1097	511	46.6	21.9	9.4	68.7
<b>1981-85</b>	1143	116	10.1	6.9	1.7	91.4
<b>1966-85</b>	4597	2608	56.7	40.3	17.3	42.4
<b>Males</b>						
<b>1926-45</b>	2036	1949	95.7	95.6	1.7	2.7
<b>1946-65</b>	4187	3867	92.4	70.9	13.0	16.0
<b>1966-70</b>	1006	829	82.4	50.5	17.9	31.6
<b>1971-75</b>	929	608	65.4	40.6	16.9	42.4
<b>1976-80</b>	914	247	27.0	16.6	8.1	75.3
<b>1981-85</b>	923	54	5.9	11.1	7.4	81.5
<b>1966-85</b>	3772	1738	46.1	41.0	15.8	43.2

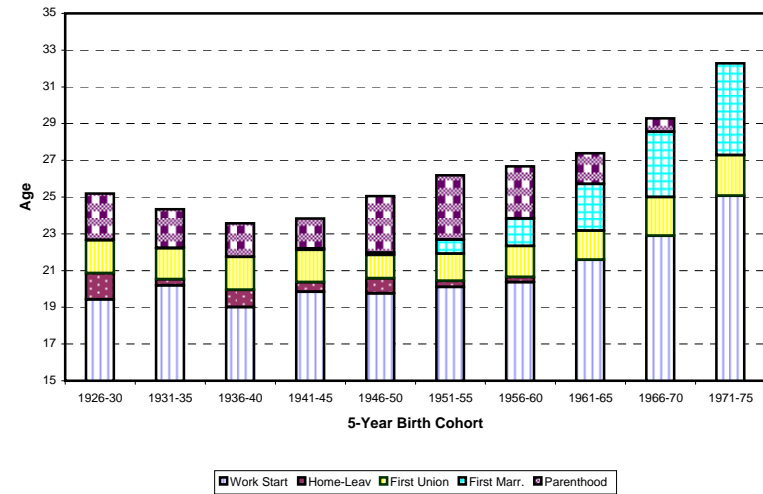
Source: 2001 General Social Survey

**Table 2: Median Ages at Experience of Early Life Events  
By 5-Year Birth Cohorts and By Gender, 2001**

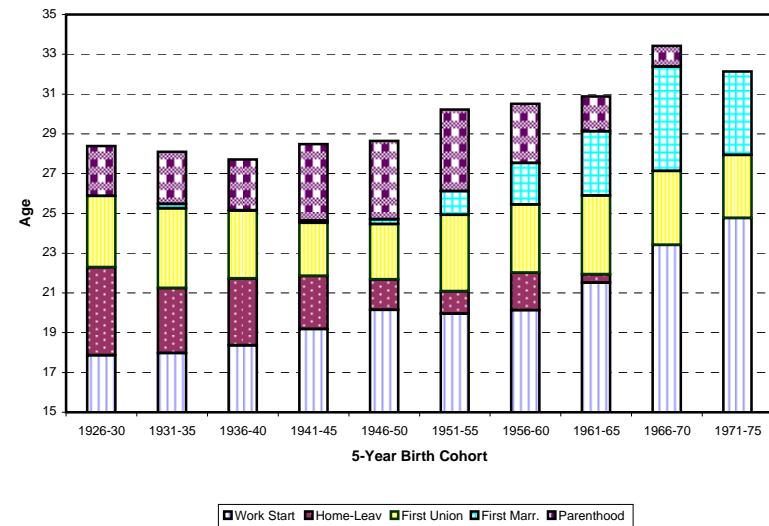
5-Year Age Groups	Females				
	Work Start	Home-Leav	First Union	First Marr.	Parenthood
1926-30	19.4	20.9	22.7	22.7	25.2
1931-35	20.2	20.5	22.2	22.2	24.3
1936-40	19.0	19.9	21.7	21.8	23.6
1941-45	19.9	20.4	22.1	22.2	23.8
1946-50	19.8	20.6	21.9	22.0	25.1
1951-55	20.1	20.4	21.9	22.7	26.2
1956-60	20.4	20.7	22.3	23.8	26.7
1961-65	21.6	21.2	22.8	25.4	27.1
1966-70	22.9	21.4	23.5	27.1	27.8
1971-75	25.1	21.9	24.2	29.1	28.9

