

STATISTICAL DATA ON MARRIAGE STABILITY

by

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The purpose of this paper is to present a survey of sources of statistical data, bearing on the problem of marriage stability and of marriage disruption, and to point out what type of data can be found in various publications and what useful data we are lacking. The present review of statistical sources, far from being complete, is limited to the basic sources of some European and American countries. The data for the United States are treated in more detail, including a short historical review of the procedures of collecting them. This information is supplemented by comparisons with Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. None of these countries is treated in a comprehensive way, and the information about some of them is more extensive than that about others.

I.

The data on family disruption are collected either by the governments of the respective countries, or by the investigators themselves. For the investigator, to collect data on a nation-wide scale or even on a much narrower one is expensive and time-consuming. Therefore, most investigators will naturally turn first to the data collected by the governmental institutions. These data are of either one of the following two types: the census data and the vital statistics data. The census data are collected periodically by the governments. Their purpose is to find out facts about various characteristics of the national life, first of all about those of the population, such as the distribution of marital status. That questions about marital status are asked during the census seems to be a practice accepted throughout the world.

Censuses are taken periodically, every 10 years, 5 years or other periods, depending on the country. In the United States the Federal Constitution provides of the American census is the apportionment of the seats in the House of Representatives among the several states, but eventually the census developed into an inquiry into numerous aspects of the national life. The census is taken by a large number of enumerators, hired ad hoc, who after a brief training have to visit every household in the country asking questions about all the members of the household to the one they are able to find at home. Canada has adopted a similar system, while in the European countries, such as Belgium, France and Great Britain, schedules are distributed to the population to be filled in by the person concerned or by the head of the household.

The questions to be asked are stated on a printed form where also the answers are to be put down, and the enumerators of the United States census are not permitted to rephrase the questions or to change their order. The filled in schedules are checked, the obvious errors corrected, and eventually the schedules are sent in to the Bureau of the Census. One of the characteristics of the American census that differentiates it from European censuses is that the enumeration lasts several weeks or even months, until the answers from all the households are collected. Therefore the American census does not refer to any exact point of time, and the changes that occur during the period of census taking may or not show in the collected data. The censuses of Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Britain and other countries endeavor to represent the situation at one particular moment, called the critical moment, usually the midnight hour of some particular date. All data are entered into the census schedules such as they happened to be at the critical moment, and changes occurring between this moment and the filling in of the schedule are ignored: even persons who died in the meantime are reported as living, and those newly born are not reported at all.

One of the most important problems in the preparation of a census is the form of the census schedule, the selection of the questions to be asked, and their formulation in such a way that can be easily understood. The collected census data are processed by me-

chanical means and published. In the United States one of the census publications is called "Population," consists of several volumes at each census.

In a similar way the census data are published in other countries, such as Belgium, Canada, France, Sweden, Norway. In Great Britain, the census results are published separately for England and Wales, on the one hand, and for Scotland, on the other. The census publications of the European countries are much less extensive than those of the United States. In Canada provinces or groups of provinces have censuses of their own, e.g. the Prairie Provinces, Quebec, etc. A further difference between various censuses is that the de jure population is counted in Canada, Germany and the United States, but the de facto population in Belgium, France and Great Britain. By de jure population is meant that every individual is counted at his or her usual place of residence, irrespective of where he happens to be at the moment of the enumeration; by de facto enumeration is meant that every person is counted in the place where he actually found himself at the critical moment.

Between the regular decennial censuses the United States Bureau of the Census keeps track of changing characteristics of the population by means of a monthly population sample survey. Starting with the year 1954, 24, to 26,000 dwelling units and other living quarters in 453 counties, forming 230 areas, have been included into the sample. Before 1954 the number of areas was only 64. Data collected through the monthly survey are published under the name of *Current Population Reports*. These reports are classified according to their contents into a number of series. Data on marital status and family are included in the series P-20, *Population Characteristics*.

The type of questions asked during the United States censuses has varied considerably. Questions pertaining to marriage and family were not asked in several early censuses. In the middle of the last century, a question on members of the household: "married within the year" or "married within the year, state month" was asked, and the results of such inquiry were published in the

censuses of 1860 and 1870. This question was asked along with similar questions about persons that were born or had died. This method of collecting data was found unsatisfactory and discontinued. Instead questions about the marital status of the population were included into the schedule of the Tenth Census of the United States in 1880, but the collected data were never published. Thus the first census that had data on the marital status (or, as it was then called, on conjugal conditions) was the Eleventh Census in 1890. Since then questions have been reformulated and refined, and all the following censuses have contained a growing number of tables dealing with marital status.

The Eleventh Census classified the population into the following categories of marital status : single, married, widowed, divorced, and unknown. These data were cross-classified with other variables and thus a number of tables were published giving information on the whole population, on the population of the several states and territories, and on the population of cities having a population of 25,000 and more. As children can, by definition, be only single, in some cross-classifications only the grown-up population was taken into consideration. The variables with which marital status was cross-classified are the following ones : sex, age, nativity (whether native or foreignborn), citizenship, and race. In some tables only absolute numbers are given, but in others percentages are also published. Unfortunately, not all tables dealing with fivefold classification : in many of them the less numerous categories, divorced, widowed and unknown, are lumped together and thus only three categories of marital status are taken into consideration. This practice is still continued in certain tables of the census publications.

The census of 1890 served as a prototype for the following ones to 1930 inclusive. Eventually the residential classification of urban-rural was introduced as an additional variable for cross-classifications of marital status. This variable has three categories, viz.: urban, i.e. persons living in cities; rural-farm, persons living on farms; and rural non-farm, persons living outside of cities but not on farms. In some censuses, for instance in that of 1910, data about the distribution of conditions of foreign countries are given, and

in the census of 1920 there are included many tables comparing data of 1920 with those of past censuses. Another important change is the growth of the number of tables where, along with the absolute numbers, also the percentage distribution is given. Such a percentage distribution is very helpful for comparisons of data of different censuses, of data of various parts of the country, and of international data. In most cases the percents are calculated taking as 100 the total population of the territorial unit.

