

## CHAPTER IX: MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND COHABITATION

In Guyana, as in most societies, statistics on marriage are important; they shed light on family formation, family composition, etc. The trend in the number of marriages has implication for housing requirement and community services<sup>1</sup>. Also, the civil status of married is associated with a variety of positive outcomes, and dissolution is associated with negative outcomes for men, women and the children<sup>2</sup>. For example, childbearing takes place mainly within socially prescribed and relatively stable marital unions, children born into stable unions are less likely exposed to high risk of infant and childhood deaths, etc. Thus, the study of the pattern of marriage is essential to the understanding of fertility and other behavioral patterns within the society.

However, the full analysis of the benefits of marital status to - either the children or spouses and the society as a whole - is beyond the scope of this analysis, but, it is intended to highlight the importance of the data. The specific purpose of this section is therefore, to investigate the following:

- What proportion of the population is currently in union?
- At what age such a marriage takes place?
- What are the age, sex and regional patterns?
- What are the likelihood probabilities of the union status?

In the census, union status was defined to include any legal civil status of married of a man and wife as husband and wife, as well as other stable cohabitation, such as man and woman living together in common-law relationship with or without any legal binding.

### 9.1 Current Union Status

Table 9.1 shows that, based on the definition of union status, 27.8 percent of the total marriageable population in Guyana had never married, 56.7 percent were currently married either legally or living in common-law relationship, while 13.4 percent were either divorced, separated, widowed, or was common law, meaning, no longer living together; in addition to about 2 percent who were married but were not currently in union. The table also reveals that higher proportion of males was never married compared to the females, for instance, a ratio of one female to nearly every two males in this category, and in reverse, one out of every ten females was widow; higher four times than the male widowers. Nearly, equal proportions (56 and 57 percent) of men and women were duly bound in marriage, either legally or by consensual relationship, indicating that a significant proportion live in common-law union.

Two concomitant factors are necessary to explain the high proportion of females in widowhood. First, the singulate mean age at marriage for males exceeded that of females, indicating that the Guyanese men mostly marry to women younger than their ages; and in reverse, the longevity of females is higher than males. On the higher proportion of never

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<sup>1</sup> Henry S. Shryock et al (1971) The Methods and Materials of Demography, US Government Printing Office

<sup>2</sup> Mathew D. Bramlett et al (2006) Cohabitation, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the United States (PDF file)

married males, it is observed that once females attained the marriageable age, they are encouraged to take a home and marry unlike the males who have to go through a period of time to prepare. As such, the time elapsed is more likely to be the reason for higher proportion of never married males than females.

**Table 9.1: Percentage Distribution of the Population 15 Years and Over by Marital Status, Sex and Region, Guyana: 2002**