5-Year Age Groups	Males				
	Work Start	Home-Leav	First Union	First Marr.	Parenthood
1926-30	17.9	22.3	25.9	25.9	28.4
1931-35	18.0	21.3	25.3	25.5	28.1
1936-40	18.4	21.7	25.1	25.2	27.7
1941-45	19.2	21.9	24.5	24.6	28.5
1946-50	20.2	21.7	24.5	24.7	28.7
1951-55	20.0	21.1	24.9	26.1	30.2
1956-60	20.1	22.0	25.5	27.5	30.5
1961-65	21.5	21.9	25.9	29.1	30.9
1966-70	23.4	22.4	26.1	31.3	32.4
1971-75	24.8	23.1	26.3	30.5	

**Figure 1B: Median Age at Early Life Course Events, Females  
Canada, 2001**



**Figure 1A: Median Age at Early Life Course Events, Males  
Canada, 2001**



Source: 2001 General Social Survey

**Table 3A: Probabilities and Mean Duration of Family Formation Trajectories  
By 5-Year Birth Cohort, Women, 2001**

	1966-70			1971-75			1976-80		
	N	Prob.	Dur.	N	Prob.	Dur.	N	Prob.	Dur.
<b>Panel 1: First Transitions</b>									
A. Origin (O) to Post-Sec Graduation (Grad)	414	0.34	20.7	436	0.38	21.0	364	0.40	20.9
B. Origin to Work (Work)	484	0.40	18.3	415	0.36	18.1	371	0.35	17.9
C. Origin to First Cohabitation (Cohab)	131	0.11	19.3	151	0.13	19.0	166	0.16	18.7
D. Origin to Marriage (Marriage)	98	0.08	20.6	72	0.06	21.0	24	0.03	20.7
E. Origin to Motherhood (Mother)	74	0.06	18.7	66	0.06	18.3	49	0.05	19.3
<b>Panel 2: Common Trajectories to Marriage Without Cohabitation</b>									
<b>A1. O - Grad - Work - Marriage</b>									
(I) Origin to Post-Secondary Graduation	414	0.34	20.7	436	0.38	21.0			
(ii) PS Graduation to Work	313	0.77	1.2	327	0.77	1.0			
(iii) Work to Marriage	159	0.54	3.4	112	0.52	3.7			
Trajectory Probabilty/ Age at Final Transition		0.14	25.3		0.15	25.7			
<b>A2. O - Work - Grad - Marriage</b>									
(I) Origin to Work	484	0.40	18.3	415	0.36	18.1	371	0.35	17.9
(ii) Work to Post-Secondary Graduation	104	0.22	3.4	125	0.33	3.5	69	0.28	3.7
(iii) Post-Secondary Graduation to Marriage	51	0.52	3.5	50	0.61	4.5			
Trajectory Probabilty/ Age at Final Transition		0.05	25.2		0.07	26.1			
<b>A3. O - Grad - Marriage</b>									
(I) Origin to Post-Secondary Graduation	414	0.34	20.7	436	0.38	21.0	364	0.40	20.9
(ii) PS Graduation to Marriage	43	0.11	2.9	36	0.09	2.2	18	0.08	1.9
Trajectory Probabilty/ Age at Final Transition		0.04	23.6		0.03	23.2		0.03	22.8
<b>A4. O - Work - Marriage</b>									
(I) Origin to Work	484	0.40	18.3	415	0.36	18.1	371	0.35	17.9
(ii) Work to Marriage	143	0.30	4.2	72	0.20	3.9	35	0.15	4.0
Trajectory Probabilty/ Age at Final Transition		0.12	22.5		0.07	22.1		0.05	22.0
<b>A5. O - Marriage</b>									
(I) Origin to Marriage	98	0.08	20.6	72	0.06	21.0	24	0.03	20.7
<b>Total Prob. of Trajectories to Marriage without Cohabitation</b>		0.43			0.39				

