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For Immediate Release

The Marriage Gap

Canadians are divided into haves and have-nots along marriage lines

Ottawa, Canada, February 25, 2014 – The Institute of Marriage and Family Canada is proud to release the first ever analysis of Statistics Canada data examining the link between marriage and income in Canada in [*The Marriage Gap Between Rich and Poor Canadians: How Canadians are split into haves and have-nots along marriage lines.*](#)

The data shows there is a dramatic “marriage gap” in Canada. The wealthy are mostly coupled up, and the poor are mostly unattached. This is troubling because research shows marriage is a powerful wealth creator and protector against poverty, as well as a force for social mobility for children.

Researchers internationally are aware of the powerful protective power against poverty that marriage provides. However, Canadians, while very concerned about inequality and poverty, have not yet made the link to marriage.

“For us, marriage and family fall firmly into the social justice camp,” says Peter Jon Mitchell, Senior Researcher and co-author of the study. “In the past we have examined the greater likelihood that single parents live in poverty. We’ve studied the family of origin of those living in a local Ottawa shelter, and we’ve examined the welfare wall. Today we take on a new angle, which is a statistical look at marriage by income.”

Did you know that:

- About half of middle-class families include a married (including common-law) couple
- In 2011, 86% of high-income families include a married couple
- In 2011, only 12% of low-income families include a married couple
- This “marriage gap” has widened since 1976 as marriage stayed popular amongst the wealthy but lost ground amongst mid to low income earners through the 1980s and 1990s
- An unexpected turning point occurred in 1998 as marriage ceased to decline
- Since then we have even seen a slight increase in marriage amongst certain age groups of Canadians in the mid to low income groups

While international research identifies a marriage gap, Mitchell and his co-author Philip Cross, were not sure to what extent this would exist in Canada as well. Cross brings his decades of experience as an economist at Statistics Canada to the project. And while the data firmly identify a marriage gap between rich and poor, Cross also notes that marriage appears to be on the rebound for some groups. “The increase is most evident for those groups which previously had shunned marriage, such as the young, lower and middle income groups,” says Cross.

So does marriage create wealth or do the wealthy get married? This chicken and egg argument remains unresolved in this study. “A better question might be whether the wealth of marriage is inaccessible to those who are lower income,” says Mitchell. He adds: “If so, what can we do about it? Asking how marriage is faring along income lines is an important step in the process of looking to eradicate poverty, long term.”

This research aims to identify the marriage gap in Canada with unassailable, replicable data and start a discussion. There must be agreement on the problem, but solutions can come from every ideological camp and political stripe, and will therefore vary. The issue of the marriage gap deserves further attention from policy makers, politicians, charity, faith groups and business leaders, as well as Canadians at large.

“Everyone is concerned about inequality in Canada today. This may just mean we need to be concerned about marriage, too,” concludes Mitchell.

The study can be found online at www.imfcanada.org.

To arrange an interview with the authors, please contact Andrea Mrozek at 613-565-3832.

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About the authors

Philip Cross is a Senior Fellow at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute. Prior to joining MLI, Mr. Cross spent 36 years at Statistics Canada, specializing in macroeconomics. He was appointed Chief Economic Analyst in 2008 and was responsible for ensuring quality and coherency of all major economic statistics. He is also a member of the C.D. Howe Institute’s Business Cycle Dating Committee.

Peter Jon Mitchell is a senior researcher at the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada. His research and writing reflect his prior hands-on experience working with youth, focusing on youth and family issues including parental influence on teen sexual choices, family involvement in the youth criminal justice process and education.

About the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada

The Institute of Marriage and Family Canada is motivated by the desire to arm Canadians with solid research on how to best support families. Since opening its doors in 2006, the IMFC has become the leading Canadian source on family matters.

As the only organization of its kind, the IMFC believes strong families and marriages are the bulwark of our culture and country and as such, deserve our sustained attention.

Elected officials and national media increasingly reference the IMFC’s research and seek out its recommendations. The IMFC has earned its reputation as a reliable source on topics including daycare, demographics, family structure, marriage, bullying, and other issues relevant to families today.