Along with the characteristics of the population, the census of the United States is interested also in families and households. The family is defined as "a group of two or more persons, related by blood, marriage or adoption, and living together". The families were classified into "primary" (with a household of their own); "secondary" (without their own household).

In the Sixteenth Census, that was taken in 1940, many changes took place. Those changes were prompted by the great depression, when the attempts to help the distressed population turned out to be difficult, if not impossible, because of the lack of numerical data. Consequently, the census schedules of 1940 were revised in a way to make it possible to collect a greater amount of data needed by the authorities. As far as the marital status distribution is concerned, the fact had to be taken into account that the legal aspect does not necessarily give a true picture of the social reality. Therefore the category "married" was divided into two subcategories, "spouse present" and "spouse absent". This last term, however, was defined very broadly and included not only those whose marital lives were disrupted because of marital discord, but also soldiers, sailors, prisoners, persons living in health institutions, persons living separately because of the requirements of their occupation or of any other considerations, as well as the spouses of all these people. The tables presenting crosstabulation on marital status are of two types. Some of them give data only about the legal aspect of marital status, differentiating the population into the four traditional categories of "single," "married," "widowed," and "divorced." In other tables the married population was divided further into "spouse present" and "spouse

absent;" in these tables the marital status is cross-classified with age, sex, urban rural residence and race. Furthermore, the category "marital status unknown" was discontinued, and those comparatively few persons who would have belonged there were lumped together with the single population.

Another innovation in the 1940 census was a reform and refinement of statistics concerning the working population, or Labor Force. Among the data on Labor Force, several cross-tabulations of marital status data with the employment status (employed, unemployed, etc.) were given, with refinements for age, sex, and urban-rural residence. Unfortunately, in the Labor Force tables widowed and divorced were lumped together.

Another innovation of the Sixteenth Decennial Census was that, sampling techniques were utilized. The Bureau of the Census says in the Introduction :

" The use of sampling methods permitted the collection of statistics on a larger number of inquiries than has heretofore been possible, the release of preliminary population statistics on an early date and the tabulation of a great many social and economic characteristics at a relatively low cost. "

In order to draw a representative sample of the population, the enumerators received instructions where, among other rules, it was said :

" At the bottom of each page of the Population schedule two lines are provided for certain supplementary information that is to be obtained for the two persons whose names fall on the two designated lines of the Population Schedule. Those lines are easily identified by the heavy rules that extend into both right and left hand margins of the schedule, by the notation 'Suppl. Quest.' (for supplementary questions) in the margins of the schedule and by the bold face line numbers. These bold face line numbers are repeated at the bottom of the population schedule in the block reserved for supplementary questions.

“ Ask the supplementary questions only from the members of the household whose name is entered on the lines described above, whether this be the head, his wife, a son, a daughter, an infant, a lodger or any other member of the household.” (*)

In order to avoid any possible systematic error that might arise, if consistently persons having the same serial numbers on the Population Schedule were asked the supplementary questions, and to insure the adequate representation of every class of persons, five types of schedules were used, with different pairs of lines designated for the sample.

This sample encompassed several fields of inquiry. Some of them are relevant to the study of marriage stability. Here belong the statistics on the educational attainments where the years of schooling of the population between the ages of 18 to 64 years are cross-tabulated, among other variables, with their marital status. Once more, as in so many other cases, not all the refined classification of marital status was used. A very broad field of inquiry covered by the sample survey is constituted by the “ family characteristics. ” Some of them are covered by the 5 percent sample, some by a 2-1/2 percent sample. The statistics on the family were not intended to stress the information on family stability, and such data as there are have only an indirect bearing on this problem. There are, however, data on marital status and sex of family head, including the information whether the wife of the family head is present or absent, and what is the number of children. As the husband and father is by definition the head of the family, the number of broken homes can be ascertained from these data. Thus, if a married woman is the head of the family, her spouse must be absent. If a married man lives with his children, but without his wife, it is clear that this is also a case of “ spouse absent. ” As these data refer not to individuals, as in most other tables, but to families as groups, a different approach to the study of family stability can be taken by using them.

(*) Bureau of the Census., Sixteenth Census of the United States. Population, Vol. IV, Part I, p. 182.

Another country that makes use of sample surveys for its censuses is Sweden. During the census of 1950 an interesting sampling technique was used : all people born on the 15th of any month and year were included in the sample. Thus the randomness of the sample was insured, but the whole system was based on the assumption that everyone knows exactly the day on which he or she was born. Not in all countries would such an assumption hold true. Tables on population by industry, age and marital status, and on population by age, sex and marital status of the head of the family were among those based on this sample.

A 1 percent sample was used in Great Britain for the preliminary tabulations of the census of 1951.

During the Seventeenth Census of the United States taken in 1950, the classification of the marital status was subjected to further refinement. The category " married, spouse absent " was subdivided into two subcategories : " separated " and " all others. " Here the term " separated " was defined in the following way :

" Separated persons include those with intentions of obtaining a divorce, and other married persons permanently or temporarily estranged from their spouse because of marital discord. "

The classification refers to the marital status of a person at the moment of enumeration. Therefore anyone reporting as " married " might have been married only once, or might have been divorced or widowed previously and then remarried. Persons reported living in common law marriages were classified as married. Those that have never been married, as well as those who have been married but whose marriage was later annulled, were reported as single. Furthermore, all inmates of institutions that were reported married were automatically classified as " married, spouse absent, " although in a few cases this classification might have been contrary to the facts. The marital status of individuals aged 14 or less was not asked; in previous censuses when the lower age limit had been 15 rather than 14 years.

In all tables but one of the volumes on population of the Seventeenth Census, where marital status is one of the variables, di-

divorced and widowed are lumped together and "married" are not further classified. (*) Only one table that gives all the available information, and that is Table of the Characteristics of the Population. This information is given separately for each state, and in the state separately for each sex. The marital status is classified in the following way: single, married, widowed, divorced; the married population is classified into "wife (husband) present" and "wife (husband) absent." The first subgroup is further classified into "head of household" and "not head of household," while the second subgroup is divided into "separated" and "other." The above information is cross-tabulated with age, for the total population of the state, for the urban, rural non-farm and rural farm population, as well as for large cities and the Standard Metropolitan Areas (large cities with surrounding counties). Separate data for the non-white population are given for subdivisions where there are not less than 50,000 non-whites. Table 57 is, however, based not on the complete count of the population but on a 20 percent sample. The sample was taken by methods similar to those of the sample in the 1940 census, with the difference that this time every fifth person was included.