**N** -- number of cases; **Prob.** -- Probability of Transition; **Dur.** -- Mean years of stay in the state before transition

**Table 3A(Cont'd): Probabilities and Mean Duration of Family Formation Trajectories  
By 5-Year Birth Cohort, Women, 2001**

	1966-70			1971-75			1976-80		
	N	Prob.	Dur.	N	Prob.	Dur.	N	Prob.	Dur.
<b>Panel 3: Common Trajectories to Marriage through Cohabitation</b>									
<b>B1. O - Grad - Work- Cohab - Marriage</b>									
(I) Origin to Post-Secondary Graduation	414	0.34	20.7	436	0.38	21.0	364	0.40	20.9
(ii) PS Graduation to Work	313	0.77	1.2	327	0.77	1.0	193	0.72	1.2
(iii) Work Start to Cohabitation	88	0.33	4.6	98	0.39	2.7			
(iv) Cohabitation to Marriage	36	0.46	2.2	35	0.50	1.9			
Trajectory Probabilty/ Age at Final Transition		0.04	28.7		0.06	26.6			
<b>B2. O - Work - Grad - Cohab - Marriage</b>									
(I) Origin to Work	484	0.40	18.3	415	0.36	18.1	371	0.35	17.9
(ii) Work to Post-Secondary Graduation	104	0.22	3.4	125	0.33	3.5	69	0.28	3.7
(iii) Post-Secondary Graduation to Cohabitation	32	0.32	2.2	35	0.31	2.0			
(iv) Cohabitation to Marriage	12	0.43	2.5	16	0.65	1.8			
Trajectory Probabilty/ Age at Final Transition		0.01	26.4		0.02	25.4			
<b>B3. O - Work - Cohab - Mariage</b>									
(I) Origin to Work	484	0.40	18.3	415	0.36	18.1	371	0.35	17.9
(ii) Work to Cohabitation	171	0.37	4.0	127	0.35	3.8	109	0.44	3.6
(iii) Cohabitation to Marriage	47	0.28	2.0	23	0.22	2.6			
Trajectory Probabilty/ Age at Final Transition		0.04	24.3		0.03	24.5			
<b>Total Prob. of Trajectories to Marriage through Cohabitation</b>		0.09			0.11				

**N** -- number of cases; **Prob.** -- Probability of Transition; **Dur.** -- Mean years of stay in the state before transition

**Table 3A(Cont'd): Probabilities and Mean Duration of Family Formation Trajectories  
By 5-Year Birth Cohort, Women, 2001**

