Family and Changing Gender Roles

Canada 1994 to 2013

The 2013 International Social Survey Programme, ISSP, module of ‘Family and Changing Gender Roles’ is the fourth replication in a series of attitudinal surveys on social science topics conducted by close to 50 countries around the world. The original module was fielded in 1988 and was replicated in 1994, 2002 and 2013. The module has evolved over the past twenty years, but maintains its focus on attitudes towards family life, work and family life, and the division of household labour and resources within the family unit.

In Canada, only the 2nd and 4th replication of this module have been fielded. What follows is a comparison of attitudes from 1994 to 2013.

Women Work and Family Life

To begin, it’s important to note the principles of question replication within the ISSP as an organization. For each module a drafting group must identify two-thirds of the questions that warrant replication from the previous module. Each question is examined for its value; variation in responses and academic use. The remaining one third of the questions are designed to measure contemporary issues on the topic as identified by the drafting group. These principals ensure researchers can conduct research in overtime series and have measures of new issues as they emerge in society. Since this process has occurred three times since the initial module on ‘Family and Changing Gender Roles’ was designed, the number of comparable questions from 1994 is now 20 of the 60 questions.

The first battery of questions focuses on attitudes towards women, work and family life. The following five questions have been replicated since 1994...

- 1a. Working women can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with their children as a mother who does not work.
- 1b. A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works.
- 1c. All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job.
- 1d. A job is all right, but what most women really want is a home and children.
- 1e. Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay.
Each question was asked on a 5 point Likert scale where 1 was ‘strongly disagree’ and 5 was ‘strongly agree’. The mean score for each question is used as a summary measure for comparison, Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Mean Scores Q1a to Q1e (Scale: 1 strongly disagree > 5 strongly agree)**

In general, what is remarkable about the data presented in Figure 1 is the lack of significant change in attitude in the 18 year span of the two datasets. On average, in 1994 and 2013, Canadians agreed that a working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work, with mean scores of 3.8 on the 5 point scale. Canadians disagree, although not strongly, with the next three questions (2.3 to 2.6); a pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works, all in all family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job, and, a job is all right, but what most women really want is a home and children. Canadians were essentially ambivalent when asked if being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay with mean scores very close to 3 (neither agree nor disagree) on the 5 point scale.

Further bi-variate and multi-variate analysis will help explain the determinants of these attitudes, but the initial data illustrates attitudes regarding the impact working women have on family life have not changed significantly over the past two decades.
While the over-time data shows very little change, how does Canada compare to a selection of other ISSP countries (Norway, Great Britain, Japan, and Poland). Two of the measures from the previous battery are used to examine country differences, ‘A pre-school child is likely to suffer is his or her mother works’ and ‘All in all family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job’, Figure 1.1 and 1.2.

**Figure 1.1: Mean Score Q1b: A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works.**

Although Canadian attitudes have changed very little over time, in some countries the changes have been more significant. In 1994, people from Japan, Norway and Great Britain and Poland all exhibited a higher mean score – more agreement - than Canadians (2.9 to 3.6 vs. 2.6 respectively) with the statement ‘a pre-school child is likely to suffer if his/her mother works’. In 1994, Japan, Norway and Great Britain were just below the neutral mean of 3, with mean scores declining in 2013 to 2 or lower. Poland underwent the most significant change in attitude, going from agreement with this question in 1994 to disagreement with the question in 2013, all while Canadian levels stayed the same.
Changes in attitude from 1994 to 2013 towards the question, ‘All in all, family suffers when the woman has a full-time job’ exhibit a similar trend as with the previous statement. All countries with the exception of Canada have gone from scores just below the neutral point of 3 on the 5 point scale down to 2 or lower, indicating stronger disagreement with the statement. Although very close to the 1994 levels of disagreement to this question in Canada, in 2013, Canadians were slightly less likely to disagree with the statement, although still on the disagreement side of the statement. Poland experienced the most significant change, going from the agreement side of this question in 1994 to the disagreement side (3.3 to 2).

Two questions have been asked since 1994 which measure how much people think women should work with pre-school and school-age...

- Q3a. Do you think women should work outside the home full-time, part-time or not at all when there is a child under school age?
- Q3b. Do you think women should work outside the home full-time, part-time or not at all after the youngest child starts school?

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate Canadians’ responses in 1994 and 2013.
Figure 2: Q3a. Do you think women should work outside the home full-time, part-time or not at all when there is a child under school age?

Less than 20% of Canadians thought in 1994, and in 2013, that mothers should work full-time with under school age children, 17%. There is a difference over time, however, when looking at the percentage of Canadians who think mothers should work part-time, 37% in 1994 to 49% in 2013. Conversely, a lower percentage of Canadians think mothers should stay at home, 46% in 1994 down to 34% in 2013.

