

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

MARRIAGE HISTORY IN DESERTION

A STUDY WITH RESPECT TO CERTAIN PERIODS  
WHERE SEPARATION OF THE MARRIAGE  
PARTNERS SEEMS MOST  
LIKELY TO OCCUR

Being the Report of a Research Project  
Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of  
the Requirements for the Degree  
of Master of Social Work.

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In recent years there appears to have been a growing interest in the causes and effects of marital discord. That this interest is justified is indicated by the fact that the family is so generally accepted as the basic unit of our society. There can be little doubt that desertion is one of the effects of marital discord since it is difficult to conceive of wilful separation in families where happiness prevails. The problem of desertion was first suggested as a topic for study by Mr. C.A. Patrick, Director of the Winnipeg City Public Welfare Department, who as a former member of the Canadian Welfare Council was well aware of the growing extent of the problem both locally and nationally. Five other Winnipeg welfare agencies agreed to participate and the topic was accepted as a pilot group research project by the School of Social Work at the University of Manitoba.

The purpose of this particular study, which is only one aspect of the topic as a whole, is primarily to see if there are periods in the course of married life when desertions seem most likely to occur, and to examine the groups separating at these periods in relation to characteristic similarities or differences. The specific characteristics to be studied will consist of the age of the marriage partners, their cultural backgrounds including nationality,

ethnic origin, religion, and education. Also such matters as drinking problems, employment, and whether or not children were involved will be considered.

Thus the questions with which it will be concerned, in addition to the length of time married life continues in desertion cases, will involve such as the following: What is the age difference in these couples? At what age did they marry? Are they of similar or different cultural backgrounds? Is drinking a characteristic problem? Are these marriages childless to any extent? Are the wives usually pregnant at the time of desertion? Are any trends discernable?

The necessary information for the study will be obtained from the files of six Winnipeg welfare agencies. Only files which were open during the month of October 1957, and in which one of the marriage partners was still resident in the City of Winnipeg proper, will be used.

The overall study of desertion was designed as a project to assist the welfare agencies towards a better understanding of one of their most perplexing problems. It is hoped that at least it will highlight some areas that merit further investigation. There can be no doubt as to the importance of the problem to every individual citizen in terms of cost alone, to say nothing of wrecked children's lives and the unhappiness of the adults involved.

It seems logical to assume that desertion is only one stage in a process of marital unhappiness which progresses

through varying degrees of discord in the home and finally may culminate in separation, desertion, or divorce. This being so, the individual personalities of the people involved would be of prime importance. However, this study will be limited to a consideration of the general characteristics noted above. The people studied will be necessarily clients of the collaborating Winnipeg agencies and not all Winnipeg agencies were represented. Furthermore we do not know the proportion of desertion cases that never come to the attention of welfare agencies. Thus a valid study of desertion in the City of Winnipeg will not be possible. In addition to these limitations there are others which should be mentioned. Agency records had to be depended on for information since interviewing of clients was not possible. These records were often incomplete and were not prepared for the purpose for which they were used. They were written by a great number of different social workers having various biases and points of view which could not be checked. Since the individual agencies prepared their records primarily for their own particular purposes, often information was not available in sufficient detail or consistency. Due to time limitations a very small sample had to be used for the study. The absence of an adequate "control" group for comparison made it impossible to be sure that the particular characteristic under consideration was actually the one studied or whether some other more deeply seated factor was operating to produce the apparent result. Finally of course,

there is the limitation imposed by our definition of desertion, which not only restricted the original selection of cases, but also, in its modified form, reduced the final sample by approximately 150 case histories.

For the purpose of the project "desertion" was defined in a manner that would include four factors which must be co-existent. The marriage partners must be living apart without mutual agreement; there must be wilful non-support; there must be intent to desert exhibited by one of the partners; and finally one partner must be a resident of Winnipeg. The definition was interpreted so as to include several other types of situation. Cases were accepted for sampling when the husband was living apart wilfully and where non-support existed, or when he was living apart wilfully and there was a court order to support, or when the wife was living apart wilfully and either did not follow up with a court action, or did so and the court ruling was not in her favour.

Common-law unions are defined as those cases in which the deserting and the deserted partners had been living as man and wife immediately prior to the desertion, without the benefit of a legal marriage ceremony. Throughout this study the terms "marriage", "married life", or "marriage partner" will be deemed to include common-law unions or the partners in such an agreement.

The data for this study was obtained from the records of the six collaborating welfare agencies. However the records

from one of these was later eliminated in the sampling process. The information was gleaned from any or all parts of the records, and these were read by ten second year students at the School of Social Work using a schedule which had been devised for the purpose. It was found very difficult to arrive at a definition in desertion which would be not only reasonable and adequate for the purpose, but would also allow adequate representation to each of the participating agencies. A total of 773 cases were secured but it was realized that there was insufficient time allotted for these to be read. The total was therefore reduced using a method of random sampling and the final total was made up of 110 cases.