	1966-70			1971-75			1976-80		
	N	Prob.	Dur.	N	Prob.	Dur.	N	Prob.	Dur.
<b>Panel 4: Common Trajectories to Parenthood Without Marriage</b>									
<b>C1.. O - Grad - Work- Cohab - Birth</b>									
(I) Origin to Post-Secondary Graduation	414	0.34	20.7	436	0.38	21.0			
(ii) PS Graduation to Work	313	0.77	1.2	327	0.77	1.0			
(iii) Work Start to Cohabitation	88	0.33	4.6	98	0.39	2.7			
(iv) Cohabitation to Birth	29	0.54	5.9	16	0.32	3.5			
Trajectory Probabilty/ Age at Final Transition		0.05			0.04	28.2			
<b>C2. O - Work - Cohab - Birth</b>									
(I) Origin to Work	484	0.40	18.3	415	0.36	18.1			
(ii) Work to Cohabitation	171	0.37	4.0	127	0.35	3.8			
(iii) Cohabitation to Birth	74	0.49	3.8	41	0.42	2.9			
Trajectory Probabilty/ Age at Final Transition		0.07	26.1		0.05	24.8			
<b>C3. O - Cohab -Birth</b>									
(i) Origin to Cohabitation	131	0.11	19.3	151	0.13	19.0	166	0.16	18.7
(ii) Cohabitation to Birth	35	0.28	2.7	41	0.28	1.7	39	0.27	1.3
Trajectory Probabilty/ Age at Final Transition		0.03	22.0		0.04	20.8		0.04	20.0
<b>Total Prob. of Trajectories to Parenthood through Cohabitation</b>		0.15			0.13				
<b>C4. O - Motherhood</b>									
(i) Origin to Motherhood (Mother)	74	0.06	18.7	66	0.06	18.3	49	0.05	19.3
<b>Probability of Trajectories to Parenthood outside of Marriage</b>		0.21			0.18				
<b>Panel 5: Most Common Trajectory after Direct Transition to Cohabitation</b>									
<b>D1. O - Cohab - Work - Marriage</b>									
(i) Origin to Cohabitation	131	0.11	19.3	151	0.13	19.0	166	0.16	18.7
(ii) Cohabitation to Work	51	0.39	0.8	51	0.36	1.9	51	0.37	1.7
<b>D2. O - Cohab - Grad - Marriage</b>									
(i) Origin to Cohabitation	131	0.11	19.3	151	0.13	19.0	166	0.16	18.7
(ii) Cohabitation to Grad	33	0.25	1.6	41	0.28	1.3	49	0.35	1.4

**N** -- number of cases; **Prob.** -- Probability of Transition; **Dur.** -- Mean years of stay in the state before transition

**Table 3B: Probabilities and Mean Duration of Family Formation Trajectories  
By 5-Year Birth Cohort, Men, 2001**

	1966-70			1971-75			1976-80		
	N	Prob.	Dur.	N	Prob.	Dur.	N	Prob.	Dur.
<b>Panel 1: First Transitions</b>									
A. Origin (O) to Post-Sec Graduation (Grad)	337	0.34	21.7	335	0.37	21.0	230	0.35	21.6
B. Origin to Work (Work)	540	0.54	18.5	479	0.52	18.3	468	0.54	18.2
C. Origin to First Cohabitation (Cohab)	70	0.07	20.7	67	0.07	19.8	57	0.07	19.6
D. Origin to Marriage (Marriage)	28	0.03	23.4	21	0.02	22.7	4	0.01	21.5
E. Origin to Fatherhood (Father)	23	0.02	20.2	12	0.02	23.7	11	0.01	19.3
<b>Panel 2: Common Trajectories to Marriage Without Cohabitation</b>									
<b>A1. O - Grad - Work - Marriage</b>									
(I) Origin to Post-Secondary Graduation	337	0.34	21.7	335	0.37	21.0	230	0.35	21.6
(ii) PS Graduation to Work	268	0.81	1.4	270	0.88	1.8	126	0.89	1.6
(iii) Work to Marriage	117	0.53	4.7	72	0.44	4.3			
Trajectory Probability/ Age at Final Transition		0.15	27.8		0.14	27.1			
<b>A2. O - Work - Grad - Marriage</b>									
(I) Origin to Work	540	0.54	18.5	479	0.52	18.3	468	0.54	18.2
(ii) Work to Post-Secondary Graduation	101	0.19	3.9	82	0.19	4.3	78	0.35	4.7
(iii) Post-Secondary Graduation to Marriage	40	0.49	4.8	24	0.43	3.4			
Trajectory Probability/ Age at Final Transition		0.05	27.1		0.04	26.0			
<b>A3. O - Grad - Marriage</b>									
(I) Origin to Post-Secondary Graduation	337	0.34	21.7	335	0.37	21.0			
(ii) PS Graduation to Marriage	21	0.07	4.1	14	0.04	1.7			
Trajectory Probability/ Age at Final Transition		0.02	25.8		0.02	22.7			
<b>A4. O - Work - Marriage</b>									
(I) Origin to Work	540	0.54	18.5	479	0.52	18.3			
(ii) Work to Marriage	173	0.38	7.6	105	0.37	8.6			
Trajectory Probability/ Age at Final Transition		0.20	26.1		0.19	26.9			
<b>A5. O - Marriage</b>									
(I) Origin to Marriage	28	0.03	23.4	21	0.02	22.7	4	0.01	21.5
<b>Total Prob. of Trajectories to Marriage without Cohabitation</b>		0.45			0.42				