Region	Marital Status								Total	
	Married	Common Law	Divorced	Separated	Widowed	Married (Not in Union)	Was Common Law	Never in Union	Percent	Number
<b>Both Sexes</b>										
Region 1	31.9	33.6	0.2	0.1	3.0	1.2	7.9	22.1	100	11,278
Region 2	43.3	17.8	0.8	0.2	5.2	1.9	4.0	26.8	100	29,788
Region 3	40.6	20.5	1.3	0.3	4.8	2.0	4.5	26.0	100	66,887
Region 4	32.0	19.9	2.0	0.4	4.5	2.2	8.5	30.4	100	199,833
Region 5	37.5	22.3	1.1	0.4	5.3	1.9	5.2	26.3	100	32,731
Region 6	39.4	22.0	1.4	0.4	5.6	2.1	4.6	24.6	100	78,693
Region 7	36.8	23.2	0.4	0.3	3.3	1.6	7.7	26.7	100	9,595
Region 8	37.2	25.6	0.5	0.2	2.5	1.0	7.1	25.8	100	5,709
Region 9	50.7	17.6	0.3	0.1	3.6	0.9	4.4	22.3	100	10,033
Region 10	29.4	18.9	1.7	0.3	3.6	2.1	12.4	31.5	100	24,306
<b>Total</b>	36.0	20.7	1.5	0.4	4.7	2.0	6.8	27.8	100	x
<b>Number</b>	168,659	97,244	7,181	1,731	21,922	9,532	32,043	130,542	x	468,853
<b>Males</b>										
Region 1	30.2	31.1	0.1	0.0	2.0	1.3	3.7	31.7	100	5,947
Region 2	42.6	17.2	0.6	0.1	2.2	1.7	1.6	34.0	100	14,929
Region 3	40.1	20.0	1.0	0.3	2.1	1.8	2.0	32.7	100	33,473
Region 4	32.2	20.2	1.5	0.4	1.8	1.9	2.9	39.3	100	95,691
Region 5	37.3	21.8	1.0	0.4	2.2	1.8	1.8	33.8	100	16,247
Region 6	39.1	21.7	1.2	0.4	2.2	2.1	2.3	31.2	100	38,960
Region 7	35.3	21.9	0.4	0.3	1.6	1.7	3.7	35.1	100	5,047
Region 8	33.6	23.4	0.6	0.3	1.5	1.0	5.8	33.7	100	3,479
Region 9	48.9	16.3	0.2	0.2	2.2	1.0	1.9	29.4	100	5,256
Region 10	30.2	19.0	1.4	0.3	1.8	1.9	4.0	41.5	100	11,904
<b>Total</b>	35.8	20.5	1.1	0.3	2.0	1.8	2.6	35.7	100	x
<b>Number</b>	82,787	47,446	2,655	747	4,547	4,227	5,997	82,527	x	230,933
<b>Females</b>										
Region 1	33.7	36.4	0.2	0.1	4.2	1.1	12.7	11.5	100	5,331
Region 2	44.0	18.3	1.0	0.3	8.2	2.1	6.4	19.6	100	14,859
Region 3	41.1	21.0	1.6	0.4	7.5	2.1	6.9	19.4	100	33,414
Region 4	31.7	19.7	2.5	0.5	7.0	2.5	13.7	22.3	100	104,142
Region 5	37.7	22.8	1.3	0.4	8.3	2.1	8.6	18.9	100	16,484
Region 6	39.7	22.2	1.7	0.4	8.9	2.2	6.9	18.1	100	39,733
Region 7	38.5	24.6	0.5	0.2	5.2	1.4	12.2	17.3	100	4,548
Region 8	42.8	28.9	0.4	0.0	4.1	1.1	9.1	13.6	100	2,230
Region 9	52.6	19.1	0.4	0.1	5.2	0.9	7.1	14.6	100	4,777
Region 10	28.6	18.9	2.0	0.4	5.3	2.3	20.6	22.0	100	12,402
<b>Total %</b>	36.1	20.9	1.9	0.4	7.3	2.2	10.9	20.2	100	x
<b>Number</b>	85,872	49,798	4,526	984	17,375	5,305	26,045	48,015	x	237,920

In all the regions, a significant proportion of men or women in the marriageable age range had ever married, somewhat above the national average, except in Regions 4 and 10, where the percentage reported ever-married was less than the prevailing national total (Table 9.1).

Although, statistics presented in the analysis are descriptive in nature, it is necessary that the relatively small proportion ever-married in the two regions would be related to individual characteristics there as compared to others. For instance, they have higher percentage of urban populations, higher proportion of gross and net secondary school enrolments, higher proportion in nonagricultural industries, serve as migration destination areas, etc. These individual characteristics are more likely to affect proportion ever married in the regions, and require cross-sectional investigation.

As there was no similar marital union data in 1991, comparison with 2002 can only be made for those who ever married. Such comparison given in Table 9.2 and Figure 9.1 varied across demographic subgroups, for example, age, sex and marital status. The table reveals that the marital status of males and females diverged significantly between 1991 and 2002, for instance, about 45 and 51 percent of males and females enumerated in 1991 were ever married, rising to 63 and 79 percent respectively in 2002. However, the sharp increase is unreliable and should be interpreted with caution. It could possibly be the outcome of changes in the definition of the module from marital status to marital union (see section 9.3.3 singulate mean at marriage).