The writer proposes to analyze the results by first obtaining the number of years of married life in each case. This will be done by subtracting the date of marriage from the date of desertion assuming that the desertion is a final one in each case. The results will be tabulated in five year intervals and compared with results obtained by E.R. Mowrer in Chicago in 1921.<sup>1</sup>

A graph will then be presented showing the years of married life plotted against the number of cases in a given year. It is hoped that this graph will indicate, by the way in which the cases are clustered or spread out, whether or not there are periods in the life of the marriage

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<sup>1</sup>Ernest R. Mowrer, Family Disorganization (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927), p. 104.



when desertion seems most likely to occur. If possible, three such groups will be chosen on the basis of the graphical picture and compared with reference to the various characteristics such as cultural background mentioned above. The method followed throughout will be to calculate the percentage distribution of the cases in all three groups for various class intervals or categories and tabulate the results for comparison. The age difference of the marriage partners will be shown in intervals of three years. The age of the man and of the woman at the time of marriage will be presented using four different age categories. In the matter of cultural background including the religion, nationality, and ethnic origin of the partners the criterion used will be that of whether these are like or unlike. The assumption here is that if the backgrounds are dissimilar they are likely to be antagonistic. The comparison with regard to education will be on the basis of whether one partner seemed to be superior, inferior, or similar to the other partner in this regard. Comparative figures will be presented descriptively, indicating the proportion of common-law marriages, male problem drinkers, men unemployed at the time of desertion, childless marriages, and wives pregnant at the time of desertion, which are distributed in the sample. In all instances the proportion of cases not reported will be indicated for each group so that the extent to which this limitation applies in a given instance can be estimated.

During the past three or four decades a great deal of interest has been aroused in problems related to marriage. Possibly this was due in part to the vastly increasing numbers of people who made use of divorce as a solution to their problems, and to the changing more tolerant attitudes of the general population towards divorce as a solution in many cases. Also, there can be little doubt that the discoveries and theories of Sigmund Freud concerning human personality proved immensely stimulating to the fields of Sociology, Psychology, and many other kindred arts and sciences. Whatever the cause, the results of numerous studies of marriage and its problems have been published in recent years, particularly in the United States.

In the past a considerable amount of effort has been expended in studying the effect of time on marriage. E.R. Mowrer found that in forty-eight percent of the desertion cases he studied, and in fifty-two percent of the divorce cases, the couples had lived together less than five years. He comments on these results under the heading "Perilous First Five Years."<sup>1</sup>

Burgess and Cottrell pointed out that, based on United States census figures for the period 1887 - 1906, one might infer that the first year of marriage was the most difficult one in which to achieve an adjustment, but that this

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 86-101.

became progressively easier with each succeeding year. However, their own findings based on a study of 526 couples, indicate that the opposite is true for the first six years of married life.<sup>1</sup> They reported that 55.7 percent of the couples they studied had "good adjustments" as against only 22.9 percent who rated "poor" in this regard. Of those couples who had been married five or six years however only 29.4 percent rated "good" while 36.9 percent obtained a "poor" adjustment score. Couples married from two to four years did not differ significantly from each other, and obtained ratings intermediate between those of couples married one year and those married five to six years.<sup>2</sup>

In 1938 L.M. Terman published some results based on a study of 800 couples in which happiness was shown as a function of the length of time married. These results indicated that happiness is high in the first one or two years declining swiftly to a low point after from six to eight years of married life. Following this low point some improvement is noted over the next few years, and eventually after twenty years of marriage the couple is almost as happy as was true in the beginning phase. Terman interpreted the low point in his results as being due to the

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<sup>1</sup>Ernest W. Burgess and Leonard S. Cottrell, Predicting Success or Failure in marriage (New York: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1939), p. 246.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 247.

diminishing effect of the honeymoon together with the increasing effect of discord.<sup>1</sup>

The report of a Manitoba Government survey of desertions in this Province, published in 1931, showed that out of fifty cases reporting only three occurred in the first year of marriage and in only five instances did it occur under five years. Ten cases were reported in the fifth and sixth year. It was believed that a graphical interpretation of the results would indicate a fairly quick rise in the desertion rate to the sixth year of marriage, a less rapid rise to the tenth year after which the curve would tend to flatten out or fall.<sup>2</sup>

We have thus seen emphasis placed on certain periods in married life, such as the first year or two, by various authors for various and sometimes seemingly conflicting reasons. The fifth and sixth, as well as the fifteenth and sixteenth years, seem also to be significant times in the course of a marriage for one reason or another. The writer hopes that the present study will throw some little additional light on the relationship, if any, between desertion rate and the length of time married, or at least indicate certain areas of this aspect worthy of further study and research.

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<sup>1</sup>L.M. Terman, Psychological Factors in Marital Happiness (New York: McGraw Hill, 1938), p. 177.

<sup>2</sup>Province of Manitoba: Department of Health and Public Welfare, The Problem of Family Desertion in Manitoba, A Report Prepared by the Welfare Supervision Board Manitoba (Winnipeg: The Queen's Printer, 1931), pp. 11 - 12.

## CHAPTER II

### METHOD

The study of desertion was undertaken as a group project by the ten students studying to complete the second academic year of the Manitoba School of Social Work. These all collaborated in working out a suitable definition, devising the schedule, sampling, and collecting and tabulating the necessary data. Although each student was concerned primarily with only one individual aspect of the problem, many of the difficulties encountered within the various aspects were discussed by the group as a whole. The entire project was, of course, carried on under the direction of an instructor from the school.

The experimental population was limited in area to the City of Winnipeg, and in time to case records open during the month of October 1957. Interviewing of clients to obtain data was not possible, but case records were made available by six welfare agencies of the City of Winnipeg. The agencies thus co-operating in the project consisted of the Children's Aid Society of Greater Winnipeg, the Winnipeg City Public Welfare Department, the Family Bureau of Greater Winnipeg, the Manitoba Government Division of Public Welfare Services, the Family Court, and the Child Guidance Clinic of Greater Winnipeg. Unfortunately the Juvenile Court was unable to participate in the project due to a number of recent staff changes which would have made such participation difficult and possibly interfered with the normal functioning of the court.