**N** -- number of cases; **Prob.** -- Probability of Transition; **Dur.** -- Mean years of stay in the state before transition

**Table 3B(Cont'd): Probabilities and Mean Duration of Family Formation Trajectories  
By 5-Year Birth Cohort, Men, 2001**

	1966-70			1971-75			1976-80		
	N	Prob.	Dur.	N	Prob.	Dur.	N	Prob.	Dur.
<b>Panel 3: Common Trajectories to Marriage through Cohabitation</b>									
<b>B1. O - Grad - Work- Cohab - Marriage</b>									
(I) Origin to Post-Secondary Graduation	337	0.34	21.7	335	0.37	21.0			
(ii) PS Graduation to Work	268	0.81	1.4	270	0.88	1.8			
(iii) Work Start to Cohabitation	70	0.28	3.3	69	0.40	3.8			
(iv) Cohabitation to Marriage	29	0.46	2.2	10	0.24	2.0			
Trajectory Probabilty/ Age at Final Transition		0.04	28.6		0.03	28.6			
<b>B2. O - Work - Grad - Cohab - Marriage</b>									
(I) Origin to Work	540	0.54	18.5	479	0.52	18.3			
(ii) Work to Post-Secondary Graduation	101	0.19	3.9	82	0.19	4.3			
(iii) Post-Secondary Graduation to Cohabitation	28	0.30	3.0	22	0.43	3.6			
(iv) Cohabitation to Marriage	8	0.32	2.6	11	0.78	3.3			
Trajectory Probabilty/ Age at Final Transition		0.01	27.9		0.03	29.5			
<b>B3. O - Work - Cohab - Marriage</b>									
(I) Origin to Work	540	0.54	18.5	479	0.52	18.3	468	0.54	18.2
(ii) Work to Cohabitation	171	0.33	5.1	157	0.37	4.1	91	0.44	5.2
(iii) Cohabitation to Marriage	39	0.25	3.0	29	0.26	3.8			
Trajectory Probabilty/ Age at Final Transition		0.04	26.6		0.05	26.3			
<b>Total Prob. of Trajectories to Marriage through Cohabitation</b>		0.09			0.11				

**N** -- number of cases; **Prob.** -- Probability of Transition; **Dur.** -- Mean years of stay in the state before transition

**Table 3B(Cont'd): Probabilities and Mean Duration of Family Formation Trajectories  
By 5-Year Birth Cohort, Men, 2001**