When considering whether women should work after the youngest child starts school, the changes over time are smaller, Figure 3.
Figure 3: Q3b Do you think women should work outside the home full-time, part-time or not at all after the youngest child starts school?

Percentage responses

When all the children in the household are in school full time, almost half of Canadians, in 2013, think the mother should be working full time, 49%, an increase of 3% from 1994. The proportion of respondents saying a mother should work part-time has increased from 43% to 47% in 2013. The proportion of respondents saying a mother should stay at home has gone from 11% in 1994 to 4% in 2013.

The majority of Canadians think a mother should work at least part-time when the youngest child starts school. Almost half of Canadians think mothers should go back to work full-time but with all children in school the other half of Canadians, 47%, think working part-time is the best option. Only 4% of Canadians think mothers should stay at home.

Marriage and Family

A number of concepts related to marriage have been measured over time. The following questions have been asked since 1994...

- Q4a. Married people are generally happier than unmarried people.
- Q4b. People who want children ought to get married.
- Q4c. It is all right for a couple to live together without intending getting married.
Q4d. Divorce is usually the best solution when a couple can’t seem to work out their marriage problem.

Using the mean scores for each question, results for the 4 questions on marriage are illustrated.

**Figure 4: Mean Scores for Q4a to Q4d (Scale: 1 strongly disagree > 5 strongly agree)**

![Mean Scores for Q4a to Q4d](image)

Generally, Canadians are on the agreement side of all 4 questions. Agreement with the questions has also increased slightly over time for the first three questions; married people are generally happier, people who want children ought to get married, and it is all right for a couple to live together without intending getting married. Agreement in 1994 and 2013 to the question, ‘It is all right for a couple to live together without getting married’ is the highest of all 4 questions. Canadians agreement with the statement, ‘Divorce is the best solution when a couple can’t seem to work out their marriage problems’, have remained the same over the past twenty years. These results present a polarity of attitude. On the one hand, Canadians increasingly agree that people who want to have children ought to get married, a traditional conservative value, but on the other hand, Canadians agree that it is all right for a couple to live together without getting married, a traditional liberal value. How do these Canadian attitudes compare with other countries within the ISSP, Figure 4.1?
Canada and Japan, over time, are moving towards increased agreement with the statement, ‘People who want to have children ought to get married’, whereas in Norway, Poland and Great Britain the trend is decreasing in agreement over time. All countries, with the exception of Norway, are still, however, on the agreement side of the statement. Norway has moved from agreement to disagreement with the statement that people who want to have children ought to get married.

In Figure 4.2 the same 5 countries are compared on attitudes towards whether couples should live together without getting married.
All countries, over time, are moving towards increased agreement with the statement, ‘It is all right to live together without intending on getting married’. Norway and Canada have the highest levels of agreement with the statement (4.0 and 3.9 in 2013). Japan has moved from the disagreement side of the statement to the agreement side of the statement.

In comparison with other ISSP countries, Canada is maintaining, and increasing, traditional conservative values around the notion of being married if wanting to have children. Only Japan exhibits a similar view while all other countries are exhibiting decreases around this value. Canada, on the other hand is increasing its agreement with liberal values around living together.

Children

A number of questions deal with children and their impact on family life. In 1994, Canadians said the ideal number of children was 2.5 (mean score). In 2013, Canadians said the ideal number of children was 2.6, a slight increase over time.

The impact children have on the family are measured by the two following questions, Figure 5:

- Q7a. Watching children grow up is life’s greatest joy.
- Q7b. Having children interferes too much with the freedom of parents.

**Figure 5: Mean Scores for Q7a and 7b (Scale: 1 strongly disagree > 5 strongly agree)**

Canadians continue from 1994 to 2013 to agree that watching children grow up is life’s greatest joy. This attitude has increased slightly over time. Canadians also continue from 1994 to 2013 to generally disagree that having children interferes too much with the freedom of parents. This attitude has also become slightly stronger since 1994.

**Division of Income**

Two questions exam how income is used in the household. The first is asked on a five-point agreement Likert scale ‘Both should contribute to the household income’ where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, Figure 6.
The mean score in both 1994 and 2013 was on the agreement side of the statement that both should contribute to the household income; in 1994 the mean score was 3.6 and in 2013, 3.5. Interestingly, agreement has gone down slightly over time. One would assume, with more women in the workforce\(^1\) an increasing number of people would agree that both partners should contribute to the household income.

A second question looked at how income is managed by the partners, Figure 7.