As will be seen later, sample records contributed by the Child Guidance Clinic were eventually eliminated from the sample. It should be noted also, that the proportion of desertion cases in the general population of the area under consideration having any contact with social agencies, is not known. Hence the validity of the study insofar as the general population of Winnipeg is concerned, may be seriously questioned.

Initially there was found to be a total of 773 case records which fell within the limits imposed by our first tentative definition of desertion. A "trial run" was instituted in which many of the records contributed by each agency were read by the students. This pointed up difficulties and imperfections both in the schedule and in the original definition of desertion. As a result the definition was modified, and the schedule revised to exclude ambiguities and questions for which answers were not likely to be found. In general the aim was to obtain a schedule which would call for as few valued judgments as possible on the part of the reader, and which would also provide only questions which could for the most part be answered on a "yes or no" basis. The schedule as finally adopted and used will be found in Appendix A of this report.

It was also realized that due to time limitations the size of the sample would have to be drastically reduced, and it was decided to diminish the original 773 case records to approximately one-third of their former total. This was

done by a method of random sampling in which the relative proportion of cases submitted by each Agency was maintained in the final sample. If the same case was drawn twice it was replaced by a new sample. Further duplications were also eliminated by checking to see where two or more Agencies might be submitting records pertaining to the same individual client. Where this occurred further selections were made to make up the difference. In this manner 260 sample records were obtained. However another difficulty was encountered when it was found that many of these 260 cases did not now fall within our modified definition of desertion and had to be discarded for this reason. This eliminated completely the records submitted by the Child Guidance Clinic and finally reduced the size of our sample to 111 case records. Unfortunately two of these were eventually discovered to be duplicates, too late for appropriate changes to be made in some of the reports including this one. The relatively small size of the final sample of course imposes another limitation regarding the validity of the results obtained.

The actual reading of the records was done in groups, and in accordance with an instruction sheet which was prepared to insure as far as possible, uniformity of interpretation of the questions on the schedule. Whenever problems arose these were discussed and definite rulings made. Completed schedules were checked to minimize the possibility of errors and/or omissions. Any or all sections of the file

were consulted in an effort to obtain as many answers as possible, but many of the records were much too lengthy to permit an adequate perusal. Thus a large proportion of the answers had to be recorded as "not given". In some few instances supplementary records such as that of a child of the family, were consulted if available. But in many cases certain information required was not available even when the size of the records permitted its being read in entirety.

Finally all the data from the completed schedules was transcribed in code onto special sheets prepared for the purpose. After these had been checked they were transferred by photostatic process onto small cards. Each student was given a complete set of 111 cards to facilitate individual use of the information in the completion of the various studies.

It is now appropriate to describe the method to be followed in analyzing and presenting the material with which we are primarily concerned in this study. The duration of married life of each couple will first be ascertained by subtracting the date of marriage from the date of desertion as given in questions twelve and thirteen of the schedule. It will be assumed that the desertion is a final one in each case, although conceivably some of these may have become reconciled since October 1957. These cases will then be tabulated by five-year periods, and the percentage of the total represented by each class interval, calculated.



The resulting figures will be compared to figures obtained by E.R. Mowrer in a study of desertion cases taken from the records of the Chicago Court of Domestic Relations for the year 1921.<sup>1</sup> This may prove to be an interesting comparison although it is recognized that there is no logical reason to suppose that a study done in Chicago in 1921 may be validly compared to one done in Winnipeg in 1957.

The results will next be expressed graphically by plotting the years of married life against the number of desertion cases in a given year. Two limitations in the method must now be pointed out. First, due to insufficient information it was found to be impossible to calculate the duration of married life to the nearest year in the great majority of cases. Thus this figure was obtained by using the year of marriage and the year of desertion only, no account being taken of the particular month in the year. This could cause a variation of nearly a full year either way. It is hoped that this error will balance off to some degree throughout the sample. Also, there were fourteen cases where this figure could not be calculated at all due to both dates being not available. The size of the sample, for the purpose of this study, was thus reduced to a total of ninety-seven cases, two of which were duplicates. Secondly, no account was taken as to whether any of the couples were legally married,

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<sup>1</sup>Op. Cit., p. 101.

although the percentage of common-law unions distributed in the sample will be shown.

In spite of the above limitations it is hoped that the graph will give some indication of the periods in the course of married life where desertion may seem most likely to occur. We will attempt to segregate our sample into groups representing three such periods as may be indicated by the graph. These three groups will then be compared with respect to various characteristics in an attempt to see whether any significant differences or trends are indicated.

The first characteristic the writer proposes to examine will be that of age differences in the couples studied. These will be categorized in intervals of three years, and the number and percentage of cases in each category will be tabulated so that the three groups may be compared. This may give some indication in regard to whether large or small differences in the age of the marriage partners tend to fall in a particular group. It may also indicate whether a relatively large difference in age tends to become a more or less troublesome factor as the years of married life progress.

The age of the man and of the woman at marriage, will be treated separately, but in the same manner as above, using four age categories and tabulating the three groups for comparison. It should prove interesting to note in which categories, and in which groups, the highest percentage of

cases will fall. The necessary data for all tables with respect to age will be calculated from the information derived from questions one, two, and twelve of the schedule.

The percentage of common-law unions in each group will be calculated and presented for comparison. It will thus be shown to what extent this factor exists in our sample. The information will be drawn from question fourteen of the schedule.