	1966-70			1971-75			1976-80		
	N	Prob.	Dur.	N	Prob.	Dur.	N	Prob.	Dur.
<b>Panel 4: Common Trajectories to Parenthood Without Marriage</b>									
<b>C1.. O - Grad - Work- Cohab - Birth</b>									
(I) Origin to Post-Secondary Graduation	337	0.34	21.7	335	0.37	21.0			
(ii) PS Graduation to Work	268	0.81	1.4	270	0.88	1.8			
(iii) Work Start to Cohabitation	70	0.28	3.3	69	0.40	3.8			
(iv) Cohabitation to Birth	21	0.49	5.5	11	0.50	4.7			
Trajectory Probabilty/ Age at Final Transition		0.04	31.8		0.06	31.3			
<b>C2. O - Work - Cohab - Birth</b>									
(I) Origin to Work	540	0.54	18.5	479	0.52	18.3			
(ii) Work to Cohabitation	171	0.33	5.1	157	0.37	4.1			
(iii) Cohabitation to Birth	59	0.47	5.5	54	0.45	3.2			
Trajectory Probabilty/ Age at Final Transition		0.08	29.1		0.09	25.6			
<b>C3. O - Cohab -Birth</b>									
(i) Origin to Cohabitation	70	0.07	20.7	67	0.07	19.8			
(ii) Cohabitation to Birth	13	0.19	1.8	7	0.10	2.1			
Trajectory Probabilty/ Age at Final Transition		0.01	22.5		0.01	21.9			
<b>Total Prob. of Trajectories to Parenthood through Cohabitation</b>		0.13			0.16				
<b>C4. O - Fatherhood</b>									
(i) Origin to Fatherhood (Father)	23	0.02	20.2	12	0.02	23.7	11	0.01	19.3
<b>Probability of Trajectories to Parenthood outside of Marriage</b>		0.16			0.18				
<b>Panel 5: Most Common Trajectory after Direct Transition to Cohabitation</b>									
<b>D1. O - Cohab - Work - Marriage</b>									
(i) Origin to Cohabitation	70	0.07	20.7	67	0.07	19.8	57	0.07	19.6
(ii) Cohabitation to Work	20	0.30	1.5	32	0.50	2.5	29	0.67	2.1
<b>D2. O - Cohab - Grad - Marriage</b>									
(i) Origin to Cohabitation	70	0.07	20.7	67	0.07	19.8	57	0.07	19.6
(ii) Cohabitation to Grad	26	0.39	2.2	21	0.33	2.2	13	0.25	1.0

N -- number of cases; **Prob.** -- Probability of Transition; **Dur.** -- Mean years of stay in the state before transition

**Table 4: Odds Ratios from the Logistic Regression of  
Traditionally Preferred Trajectories to Marriage  
1966-75 Birth Cohorts, Women and Men**

	Women		Men	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
<b>Birth Cohort</b>				
1971-75	0.81 *	0.78 **	0.64 ***	0.62 ***
1966-70®				
<b>Family Characteristics</b>				
<b>Social Status</b>				
Low	0.37 ***	0.34 ***	0.74	0.77
Middle	0.58 ***	0.55 ***	1.04	1.04
High ®				
<b>Family Structure</b>				
Lived with Both Parents	2.39 ***	2.15 ***	1.30	1.23
Did not Live with Both ®				
<b>Culture and Geography</b>				
<b>Religion</b>				
No Religion	0.77	1.01	0.49 ***	0.61 *
Roman Catholic	0.99	1.00	0.64 **	0.66 *
Protestant	1.08	1.03	1.05	1.04
Other Religion ®				
<b>Migration Status</b>				
Born in Canada	0.96	0.93	0.61 ***	0.65 **
Immigrant ®				
<b>Region of Residence</b>				
Atlantic	0.80	0.80	0.96	0.94
Quebec	0.34 ***	0.43 ***	0.52 **	0.65
Ontario	1.26	1.20	1.54 *	1.55 *
Prairies	0.73	0.69	1.31	1.26
British Columbia ®				
<b>Intervening Variables</b>				
<b>Values</b>				
Importance of Family		2.27 ***		2.09 ***
Importance of Paying Job		0.78 ***		0.83 *
Constant	0.20 ***	0.17 ***	0.26 ***	0.21 ***
<hr/>				
Total N	1986	1986	1681	1681
% traversing dependent trajectory	15.7	15.7	13.1	13.1
Nagelkerke R Square	0.094	0.168	0.089	0.147
- 2 Log likelihood	1859.4	1719.6	1356.4	12272.7

Levels of Significance: \*\*\* 1%, \*\* 5%, \* 10%