Some of the special reports of the 1950 census contain important data on marital status and family. The Special Report P-E No. 2D, called *Marital Status*, presents national data based on a 3-1/3 percent sample. The refined classification of marital status, the same as in Table 57, is cross-tabulated with household status by age, for the total population and also separately for non-whites, for the rural-farm population, and for the rural-farm non-white population. The household status classifies the population by the relationship to the head of the household, i.e. head, wife, child, parent, member of a secondary family, lodger, etc. Further, information is given about marital status by single years of age and by yearly income. The Special Report P-E No. 2E, *Duration of Current Marital Status* gives information about women: married once, husband present; married more than once, husband present; separated; divorced;

(*) U.S. Bureau of the Census, United States Population Census: 1950, Vol. II Characteristics of the Population, Tables 21, 32 and 36.

and widowed. Each category is classified by duration of current marital status, number of children ever born, years of school completed, employment, and age at the beginning of the current marital status; all this information is provided separately for non-whites, for the farm population and for the non-farm population. Another relevant Special Report is P-E No. 2A, *General Characteristics of Families*, where the marital status of the head of the family is cross-tabulated by the number of his own children. Data are here provided for the total population, for states and for Standard Metropolitan Areas.

The Current Population Reports Series P-20 publishes many data about marital status based on the monthly sample survey. As an example we shall state the titles of some reports on this topic published during the last 10 years. In the 1947 reports single, married, widowed and divorced persons were cross-tabulated by age, sex, urban-rural residence, relationship to the head of the household, years of school, employment status, major occupational groups, etc. There was published, furthermore, a number of tables on families : marital status by household status ; heads of families by number of times they have ever been married ; married couples: how many times each spouse has been married ; number of children : how many times parents were married ; duration of present marital status by age, sex, and how many times married. In later years reports were published yearly on the same topics with occasional variations. Moreover, in 1954 and 1956 detailed data on the differences of the marital status between the white and the non-white population were given.

Short summaries and abstracts of the statistical data are given in the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. In this yearly publication are included historical data on marital status, the present distribution of the marital status, an abstract of marital status data of last census, and an abstract of vital statistics. In the *Statistical Abstract* hardly anything can be found that was not published in a more extensive form elsewhere, but its data are very useful for a quick review of the situation.

Not all information collected during the census enumeration

is tabulated, and not all tabulated information is published. A part of the data for cities smaller than 10,000 inhabitants, for the urban and rural parts of the counties, as well as those for standard economic areas, were tabulated but left unpublished. A list can be obtained from the Bureau of the Census, and upon request the data themselves can be made available against a small fee.

Both the classification of marital status and the type of information available vary from country to country. In the Canadian census of 1941 the term "separated" is defined as "married persons who are permanently separated, for domestic reasons, though they are not divorced," but in the 1951 Census the category "separated" was not used again and all legally married persons were classified together. The reason for this change is not stated. In Volume III of the census publication of 1941, data on marital conditions by province are crosstabulated by age and rural-urban residence; data on marital status in individual metropolitan areas and cities are given separately. Similar information is found in the census of 1951. Moreover, in the census of the Prairie Provinces taken in 1946, the marital status distribution for census areas and for urban-rural residence is presented, but the category "separated" is not shown.

In the Federal Republic of Germany the married population was divided in 1950 into those "living together" and those "not living together." The original plan was to subdivide the latter category into married persons not living together (1) because of occupational reasons or of lack of living space; (2) because the spouse is a prisoner of war or is missing; and (3) because of other reasons. The check of the collected census materials has shown that data about this threefold subdivision were not dependable and therefore they were not published. (*)

In France, the census of 1946 uses only the categories of single, married, widowed and divorced, and the same is true of the Belgian census of 1947 and the British census of 1951. These cen-

(*) Einführung in die methodischen und systematischen Grundlagen der Volks- und Berufszählung, Statistik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Vol. 34, p. 15.

suses give the usual cross-tabulations of the distribution of marital status starting with the census of 1911 through that of 1947 ; the United Kingdom gives the distribution by minor administrative divisions and Belgium gives the sex and the marital status of household heads. As the head of the household is ordinarily the husband, female married household heads, male married household heads living with children but without wife, divorced household heads, and similar combinations of characteristics, can be interpreted as symptoms of family disruption.

In Sweden in the census of 1950 the same four categories are given, but special tables show married people living together. Some other interesting cross-tabulations of the marital status can be found in the Swedish census, besides the usual one by age, sex and residence. Data on the marital status by occupation, the marital status distribution in the densely and in the sparsely populated areas, and the marital status of the agricultural population are published.

In Norway, all persons that are legally separated and divorced are classified together in the census of 1950. As in Sweden, the marital status distribution is cross-tabulated by occupation (with a detailed occupational classification) and age.

Switzerland, Denmark and the Netherlands report the marital status distribution in their respective statistical yearbooks. Switzerland in the *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Schweiz* gives the distribution of the four categories : single, married, divorced and widowed, by cantons and principal cities. The Netherlands in the *Jaarcijfers voor Nederland* add a fifth category, viz. that of persons separated from bed and board. Denmark in the *Statistik Arbog* publishes information also about the separated, but no definition of this term is given. There are separate data for the capital city, the urban and the rural population.

Statistical data are supposed to depict social reality. However, in no case do they do it perfectly. Errors in collecting and pro-

cessing the data are unavoidable, but there are also other types of errors. Thus arises the problem of reliability of statistical data.

Errors can be either random or systematic. Random errors do not show any particular direction. Therefore, if the number of cases is large enough, these errors can be expected to cancel themselves out, but they may vitiate the data for less numerous groups. The random errors stem from various sources. The census enumerators either forget to ask some questions, or do not ask them correctly, or write them down in a wrong way, or on the wrong line. The same holds for the household heads when they fill out the census schedules. Some of such errors are later detected and corrected, but some remain undiscovered. Similar errors are made while the collected data are being processed.