In dealing with the matter of cultural background, information regarding the country of birth and the ethnic origin of the marriage partners will be used as obtained from questions three, four, seven, and eight of the schedule. It is the writer's opinion that the country of birth may yield a more accurate picture than the ethnic origin, since the latter term refers to the nationality of the father rather than the person concerned. In addition it would seem that information as to the country of birth would be less subject to error due to varying interpretations of the meaning of the term between different social workers or agencies. However, the percentages of unlike marriages with regard to country of birth will be shown for each of the three groups for comparison. The same procedure will be followed with regard to the ethnic origin of the partners.

Another characteristic involving cultural background to be considered is that of religion. Questions nine and ten of the schedule yielded information regarding the religious

denomination of the couples studied. It must be remembered however, that we still do not know to what extent religion played a part in the lives of these people, or what it actually meant to them. It will merely be assumed that certain denominational differences produce antagonism in this area. This of course is not necessarily true, and it is also evident that religious antagonism could exist between members of the same denomination. However, a table will be presented showing the number and percentage in each group of those belonging to similar and those belonging to dissimilar religious denominations. The writer admits to having at best only a very limited knowledge of religious doctrine and there is unfortunately insufficient time to consult authoritative works on the subject. However, most people are doubtless aware of many fundamental differences between the Catholic and the Protestant faiths. Catholicism for example, besides being older and much more ritualistic in its form of worship, requires that its members confess their sins to the priest, whereas Protestantism asserts the right of the individual to confess privately by means of prayer. Moreover, Catholics who marry outside of their own Church suffer the penalty of excommunication and of not having their marriage recognized by the church. The writer is also given to understand that members of the Greek Orthodox church, while they adhere to a form of ritual similar to that of the Roman Catholic, do not consider themselves to be under the jurisdiction of the Pope in addition to other basic differences.

The Mennonite religions are believed to embrace for the most part, extremely strict and rigid religious principles especially with regard to such matters as gambling, card playing, use of alcohol, attending shows and so on, which many other people permit themselves to enjoy in more or less degree.

The Salvation Army are considered different than other religions on the basis of their involvement with uniforms and outdoor display. The Christian Missionary Alliance seems to imply a committal towards the conversion of non-Christians to the Christian faith, which if true might tend to attract members who have a special need to impose their particular beliefs on others. With the above ideas in mind Roman and Greek Catholic will be considered to be similar to each other but dissimilar if in combination with any other religion. Greek Orthodox, Salvation Army, Christian Missionary Alliance, and Mennonite religions will be considered to be dissimilar both amongst themselves and in combination with any other denomination. This of course is a completely arbitrary means of classification constituting a further limitation to the method. Some indication may be given however as to the extent of mixed religions in the cases studied, and whether they tend to predominate in any particular group or not.

Questions thirty-one and thirty-two of the schedule ask whether drinking on the part of the man was considered a problem by the wife or by the social worker. Our three groups will be compared in the same manner as before, consider-

ing this to be a problem if it was said to be so by either the wife or the social worker. This may give an indication of the extent to which excessive drinking characterizes any or all of the groups, but we have to remember that we have no way of knowing in how many instances the wife may have been considered a problem drinker by the husband.

The three major groups will be compared with respect to whether the man was employed or not at the time of desertion, basing our figures on answers to question thirty-six of the schedule. No account is taken here of the particular occupation, salary, or permanency of work of the man. The results however, may yield some clue as to whether or not the men in our groups were characteristically unemployed at the time of desertion.

In the matter of education we will compare our three groups on the basis of which partner seemed to be superior in this regard from the answers to questions fifty-two and fifty-three of the schedule. Doubtful cases will be assumed to be similar, while as little difference as one year of schooling will mark one partner as superior to the other. The method obviously takes no account of education that may have been acquired through experience, travel, or spare time reading, and could thus be quite misleading. In this matter, as in so many of the other characteristics such as religion, ethnic origin and so on, one needs a great deal more background information about the people concerned in order to be able to

arrive at more valid classifications.

Finally, the percentage of women in each group who were pregnant at the time of desertion will be presented descriptively. The number of childless couples in each group will also be indicated. This information will be obtained from questions twenty-nine and fifty-four of the schedule.

In each of the foregoing tables the percentage of answers recorded as "not given" will be presented so that the reader may judge to what extent this limitation applies in a given instance. It must also be said that in the absence of any adequate "control group" with which to compare our results, we can never be sure that some other factor or factors are not operating to produce the indicated distribution or trend. This imposes a most severe limitation on the entire method in addition to those already mentioned.

## CHAPTER III

### ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

It will be interesting at the outset to divide our total sample of 111 cases into categories representing five-year periods of married life, and compare the percentage distribution obtained with that found by Mowrer in Chicago for the year 1921.<sup>1</sup> This is done in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF DESERTIONS BY FIVE YEAR PERIODS OF MARRIED LIFE COMPARED WITH MOWRER'S STUDY OF CHICAGO CASES IN 1921.