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Figure 7: Percentage Response: How do you and your spouse/partner organize the income that one or both of you receive?

The most common method of organizing family income in 1994 and in 2013 was to pool all the income. Fewer Canadians in 2013, when compared to 1994, said they pool ‘some’ of their income and a higher percentage of Canadians said they ‘keep their own money’ in 2013 than in 1994. It is interesting that over half of Canadians pool their money, a somewhat conservative method of handling household expenses. When considering a greater proportion of women are entering the workforce coupled with getting married and having children at a later age\(^2\) the assumption might be that pooling all money might be on the decline rather than the incline. How does this compare with other ISSP countries, Figure 7.1?

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Figure 7.1: Country by % Pool all money

Norway, Poland and Great Britain all have a higher percentage of respondents than Canada who said, in 1994 and 2013, they pooled all their money. Japan had the lowest percentage of respondents who said they pooled all their money. In all 4 countries, other than Canada, the proportion of respondents who said they pooled all of their money has declined. In Canada, from 1994 to 2013, there has been a small increase in the percentage of respondents who said they pooled all their money.

**Age**

As a final point of analysis, the relationship of age and a selection of the questions are examined. Cross-tabulations with all Likert scale questions (1 agree to 5 disagree) were run against a grouped age variable, 18 to 24, 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64 and 65 +. Only statistically significant results at the .05 are reported. To interpret Figure 8, a positive Gamma indicates the older you are the more likely you are to disagree with the statement and, a negative Gamma indicates the older you are the more likely you are to agree with the statement. Conversely, this also means a positive Gamma indicates the younger you are the more likely you are to agree with the statement and a negative Gamma indicates the younger you are the more likely you are to disagree with the statement.
Figure 8: Grouped age and all questions: 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Gamma</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married people are generally happier</td>
<td>-.214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married people who want children ought to get married</td>
<td>-.250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce is the best solution when marital problems can not be solved</td>
<td>-.216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is all right for a couple to live together without intending to get married</td>
<td>.205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both should contribute to the household income</td>
<td>.206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children interfere too much with parents freedom</td>
<td>.154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Looking at Figure 8, older people are more likely than younger people to agree; married people are generally happier, married people who want children ought to get married and divorce is the best solution when marital problems can’t be solved. Older people are more likely than younger people to disagree; it is all right for a couple to live together without intending to get married, both should contribute to the household income and children interfere too much with parents freedom.

Conclusion

In general, the results indicate very small changes in attitudes towards working mothers, children, marriage and finances in the past two decades in Canada. Canadians, on average, agree working mothers can establish just as good a relationship with their children as mothers who do not work and, on average, disagree that a child or family life suffers when the mother is working and all women really want is a home and children. Canadians are not, however, as sure that being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay. Canadians are more likely in 2013 than in 1994 to think mothers should work part-time than stay at home when their children are not at school, but the percentage of respondents who think mothers should work full-time with young children has not changed. Once all children are at school, Canadians are more likely to say mothers should work full-time or part-time than stay at home. With regards to marriage, Canadians generally agree that married people are happier, people who want to have children should get married and living together is all right. These sentiments have increased somewhat over time. Canadians agree, although not strongly, that divorce is a good solution when a couple can’t work out a problem. This attitude has not changed over time.

Canadians think the ideal number of children is between 2 and 3 and also agree that watching children grow up is life’s greatest joy. They disagree that having children interferes with the freedom of parents. Canadians agree that both partners should contribute to household income and are most likely to pool their income.
When breaking these attitudes down by age, there are some differences between older and younger Canadians. Older Canadians are more likely to have conservative values towards having children and being married as well as living together. They are more likely to think married people are happier and divorce is a good solution if problems can’t be worked out. There are not significant differences between older people and younger people when it comes to women and work.

When comparing Canadians’ attitudes to other countries, there are some notable differences. While Canadian attitudes have been stable when considering the effects of working mothers on children and the family - Canadians disagree that the child or family life suffers – in other countries attitudes have changed.

Canada and Japan, over time, are moving towards increased agreement with the statement, ‘People who want to have children ought to get married’, whereas in Norway, Poland and Great Britain the agreement is declining. Norway has moved significantly from agreement to disagreement with the statement that people who want to have children ought to get married.

All countries are moving towards increased agreement with the statement, ‘it is all right for a couple to live together without intending to get married’.

Most Canadians pooled all of their household income in 1994 and a slightly higher proportion of Canadians pool their income in 2013. In Japan, Norway and Poland the trend is towards a lower proportion of households pooling their income, although in Norway and Poland the proportion of households pooling their income in 2013 is still higher than in Canada.