The respondents may give erroneous information to the enumerator by mistake or through lack of knowledge. In countries where census taking lasts weeks or months, as in the United States, changes take place during this period and the collected information does not show the conditions of any special point of time. In countries where the census ideally refers to one specified "critical moment," and all enumerating has to be completed as quickly as possible, a very large number of enumerators is needed in proportion to the population, therefore they are necessarily comparatively poorly trained and have to do their job in haste. In countries where the census is taken by mail, the persons answering the questionnaires may misunderstand the questions or make other errors, or forget to return the forms.

More dangerous than the random errors are systematic errors, i.e., errors made only in one direction. The random errors tend to cancel each other out, but systematic errors tend to accumulate. For example, it is proved that people are inclined to report age in years ending by a zero or a five, rather than by any other digit. This systematic error is so common that actuaries have devised several special formulae to correct them. Each of these formulae is based on a set of assumptions and can be used only if this specific set of assumptions holds in the given case. As far as marital status is concerned, a number of systematic errors are made because of the

respondent's conscious will to conceal the truth. Thus non-married mothers are inclined to report themselves widowed, divorced or separated. Persons who have deserted their marriage partners will often report themselves as single, as divorced, etc. Strangely enough, some similar misrepresentation is made without any lack of good will. Two marriage partners not living together may easily report their marital status differently : one as " married, spouse absent, " the other as " separated. " One spouse may have obtained a divorce in some domestic or foreign divorce mill without notifying her or his former marriage partner and thus be divorced and even remarried, while the ex-spouse will consider himself still married. Such and similar misreporting causes the census data to be not thoroughly reliable.

When data are estimates based on samples, the problem of reliability is more complicated. First of all, the sample must be representative, i.e. such that inferences from the data of the sample to the population can be by means of the theory of probability as expressed in statistical formulae. The figures obtained by a sample survey are obviously not identical with the unknown figures existing in the universe from which the sample was drawn. Moreover, every time a sample is taken, differing figures will be obtained. These differences are known as sample variability. A statistical formula, called the standard error, enables the investigator to calculate the probability that the difference between the data obtained by the sample survey and the unknown distribution of the universe, from which this sample was drawn, is not larger than a given number.

Typical standard errors are sometimes indicated in connection with the sample survey data, or a formula to calculate them may be given, or both. In the 1950 census of the United States two tables of standard errors are given, one for the estimated numbers, the other for estimated percentage.

The use of standard errors is illustrated in the census book by the following example :

"Let us assume that for a particular city with a population of 100,000 . . . there were an estimated 900 persons 10 years of age who were enrolled in schools . . . Table A shows that the standard

error for an estimate of 900 in areas with 100,000 inhabitants is about 70. Consequently, the chances are 2 out of 3 that the figure that would have been obtained from a complete count of the number of persons 10 years of age that are enrolled in schools differs by less than 70 from the sample estimate. It also follows that there is only 1 chance in 100 that a complete census result would differ by as much as 175, that is by about 2-1/2 times the number given in the table." (*)

III.

The census publications are primarily useful in providing quantitative data about persons whose marital life has been disrupted. They do not provide any information about family disruption as such. Once the family is disrupted, the marital status of the spouses may change several times. Separated persons may divorce, become reconciled or widowed, divorced persons may remarry, and married persons may separate, divorce or die. The number of people in a given category of marital status is the balance of all people who ever have entered this category, minus those who have left it. Therefore inferences from the number of divorces to that of marriages and vice versa can be made only with qualifications. The vital statistics data, contrarily to the census data, show not the number of personal characteristics but that of events i.e. the number of births, deaths, marriages, that occurred during a given period of time. In most countries, including the United States, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, divorces are the fourth type of "vital" events, but in some other countries, such as Austria, Belgium, Italy, divorces are listed among the judicial statistics. In both cases, the data on divorces are published in the statistical yearbooks of the respective countries, but in different sections of the book.

In most countries divorces are granted by courts, and this differentiates them from other types of vital statistics data. The reason for the meagerness of the data on divorces in the United States

(*) U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population: 1950*, Vol. 11 pp. XXVIII-XXIX.

is due to the fact that, while vital statistics data are collected by the federal administration, divorces are pronounced by state courts. Not all states have a system of central filing, i.e. not all state governments collect data about the divorces granted in the state, and in those states that do not it is difficult to collect information, because the federal administration has no means to force the state courts to produce the data.

Thus in the *Vital Statistics for the United States* issue for 1953, 28 out of 48 states and the District of Columbia reported divorces and annulments (lumped together) by month, 24 states reported legal grounds for the decree, 23 states reported the party to whom the divorce or annulment was granted; 22 states stated the number of reported children under 18 years of age; 23 states reported divorces and annulments by duration of marriage, and only 9 states reported divorces and annulments by the state in which the marriage was performed. Thus data on divorces in the country that seems to have the highest rate of divorce in the Western world are incomplete. The gaps have to be filled by estimates compiled by statisticians working with mathematical formulae. What is here said about the divorce statistics applies, though to a lesser degree, even to marriage statistics: the number of states that reported in 1953 some information about marriage varied between 34 and 12, depending on the question. Among the information about marriages, data can be found that deal with divorces persons. Information about it is given in the following tables: marriages by age and previous marital status of bride and groom: 15 states; marriage by previous marital status of bride and groom (by five years age groups): 19 states; marriages by previous marital status of bride, by previous marital status of groom: 20 states.