Years of Married Life	MOWRER'S RESULTS			
	Total		Total	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Total	111	100.0	2,661	100.0
0-4	35	31.5	1,268	47.7
5-9	32	28.8	627	23.6
10-14	13	11.7	371	13.9
15-19	14	12.6	206	7.7
20-24	2	1.9	96	3.6
25-29	1	0.9	45	1.7
30-44			31	1.2
Not Given	14	12.6	17	0.6

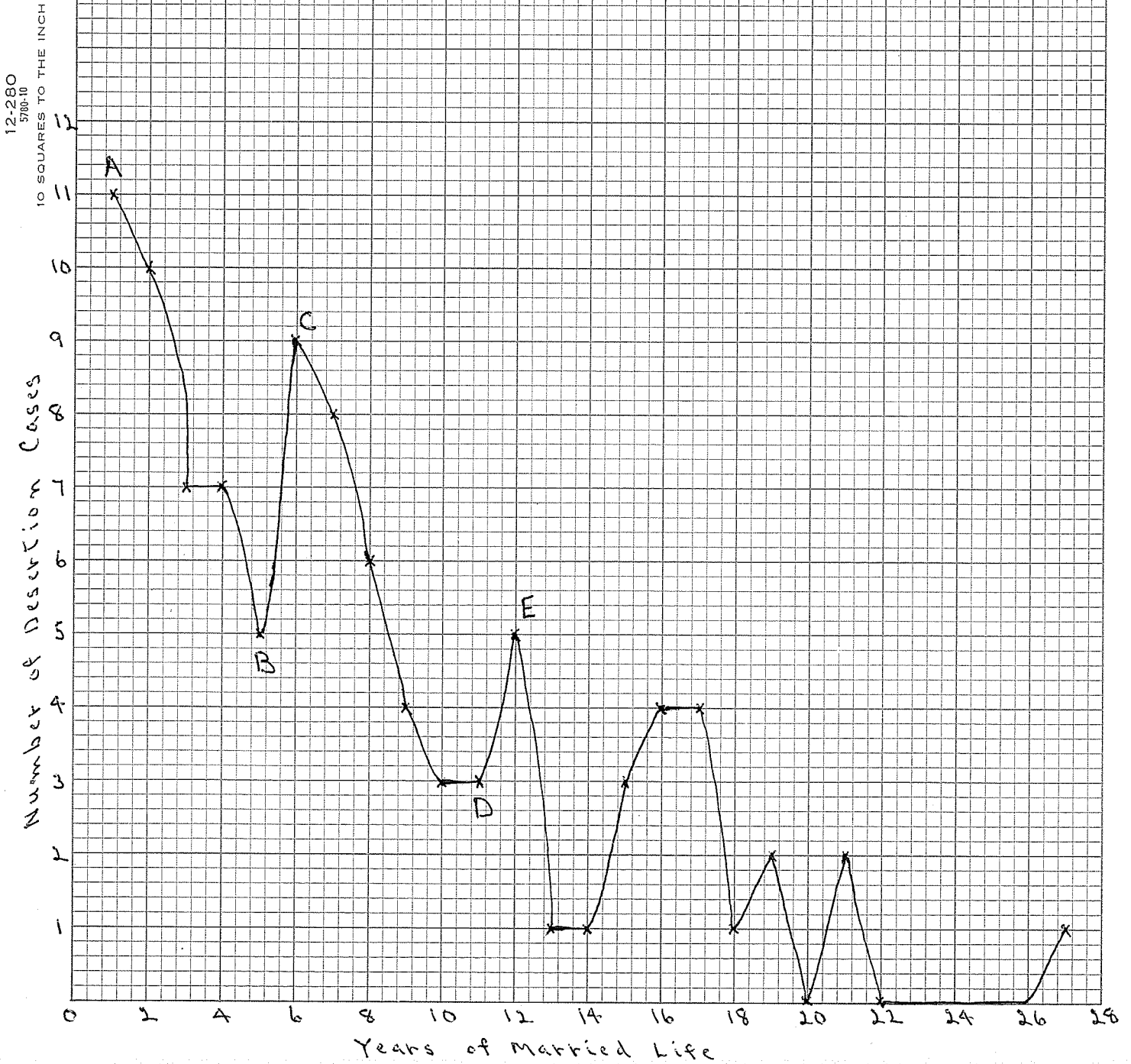
<sup>1</sup>Op. Cit., p. 104.



It will be seen from the above table that in both studies the highest percentage of desertions take place within the first five years of married life with a general downward trend as the years go by. In the Chicago study almost half of the total number of cases desert within the first five years, the number decreasing by approximately one half in each successive category. In this study however, nearly one third of our cases appear in the first category and there is a drop of only approximately three percent in the succeeding one. In the periods from ten to fourteen and from fifteen to nineteen years the trend reverses slightly with only about one percent difference between them. There is then a large drop to nearly two percent in the following interval of twenty to twenty-four years. It will be noticed that the percentage "not given" in the Winnipeg study exceeds that done in Chicago by twenty-one times thus rendering our own figures more suspect in this regard. It would seem logical to assume that there are more couples in the early stages of marriage than in later ones, due to death, legal separation, divorces, and cases not included in our definition of desertion, so that one might expect a general downward trend in the desertion rate such as is shown. To this extent the figures may merely reflect a natural trend.

When the number of desertion cases is plotted against the years of married life we get a curve such as shown on page 23. It will be noticed that the greatest

Graph Showing Distribution of  
Desertion Cases with Respect to  
Years of Married Life



number of desertions appear to occur in the first year or two of marriage gradually decreasing to a low point at the fifth year. There is then a marked upsurge to a point almost as great as it was in the beginning, when there is again a gradual decrease in the number of cases to a low at the tenth and eleventh year. The high points on the curve might be taken as being indicative of periods in the life of a marriage when desertion is more likely to occur. If however we were to take only the cases shown at A, C, and E, on the graph for comparative purposes, we would have to work with a pitifully small number of cases. On the other hand the sharp break at the point B suggests the possibility that a new factor or factors are operating in the group represented by C D, than was the case for those represented by A B on the graph. Certainly for one thing the former group have on the average stayed together for a much longer period of time. On this basis then, rightly or wrongly, we divided our sample into three basic groups hereinafter designated as Group A, Group B, and Group C. Group A then represents the cases included in A B on the graph or 41.2 percent of the total ninety-seven cases. Group B, or C D on the graph represents 34.0 percent of the total, and Group C represents the remaining 24.8 percent. The final fluctuations in the graph are difficult to account for in such a small sample and our only justification for lumping these cases together is that they represent the people who have stayed together for the longest period. The three

groups thus represent intervals of zero to five years, six to eleven years, and twelve to twenty-seven years of married life.