It must, however, be underlined that some decades ago the collection of divorce data in the United States was much more thorough. In 1887, data for the period from 1867 to 1886 were collected directly from courts that had divorce jurisdiction. This first edition of *Marriage and Divorce*, published by the Bureau of the Census, is now a bibliographical rarity. For the second time, these data were collected for the period of 1887-1906 and published together with those of the preceding 20 years under the title *Mar-*

riage and Divorce. This book has only 7 tables of marriage data, but contains extensive information about divorces for a 40 year period (46 tables in all). This information includes almost the whole territory of the United States, excepting a few counties where the records had been destroyed by fire or other causes. This publication was so favorably received that it was decided to make in the future a similar collection every decade. But in 1917, because of the war, the data were collected not for the whole decade, but only for one year, viz. 1916. For the period of 1907-1915, estimates were published by the Bureau of the Census, and similar estimates were published for the years of 1917-1921. In 1922, a yearly publication called *Marriages and Divorces* was started devoted mostly to divorces; it was published until 1932. Though the number of the tables varied, and the editors were inclined rather to discontinue tables from the previous years than to introduce new ones, a fair amount of information was collected. In the majority of the eleven issues tables can be found on the following topics : number of marriages by years and states ; marriage rates ; counties with an excess of marriages for non-residents; number of divorces ; divorce rates, party to whom granted; causes of divorce ; children ; by counties. During the years 1926-1936 data on annulments were published; information on the following topics is given : number and rates; causes; whether contested or not contested ; duration of marriage ; annulments by counties ; cross-tabulation of the above variables. The *Marriages and Divorces* issue of 1932 was abbreviated, and in 1933 its publication was discontinued. The official reason given was economy : because of the depression expenses of the government had to be cut. As, however, at the same time the government started to collect various data which had not been collected before and to spend money on various other costly projects, this reason seems dubious.

For the years 1933-1936 estimates of marriages and divorces were made by S. A. Stouffer and L. M. Spencer and published in the *American Journal of Sociology* in January 1939.

For the years 1937-1940 the estimates, based on an almost complete survey, were published by the Bureau of the Census. Later the task of collecting data on marriages and divorces was trans-

ferred from the Bureau of the Census to the National Office of Vital Statistics, a subdivision of the Public Health Service ; the publication of the yearbook *Vital Statistics for the United States* was taken over by this agency. Thus, starting with 1946, data on divorces as collected and reported by the several states were published in the *Vital Statistics for the United States*. The amount and type of data collected have already been discussed.

Selected vital statistics data, including the number of divorces by states and by duration of marriage, with estimates for the non-reporting states, are published in the *Statistical Abstract*.

The National Office of Vital Statistics also publishes "Vital Statistics-Special Reports," which contain preliminary statistical reports, special estimates, cross-tabulations and essays written by individual demographers. Some issues have dealt with problems of family stability, such as mortality by marital status; marriage and divorce in the United States 1937-1945 (estimates and estimating techniques); divorces and annulments by month, by causes, by party to whom granted, by duration of marriage, and by counties: median age of divorcing spouses ; number of children involved in the divorce.

Data on vital statistics are published not only by the federal government of the United States, but also by some state governments. The following states publish information about divorce : Connecticut, Florida, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, New Hampshire, Ohio, and Tennessee. The published data are mostly identical with those published for the same state in the *Vital Statistics*, but some states publish unique data that are not reported by other states and not published by the *Vital Statistics*. This includes information on whether the divorce was contested or not, published in Florida and Massachusetts ; divorces by race in Mississippi ; data on annulments in Connecticut, Florida and Iowa. This last state publishes comprehensive information about personal and property rights awarded when the divorce is granted; occupation of the divorced husband cross-tabulated by occupation of wife ; and, contrary to the traditional practice in the United States, information about the religion of the divorcing parties.

The Vital Statistics data are not necessarily fully reliable. Various vital events may be easily left unreported, but hardly a vital event that has not taken place will ever be reported. Therefore the vital statistics suffer from a systematic error of underreporting, with respect to marriages and marriage disruption. The reporting of divorces being especially faulty, and many data are based on estimates. The formulae for obtaining such estimates can give only approximations of reality. Even more important, divorces are reported only by place of occurrence, because they are granted, at least in the United States, only to resident plaintiffs. The actual residence of the divorcing party might be, however, quite different from that alleged for the purpose of obtaining the divorce. Therefore in some states, like Nevada, the number of divorces granted is much larger than that granted to the actually residing population. The same is true of other divorce mill states.

Moreover, the definitions of terms used are not necessarily given, and the same term can have different meanings in different countries or even in different states of the Union. Thus, in the table on children under 18 years of age reported in divorce and annulment cases in 1953, with 22 states reporting, data for 3 states are incomplete, Kansas and Vermont report the total number of children, Michigan reports children under 17 years of age, Mississippi "minor" children without precise definition of the term, New Hampshire children under 21 years of age, North Dakota "dependent" children under 21 years of age, and Virginia "minor children affected by the divorce."

The term "divorce" is not defined in the *Vital Statistics of the United States*. It may mean absolute divorces only, or also divorces a mensa et thoro. It is expressly stated that annulments are included in the number of divorces whenever they are reported. Therefore, before using the data on divorces, and especially before comparing data from different sources, the definitions must be found out.

The judicial statistics of the United States are neither collected nor published on a national basis. As there are both federal and state courts, the collection of data from the states involves dif-

difficulties. These data have been collected for more than one decade, namely in the years 1932 through 1945, but limited only to criminal statistics. Data on indictments and convictions for crimes were published by the Bureau of the Census under the heading of *Judicial Criminal Statistics*. Among other crimes, information is given about those connected with family stability, namely bigamy, non-support and neglect. This publication, which covered 24 states and the District of Columbia, was discontinued with the issue covering the year 1945. The following cause was given: "The demand on these statistics is considered insufficient to justify the funds and personnel for their collection."

Statistics for individual states, if published, for instance in Maryland and Ohio, are limited to criminal cases. Furthermore, there exist publications of individual courts. Among them there are some that could be of interest, such as *Unmarried mothers in the Philadelphia Municipal Court*, where information is given on causes heard in that court relating to the support of illegitimate children.

United States federal judicial statistics are published in the *Uniform Crime Reports for the United States*, a semi-annual bulletin of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, where persons arrested for crime are cross-classified by crime and age. One of the categories of crime is "offenses against family and children."

In the *Annual Report* of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts data can be found about divorces in the District of Columbia and in the overseas possessions of the United States.

Outside of the United States no information about the difficulties of collecting or incompleteness of the data on marriage disruption is to be found in the respective yearbooks or other publications.