We may now compare our groups with respect to various characteristics which they may or may not possess to any extent. The first of these to be considered is the matter of age difference between individual marriage partners. This distribution is shown in Table 2 below using intervals of three years difference.

TABLE 2  
COMPARISON OF THE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION IN  
GROUPS A, B AND C BY DIFFERENCE IN  
AGE OF THE MARRIAGE PARTNERS

Age Difference (Years)	Group A		Group B		Group C	
	Number	Per-centage	Number	Per-centage	Number	Per-centage
0-2	14	43.8	13	43.4	7	35.0
3-5	10	31.3	4	13.3	6	30.0
6-8	6	18.7	4	13.3	3	15.0
9-11	2	6.2	3	10.0	1	5.0
12 /	0	0.0	6	20.0	3	15.0
Total	32	100.0	30	100.0	20	100.0
Not Given	8	20.0	3	9.1	4	16.7

The above Table shows that in the great majority of our cases there was very little difference in the age of the partners. In general as this difference becomes greater the proportion of desertions decreases. It is interesting that this trend is carried through completely in Group A. In both other groups however the percentage of desertion cases reaches a minimum at an age difference of nine to eleven years and then increases markedly when the difference becomes twelve years or more. One might wonder whether a difference of nine to eleven years would be an ideal one for marriage partners, the danger increasing as the age difference decreases. A difference of twelve years or more is indicated to be characteristic of groups B and C but not of Group A. This might lead one to ask whether an age difference of twelve years or more is of little or no consequence in the first few years of married life, but may become cause for concern as the years go by. No account is taken of which partner was the oldest except to say that the woman was older than the man in thirty-one percent of the cases in group A, twenty-three percent of those in Group B and ten percent of those in Group C.

The age of the partners at the time of marriage will now be considered. Table 3 below compares the distribution in the three groups by the age of the man at marriage using four different categories.

The following Table shows that in 38.7 percent of the cases in group A the man was twenty-one or younger at

the time of marriage. The same percentage holds true for the men in the next category of twenty-two to twenty-nine years. Also the percentage in the youngest category decreases to 26.7 in group B and again to 21.7 in group C. However, the reverse is true in the older category, increasing to 43.3 percent in group B and again to 52.2 percent in group C. A possible explanation is that the older category represents men who were more mature at the time of marriage and were therefore able to "stick it out" for a longer period of time. The other figures shown are difficult to explain.

TABLE 3

COMPARISON OF THE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION IN THREE GROUPS BY AGE OF THE MAN AT MARRIAGE

Age of Man at Marriage	Group A		Group B		Group C	
	Number	Per-centage	Number	Per-centage	Number	Per-centage
21 and under	12	38.7	8	26.7	5	21.7
22-29	12	38.7	13	43.3	12	52.2
30-40	6	19.4	8	26.7	4	17.4
41 and over	1	3.2	1	3.3	2	8.7
Total	31	100.0	30	100.0	23	100.0
Not Given	9	22.2	3	9.1	1	4.2

Table 4 below shows the same sort of comparison for the women as was made for the men in the preceding Table.

This presents a different picture difficult to explain. We note that in group A and group C the highest proportion of desertions represent cases where the woman was married before the age of twenty-two. In group B the proportions are more evenly divided between the first and second category the highest being in the range from twenty-two to twenty-nine years. Perhaps more meaningful results would have been obtained had we used different class intervals for the women than was used for the men, since women are generally considered to marry earlier and to be physically mature at an earlier age than is the case for men.

TABLE 4

COMPARISON OF THE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION IN THREE GROUPS BY AGE OF THE WOMAN AT MARRIAGE

Age of Woman at Marriage	Group A		Group B		Group C	
	Number	Per- centage	Number	Per- centage	Number	Per- centage
21 and under	21	53.9	14	43.7	14	63.6
22-29	11	28.2	15	46.9	6	27.3
30-40	5	12.8	3	9.4	2	9.1
41 and over	2	5.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	39	100.0	32	100.0	22	100.0
Not Given	1	2.5	1	3.0	2	8.3

At this juncture we would like to point out the distribution of common-law unions throughout our sample. These constituted 18.6 percent of the total ninety-seven cases and there were no answers recorded as "not given". As between the three groups, 25.0 percent of group A were common-law unions compared with 18.2 percent in group B, and 8.3 percent in group C. Thus this factor might be considered fairly characteristic of group A, relatively less so of group B, and insignificant in group C. At any rate there appears to be a tendency for these unions to break up in the earlier stages.

TABLE 5

COMPARISON OF THE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION IN THREE GROUPS BY LIKE OR UNLIKE COUNTRY OF BIRTH

Country of Birth	Group A		Group B		Group C	
	Number	Per-centage	Number	Per-centage	Number	Per-centage
Like	23	85.2	19	73.1	11	55.0
Unlike	4	14.8	7	26.9	9	45.0
Total	27	100.0	26	100.0	20	100.0
Not Given	13	32.5	7	21.2	4	16.6

The question of cultural background will now be considered on the basis of whether the country of birth of the marriage partners was the same or different. Table 5 above makes this comparison.



It will be observed that 45.0 percent of the cases in group C were mixed marriages with respect to nationality as compared with 26.9 percent in group B and 14.8 percent in group A. Hence mixed nationalities might be said to be very characteristic of group C, much less so in group B, and only slightly so in group A. Again we might conclude that national differences have little effect in the early years of marriage becoming increasingly wearing with the passage of time.

If we now make the same sort of comparison using ethnic origin as the criterion we get results as indicated in Table 6 below.

TABLE 6

COMPARISON OF THE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION IN THREE GROUPS BY LIKE OR UNLIKE ETHNIC ORIGIN

Ethnic Origin	Group A		Group B		Group C	
	Number	Per-centage	Number	Per-centage	Number	Per-centage
Like	12	46.2	5	23.8	7	46.7
Unlike	14	53.8	16	76.2	8	53.3
Total	26	100.0	21	100.0	15	100.0
Not Given	14	35.0	12	36.4	9	37.5

We now have a greater percentage of unlike marriages in each group. A very different picture from that

presented in Table 5. More than half the cases in both group and group C are cases where the marriage partners are of different ethnic origin. This is true in more than three quarters of the cases in group B. Speaking of the mixed marriages the same upward trend is observed as was remarked in Table 5 except that in this case the percentage falls again in group C. This might reflect variation in interpretation of the term "ethnic origin" but in any event the results in both tables are marred by the high percentages of answers not given.

Another cultural difference is that of religion. A comparison of like and unlike religions between the three groups is made in Table 7.

TABLE 7  
COMPARISON OF THE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION IN THREE  
GROUPS BY LIKE OR UNLIKE RELIGION

Religion	Group A		Group B		Group C	
	Number	Per-centage	Number	Per-centage	Number	Per-centage
Like	21	80.8	19	76.0	12	80.0
Unlike	5	19.2	6	24.0	3	20.0
Total	26	100.0	25	100.0	15	100.0
Not Given	14	35.0	8	24.2	9	37.5

Looking at the above results it will be seen that

the proportion of cases where the partners were of mixed religion is comparatively low in all groups, in spite of the fact that some Protestant religions were assumed to be mutually antagonistic and therefore included in the unlike category as explained in Chapter II. Again there appears to be a tendency for the percentage of mixed marriages to increase as we go from group A to group C, and one might infer that religious differences become increasingly obnoxious in the older groups. It will be seen also that the percentage of replies not given is very high in all groups, thus detracting greatly from the value of the Table.

The answers to questions thirty-one and thirty-two on our schedule produced interesting information regarding the extent of the drinking problem in our three basic groups. In 81.3 percent of the cases in group A this was considered to be a problem by either or both the wife and the social worker. The proportion in group B was 77.3 percent and in group C 80.0 percent. Thus drinking would appear to be an outstanding characteristic of all three groups and possibly of desertion cases in general. It must be remembered that drinking wives are not considered here, and if we assume these to be a problem in some cases there would be a proportionate increase in some or all of the above figures. However it must also be said that the percentage of answers not given was very high being 60.0 for group A, 33.3 for group B and 58.3 for group C.

On the other hand the problem of unemployed husbands did not appear to be nearly as important a factor as one might expect. Basing our figures on answers to question thirty-six of the schedule there was found to be very little difference between the three groups in this respect. In group A 70.6 percent of the husbands were employed at the time of desertion, compared with 72.0 percent in group B and 68.7 percent in group C. In the latter group one husband was retired which constituted 6.3 percent of the total in that group. In groups A, B, and C respectively the proportion of cases not reported are as 15.0 is to 23.6 is to 33.3.

Turning now to the matter of differences in educational background we present results based on similarity or superiority in this regard of one marriage partner as opposed to the other. As explained in Chapter II the method is very limited, and the proportion of cases not reporting is extremely high, but the figures shown in Table 8 below may prove nonetheless interesting.

If we were to assume that superiority of academic education in a wife compared with that of her husband, was an undesirable trait in a marriage, contributing to friction in the home, then it would appear that the effect of this characteristic in a wife is at a minimum in group A where the proportion of superior wives is reported as 28.6 percent. In the other two groups this effect becomes apparently very much greater at 42.9 percent in group B and 40.0 percent in group C.

TABLE 8

COMPARISON OF THE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION IN THREE GROUPS BY EDUCATIONAL DIFFERENCE

Education	Group A		Group B		Group C	
	Number	Per-centage	Number	Per-centage	Number	Per-centage
Wife Superior	4	28.6	6	42.9	2	40.0
Husband Superior	8	57.2	2	14.2	1	20.0
Similar	2	14.2	6	42.9	2	40.0
Total	14	100.0	14	100.0	5	100.0
Not Given	26	65.0	19	57.6	19	79.2

One might be tempted to say that perhaps the wives in the older groups are beginning to flaunt their superiority when it is no longer expedient to inhibit this trait. However the same trend is observed when we look at the proportions of couples having similar educational background, the difference being even greater between group A and the other two groups in this respect. This might be partly explained on the assumption that there is less need to separate in the early life of the marriage when educations are similar than when the wife is superior in academic background. It should be said also that none of the wives studied, and only one husband had an education involving more than high school.