In Austria data on marriage breakdown are published in the *Statistisches Handbuch* under the heading of "judicial statistics," while those on marriages are published in the same book as vital events. The information on marriage disruption given is limited to absolute divorces, classified by causes, number of children, age of the spouses at marriage, difference in age, and length of marriage.

Some further data can be found in *Statistische Nachrichten* ; No. 2 (11) of November 1947, for instance, contains information about all family disruption, divorces, legal separations and annulments, that took place in 1946.

In Belgium two sources of information come into consideration. In the *Annuaire Statistique de la Belgique et du Congo Belge* the time series of divorces is published, starting with 1830, with data for each fifth year until World War I and for every year since. Furthermore, data are classified according to provinces, age of the spouses, and length of the marriage. In the *Bulletin Statistique*, a monthly publication, divorces and separations are included in the judiciary statistics. The number of suits is given, those granted, rejected and withdrawn are crossclassified by cause, also data on the number of children and length of marriage are included. Divorces and separations are treated in different tables. A table in the chapter on judicial statistics gives the marital distribution of convicted criminals by sex. Another table of this chapter treats juvenile delinquency.

In *The Canada Year Book*, under the heading of " Vital Statistics, " the number of divorces is given for every province. In the chapter " Crime and Delinquency " information about the marital status of convicted persons can be found. In the classification of offenses, there is a special class of " offenses against females, " where a great many different Offenses from abortion to wife desertion are lumped together. Furthermore, there is information about juvenile delinquents, by province, age and sex, the number of offenses, education, and the family of the delinquent

In the Danish *Statistik Arbog* the problem of marriage dissolution is handled in the following way : the whole number of dissolved marriages is classified according to how they were dissolved: by death or by divorce. Marriages dissolved by death are further classified into those dissolved by the death of the husband and those dissolved by the death of the wife, while marriages dissolved by divorce are classified according to who granted the divorce . the court, the ministry of justice, or the prefecture. In this year book

also a time series of marriages and divorces is published, starting with 1801. In the Danish judiciary statistics a number of offenses are given that are of interest from the point of view of family stability : bigamy, incest, seduction, sex crimes, infanticide. Moreover, a category of civil cases is called " matrimonial litigations. "

In France, most information about marriage disruption is published in the *Statistique du Mouvement de Population*, where information is found about age, duration of marriage, average age at divorce, marital status previous to marriage, and the spouse to whom the divorce was granted. Furthermore, in the issue of 1948-49 the proportion of the marriages celebrated in a given year and dissolved by divorce in the succeeding years is calculated ; in this way information is given about divorces, not on the basis of the year when the divorce was granted but of the year when the marriage was celebrated.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, the principal statistical publication is the *Statistik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, already mentioned. It is a series of publications on various topics, including vital and judicial statistics. In the volumes on judicial statistics we find information about the criminal cases brought before the courts, by sex, age (starting with 14), former crimes of the defendant, as well as by the sentence pronounced. Among the crimes there are several dealing with marriage and family : desertion, abandonment of children, bigamy, adultery, incest, non-payment of alimony or support, squandering of family property, and crimes against morals.

Another German statistical source book is *Statistisches Jahrbuch für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. There an approach is found similar to that adopted in Denmark : marriage disruption is classified according to how the marriages were disrupted — by death or by decision of the court. This last category is divided into divorces, separations and annulments. The usual cross-classification is made, that by age of the parties, by causes and by the number of children, but several other interesting variables are added;

thus information is given whether the case was contested or not, and which spouse was found guilty.

Not only the federal government of Germany, but also governments of several of the Länder publish statistical data. Thus Bavaria has a *Statistisches Jahrbuch für Bayern* where several tables on divorces are included. Here the divorces are cross-tabulated in the usual way (by age, causes, children), except that a table on differences in age of the marriage partners is added.

In Great Britain, data on marriage disruption are published separately for England and Wales and separately for Scotland. *The Registrar General's Statistical Review of England and Wales* publishes information on "dissolutions and annulments, petitions filed and decrees made absolute" for the years starting with 1876. The absolute decrees are crossclassified by cause, age and number of children. In the *Annual Report of the Registrar General for Scotland* there is also a table on marital conditions at time of marriage. Another British publication is the *Annual Abstract of Statistics for the whole United Kingdom*. A table on divorce proceedings is included in the judiciary statistics. Here divorces are divided into dissolutions of marriage, nullity of marriage, and judicial separations; the number of petitions filed, by whom filed, as well as the number of decrees nisi granted, are given. One such table refers to England and Wales, and another to Scotland. A number of tables deal with crimes and offenses committed by juveniles, i.e. persons under 17 years of age. The offenses are classified into very broad categories, and therefore it is impossible to say which of them have anything to do with the family. Similar broad classification is used for the offenses committed by adults.

In the chapter on judicial statistics of the Italian statistical year book *Annuario Statistico Italiano* there is information on civil suits pertaining to marriage and on civil suits concerning minors. The classification of crimes comprises a special category of "crimes against the family." The categories of crimes are cross-classified by marital status, education and age of the criminals. In another publication, *Compendio Statistico Italiano*, there are data on illegitimate births and also a chapter on justice, that includes judicial

decrees on separation, annulments and foreign divorces, no divorces are granted under Italian law and also on legitimation and adoption.

In the *Jearcijfers voor Nederland*, published by the Dutch government, chapter on vital statistics, data about divorces and judicial separations are given separately. Divorces are cross-tabulated by duration of marriage and number of living children not yet of age, while separations are crosstabulated only by number of children. In the chapter on "Justice and Prisons" there are also data that might be connected with family stability, such as information about cases tried in the juvenile courts, children put under supervision, cases on parental authority and guardianship.

In the Norwegian *Statistisk Arbok* there is only one table on divorces and legal separations. A rather extensive chapter on judicial statistics is constructed in a way that no information about family stability can be obtained from it.

In the Swedish *Statistisk Arsbok* the population is classified by province and marital status : single, married, widowed and divorced. The marital status is cross-tabulated by sex and age. Special information is given about the agricultural as compared with the non-agricultural population. The divorces are cross-tabulated according to the age of the divorcing spouses, the number of children, and causes; separations, by rural and urban population. In the criminal statistics, in the table listing crimes by the categories of offenses there is a special category of "offenses against the family."