Children were involved in the vast majority of

our total sample since only 5.2 percent of these couples were childless and only one case was not reported. In group A, three couples, or 7.5 percent of the group were childless whereas there were no such cases in group B and only two or 8.7 percent in group C, the one case not reported being in this latter group. This indicates that the presence of children is characteristic of all three groups. Account is not taken here of the number of children in the family nor of the distribution of "problem" children. However in group A 14.3 percent of the wives were pregnant at the time of desertion compared with 24.2 percent or nearly double the amount in group B. This may reflect the effect of increasing responsibility on the husband as the family continues to increase with passage of time. There were no pregnant wives in group C which one might expect since as a group they are much older. Replies not given constituted 12.5 percent in each of groups A and C, while a complete report for group B was obtained in this regard.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSIONS

In view of the many limitations in the validity of this study as pointed out from time to time above, it will not be possible to draw conclusions which may be said to be of general applicability to the populations of either this city or of other cities and communities in Canada or the United States. Nevertheless, our results do seem to indicate some interesting possibilities and trends which may prove worthy of further study.

We have seen certain periods in the married life of desertion cases, particularly the first year or two and the period approximating the sixth year, again highlighted as being apparently critical times in the lives of these people. Dividing our sample into groups representing those who separated after less than six years of married life, those who separated in the period following six to nearly twelve years of marriage, and those married twelve years or more, produced interesting apparent differences and similarities between groups.

In the matter of age differences we found that the largest proportion in all groups were couples having less than three years difference between husband and wife. In group A the percentage of desertions decreased as the difference in age between the partners became greater. The same trend was observed in groups B and C except that a minimum

number of desertions was reached when the age difference was nine to eleven years and started to increase again when the difference became twelve years or more. This might be taken to mean that an age difference of nine to eleven years is to be preferred by couples contemplating marriage. In 31.3 percent of the cases in group A, 23.3 percent of those in group B, and ten percent of those in group C, the woman was older than the man. When the man was twenty-one years old or less at marriage, the number of desertions occurring in group A was greatest, becoming markedly less in group B and still less in group C. However, it was found that where the man was in the range of twenty-two to twenty-nine years of age the above trend was reversed. Starting with thirty-nine percent deserting in group A, this became forty-three percent in group B and fifty-two percent or more than half in group C. This was taken to indicate that the men in the younger class tended to desert in the first years of marriage while those in the older class tended to "stick it out" for a much longer period. In the latter instance also, it seems more probable that another factor or factors was operating as a prime cause of the break-up. When we looked at the age of the women at marriage, the results were more difficult to interpret and it was thought that possibly different age classifications than those used for the men, might have produced more meaningful results.

Common-law unions constituted nineteen percent of



the total ninety-seven cases. These were more characteristic of group A, making up one quarter of the group. In group B eighteen percent, and in group C only eight percent of the group were this type of union. Thus we note a tendency towards an early disruption of these couples.

In general, cultural background differences such as those of religion, nationality and education, did not appear to be such large precipitating factors in desertion as might be supposed. This was especially notable in group A where only fifteen percent of the group were of different nationalities, less than twenty percent had religious affiliations that were likely to be incompatible, and twenty-nine percent of the wives had what might be considered a slightly superior education to that of their husbands. Where such differences existed the trend was toward an increase in the desertion rate as we progressed through group B to group C. One might infer from this that other factors are the prime cause of the friction developing between the partners and that cultural differences only appear to loom large in this respect as they come to be used, in the later stages, as a means of expressing more deeply rooted animosity. An apparent exception to this viewpoint is presented by our results in the matter of ethnic origin. Fifty-four percent of the couples in group A were different in this respect. In group B the rate of desertion increased to seventy-six percent but fell again to fifty-three percent of group C. This may be

explained on the basis of variation in interpretation of the term "ethnic origin" and also may be due to the high proportion of cases not reporting, which was well over one third of each group. It is perhaps pertinent while on the subject of cultural background to quote Florence Hollis, who, writing on the subject of marital conflict advances the hypothesis that "people usually do not marry beyond the limits of their cultural tolerance unless driven by personality factors which already predispose them to marital disharmony."<sup>1</sup>

Drinking husbands would appear to be a major problem in desertion. Little difference was found between our three groups in this respect, each having proportions approximating eighty percent where the husband was considered to be a problem drinker by the wife or the social worker. However the percentage of cases not reporting in each group was quite high.

On the other hand unemployment did not seem to be as large a factor in these cases as might be expected. Only twenty-nine percent of the husbands in group A were unemployed at the time of desertion as compared with twenty-eight percent in group B and one quarter of group C. Thus all three groups were quite similar in this regard.

Wives pregnant at the time of desertion constituted twenty-four percent of group B and only fourteen percent

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<sup>1</sup>Florence Hollis, Women in Marital Conflict (New York: Family Service Association of America, 1949), p. 210.

of group A. One might expect that the additional responsibility and increased economic pressure imposed on the husband as the family numbers increase, would be a greater factor in group B than in group A since the latter group have not been married for as long a period. Thus we might conclude that a pregnant wife could well be a factor precipitating desertion on the part of the husband when the couple are members of group B, but this is not so likely to be true if they belong in group A. None of the wives in group C were pregnant at the time of desertion.

There seems to be a popular notion that children tend to hold a family together but our results do not appear to support this view. All of the couples in group B had children, and only eight percent approximately of each of the other two groups were childless.

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APPENDIX A

Schedule Used in Collection of  
Data from Agency Files.