The Swiss *Statistisches Jahrbuch* gives data on marriages and remarriages. As far as divorces, legal separations and annulments are concerned, the number of petitions and their disposition, as well as the preferred causes, are given by cantons and cities. An interesting table is that of the "balance of marriages" : from the number of marriages celebrated in a given year the number of marriages disrupted is subtracted (the latter divided into those disrupted by death and those disrupted by divorce) and the balance is given by years starting with 1881. A further table deals with illegitimate children. In the criminal statistics, the classification of crimes includes a special category of offenses against the family. The appendix

of the *Jahrbuch*, called "International Comparisons," contains a table of divorce rates of 12 countries, including the United States, for the years 1900-1950.

IV.

Beside the statistical data published by the governments, there are also some published by non-governmental organizations as well as by private investigators and scholars. *Census Data for the City of Chicago* was published in 1920 and 1930 by Ernest W. Burgess and Charles Newcomb, and in 1934 by Charles S. Newcomb and Richard O. Lang. In these publications data on marital status are given by small territorial units — the census tracts — of which there are more than 900 in the city of Chicago.

Another collection of statistical data on the city of Chicago was published by Melvin L. Dollar. It is called *1934 Chicago Census Data Supplementary Tables, Family Statistics*. As its title shows, his work deals only with data about the family, grouped by 120 sub-community areas. Here the type of family and number of offspring is cross-tabulated by the number of persons in the household, by rentals, etc. The family types according to this book are "normal" and "broken." "Broken families" are defined as groups of one parent living with his or her children, but without any differentiation as to what is the cause of the absence of the other parent: divorce, separation, or death. Also if husband and wife are divorced or separated, but neither is living with children, the family is not defined as "broken." This lessens the value of this publication for the study of family stability.

Among the non governmental organizations in the United States, first of all the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company ought to be mentioned. This company publishes a *Statistical Bulletin*, where data about family stability are often included. Here are some titles of the items published: "Whom do the widowed and divorced marry," "Trend of divorces," "One child in nine in a broken family," "Chances of remarriage," and "Have broken families increased?"

The religion of the spouses can be assumed to have a great influence on their proneness to divorce or separation, but the official statistical publications in the United States have no data whatsoever about religion. Therefore, statistical data published by religious bodies can be of great significance for explaining the incidence of various forms of marriage disruption. The Roman Catholic Church has a great influence, being the virtually only denomination that prohibits all absolute divorce. Therefore *The National Catholic Almanac*, published by St. Anthony's Guild, is important as it gives information about the number of Catholics by states and dioceses, and the percentage of Catholics in the population. Data about the family disruption suits in the ecclesiastical courts of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago, namely about separations a mensa et thoro and annulments, are published by John Thomas in the *American Catholic Family*.

Studies made by Lean C. Marshall and Geoffrey May, sponsored by Johns Hopkins University, under the title of *The Divorce Court*, though limited to the states of Maryland and Ohio, give highly interesting information about actions on divorces a vinculo, divorces a mensa, annulments and alimony. These actions are classified according to the sex of the plaintiff, the residence of the parties, and the type of service on the defendant. Tables are given where the same actions are cross-tabulated with the presence or absence of children, the duration of the marriage, and the disposition of the actions. Detailed information is given on children involved, as well as to whom the custody of minor children involved, as well as to whom the custody of minor children was awarded. Further data can be found on the type of relief sought, on the type of evidence adduced and on the time taken by various stages of the process.

Detailed information on suits connected with family stability in the courts of San Francisco, Chicago, Indianapolis, Toledo, Cincinnati and Milwaukee is given by Maxine Boord Virtue in *Family Cases in Court*. The organization of the courts that have jurisdiction over family cases and various methods used by those courts in or-

der to preserve the family are described. Unfortunately, statistical data are almost completely lacking in this book.

Data providing information on marital adjustment are given in *Predicting Success or Failure in Marriage* by Ernest W. Burgess and Leonard C. Cottrell, Jr. Here marital adjustment classified as "poor," "fair" and "good" is cross-tabulated with sociological, psychological, economic and cultural factors.

William J. Good in *After Divorce* describes a sample of divorced persons, that was taken from the records of the courts of Wayne County, Michigan, the county where the city of Detroit is situated. The sample included only urban mothers, aged 20 to 38 years at the time of divorce; they were interviewed between two months and twenty six months after divorce was granted. Numerous statistical tables give information about the social backgrounds of the couple, various aspects of their marital life, the conflicts between the spouses, separation, divorce, and post-divorce adjustments, as well as about the children of the divorced couple.

Information about divorces in Chicago was collected and published by Ernest R. Mowrer in *Disorganization, Personal and Social*. More than twenty statistical tables deal with various aspects of divorce and non-support in Cook County, Illinois, and in the city of Chicago. Moreover, very interesting information is given in tables that show for Chicago the correlation between divorce and other variables used by the census, such as mean age, size of family, percent of divorced persons, such as mean age, size of family, percent of divorced persons, mean rental, percent of illiteracy, etc., and between divorce and other aspects of social and personal disorganization: juvenile delinquency, illegitimacy, insanity, suicide.

The newest book that gives data relevant to the problem of marriage stability is *American Families* by Paul C. Glick. It is based on the 1950 census of the United States and has a chapter on separation, divorce and widowhood, with statistical tables on the age at divorce or separation cross-tabulated by years of school; rates of separation and divorce by age; median years of school completed by marital status; income by marital status, etc.

V.

The question naturally arises as to how helpful the existing data are for the study of the problem of marriage stability. First of all, it appears that the requirements of the study of family stability have so far played only a small role in the computation of the statistics of the several countries. Census data, where the classification of marital status is limited to the categories : single, married, widowed and divorced, and even those with the fifth category of legally separated, simply ignore the fact that there are also persons whose marriages are disrupted only *de facto*, but not *de jure*. The habit of lumping together the less numerous categories of marital status, the widowed and the divorced, is even more pernicious for the problem under consideration, because it makes many tables with important cross-tabulations virtually worthless for our purposes. In household and family statistics the problem of broken families is seldom elucidated. How many children of broken marriages live with the families of their remarried parents cannot even be inferred.

The problem becomes still more complicated when we look for data that by existing methods cannot be gathered at all. Here belong first of all the true causes of divorce and, most important, the number of *de facto* separations. Every time a divorce petition is filed a " cause " or " ground " for such action has to be stated. One would, however, be ill-advised if he were to take those alleged causes to be the real ones. Usually those causes are alleged that (1) are considered by the law valid legal grounds for family disruption, (2) are least unpleasant to be made public, (3) are easiest to prove. The plaintiff uses normally the line of least resistance, especially if the case is not contested.

Beneath the layer of official grounds there is a second layer of causes that the individual consciously believes are to be blamed for the unsuccessful family life. While he or she knows them, he might not care to make them public. However, the psychologists tell us that the conscious causes still are not the " true " ones. Below them there is a third layer, hidden from everyone including the person concerned. These are the subconscious " true " causes, deeply buried and remaining unknown.

How to get at these true causes, at the third or even at the second layer? Obviously not through the records of the courts. Inexperienced census enumerators would hardly be able to cope with the task. Possibly the best approach would be to use a survey made by institutions specializing in survey taking. Having a nation-wide organization of trained and experienced interviewers and analysts, such an institution might be able to obtain satisfactory answers from a representative sample of the population, at least as far as the second layer of causes is concerned.

Equally difficult is the problem of *de facto* separations. As there are no official records of such separations, no numerical data can be officially published. Some indication about their number could be eventually found in the records of the courts, but only if suits of desertion, non-support, etc. were filed, and in many cases they are not. Some data could be procured by social workers, but only about those cases that have come to their attention. This would not much help to estimate the number of all such separations. As demographers and actuaries have devised various intricate formulae to estimate data that are not collected, it can be presumed that in the future they will be able to estimate the number of separations from the number of separated persons that is given by the census, but no such formula has as yet been developed.

Statistical data expressed in absolute numbers are not of great value for the investigator. It is easier to use them when they are expressed in measures that make comparisons possible. Instead of saying that so-and-so many individuals in a given population are single, married, divorced, etc., it is preferable to express it in percentages or ratios. Instead of saying that so-and-so many divorces happen in a country during a given period of time, it is preferable to express them in rates. What population is to be used as a basis for calculating the percentages, ratios and rates depends mostly on convenience. Whether the investigator will express the separated as a percent of the total population, of the married population, or of the total non-single population, depends on what he wishes to find out. The same is true of the calculation of the rates. Numerous percentages and rates are often already given in the official publications of the census or of the vital statistics, usually calculated

on the basis of the total population. Thus the number of divorces is expressed in the vital statistics of the United States in yearly rates per one thousand population, and in European statistics per ten thousand population, or even per one hundred thousands. Some countries use also another type of rates : e.g. Switzerland gives yearly divorce rates per ten thousand married population. This method is theoretically better, because rates should be calculated on the basis of the " population exposed to the risk, " and of course only the married, including separated, population is exposed to the risk of divorce. But, on the other hand, thus calculated divorce rates could not be compared with other vital rates of the same population, because of lack of a common denominator. What is here said about rates also applies to the percentages of the several categories of the marital status. They are published taking as 100 percent the total population of the given group. For the investigator it is easiest to use the rates and percentages as they are given, except when for the purpose of his several categories of the marital status. They are published taking as 100 percent the total population of the given group. For the investigator it is easiest to use the rates and percentages as they are given, except when for the purpose of his study the recalculation on a different basis is deemed necessary.

Another important problem is that of comparability of rates and percentages. In order to be able to compare data of two groups or of the same group at two different periods, data about various sub-groups of the population must be obtained. The proportion of broken marriages might be specially high or specially low in a given population, simply because of its composition, since various subgroups may be more or less prone to family disruption. The amount of family disruption of two populations can be compared only if the composition of each of them is known.

Thus an important item the investigator has to know about any population is the numerical size of the biological, socio-economic, religious, ethnic, racial, cultural, educational, occupational and other sub-groups of that population. Ideally, he should know the differential rates of family disruption for every sub-group, but data can be obtained only about some of them.

Two populations differing in their composition may have an extremely different rate of incidence of family disruption, in spite of identity of legal norms. Thus in France in 1944 the number of divorces per 100,000 population varied between a maximum of 213 in the Département of Seine Inférieure and a minimum of 10 in the Départements of Ardèche and of Lozère. (*) Such vast differences have occurred within the frame of the same Code Civil, identical for the whole country. Even more characteristically, in the city of Chicago in the years 1929-1935 the divorce rate in the neighborhoods where it was highest was eighteen times that of the neighborhoods where it was lowest. (**) This makes comparison and analysis difficult if not impossible. In order to be comparable, the percentages and rates have to be standardized, i.e. calculated so as to be made independent of the differences in the composition of two or more populations. The relationship between two rates might be reversed when the crude rates are standardized. Thus population A may have a higher divorce rate than population B, but at the same time the percentage of the urban population may be higher in A than in B. When the rates are standardized for the urban-rural distribution, i.e. when the differences of the residential distribution are mathematically taken into account, it may easily happen that the divorce rate in B will be higher than in A. Therefore the percentages and the rates may have to be standardized for the main sub-groups that can influence them. In other words, the characteristics influencing the rate or percentage must be kept mathematically constant.

When the investigator is interested in the relationship between variables, he will almost never find that one variable can be fully explained by the other. Thus if the investigator is interested in the relationship between the legal norms governing family life and the prevalence of family disruption, it is not to be expected that all differences in the prevalence of the disruption can be explained by

(*) Direction de la Statistique Générale : Statistique du Mouvement de Population, Année 1944. Première Partie. Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1947, p. XXXI.

(**) Ernest R. Mowrer, *Disorganization, Personal and Social*, Chicago, J. B. Lippincott Company, 1942, p. 506.

differences in the legal system. There are many other factors that influence the number of divorces and separations. Thus the question to be asked is not "Is A caused by B?", but "What is the association between A and B? How far does B influence A?". If both variables can be expressed in numbers, the association between any two variables can be calculated.

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