**Table 9.2: Changes in Marital Status of Persons 15 Years and Over, by Sex, Guyana: 1991 - 2002**

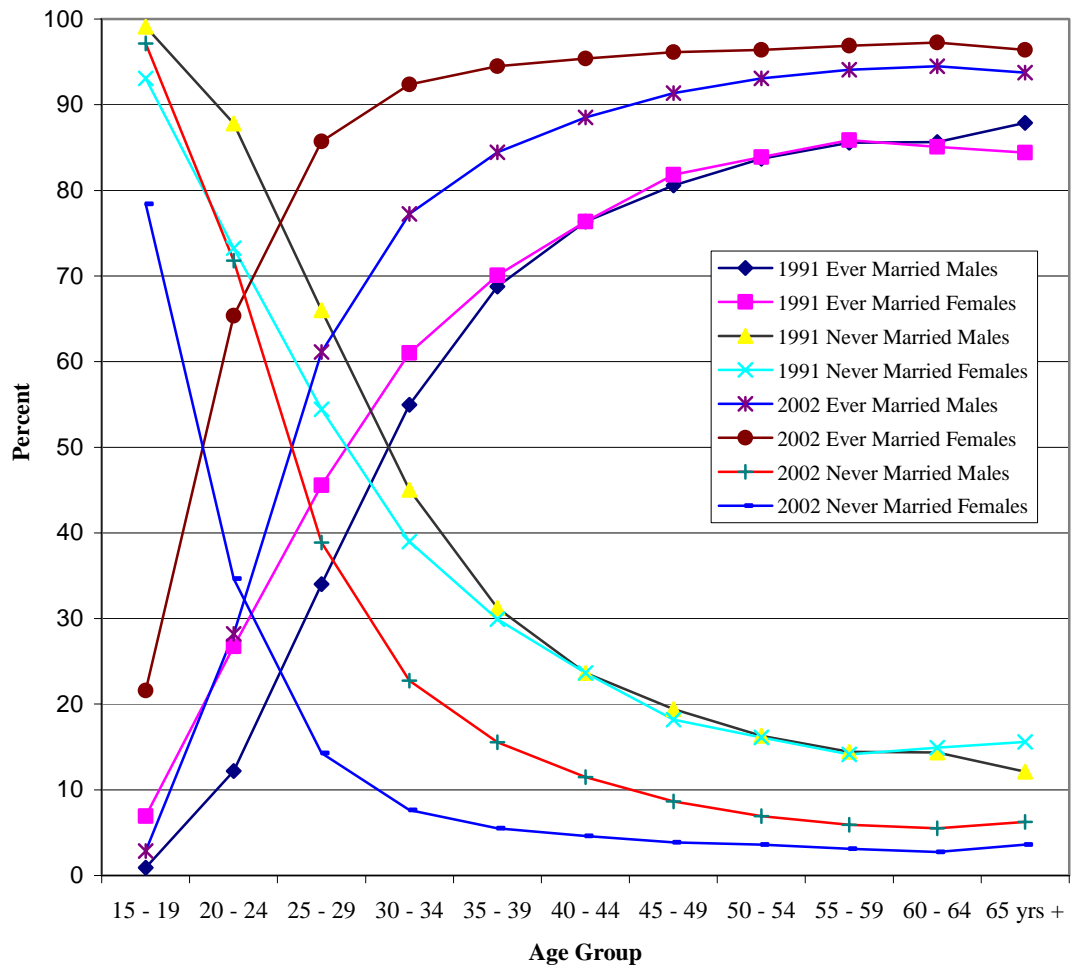
Marital status	1991			2002		
	Males	Females	oth Sexes	Males	Females	oth Sexes
Ever Married	45.2	51.0	48.1	62.7	78.6	70.7
Never Married	54.8	49.0	51.9	37.3	21.4	29.3
<b>Total %</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<b>Number</b>	223,404	233,242	456,646	230,933	237,920	468,853

### 9.3 Age-Sex Pattern and Mean Age at Marriage

#### 9.3.2 Age-Sex Pattern

The age-sex pattern of marital status is displayed in Table 9.3 and graphically in Figure 9.1, showing in any case the universal trends. As expected, the proportion of men or women who have never married in the two censuses decreases substantially with increasing age; in inverse relation, the proportion increases with increasing age for those who have ever married. For instance, the never married for both sexes combined was 86.6 percent for 15-19 years, but by 55 years and over, only about 4.5 percent was left who had never married. The likelihood of never married was higher for males within the teenage, which is 95.7 percent, as compared to 77.6 percent among the females, but it similarly decreases with age and later lined with females by the time both of them exited from the marriageable age range (see Figure 9.1).

Fig. 9.1: Distribution of Never and Ever Married, Guyana: 1991 - 2002



**Table 9.3: Percent Distribution of the Population 15 Years and Over by Age, Union Status and Sex, Guyana: 2002**

Age Group	Married	Common Law	Divorced	Separated	Widowed	Married (Not in Union)	Was Common Law	Never in Union	Not Stated	Total	
										Percent	Number
<b>Both Sexes</b>											
15 - 19	3.7	6.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	2.0	86.6	1.3	100	65,417
20 - 24	18.4	20.7	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.7	6.2	52.0	1.5	100	62,989
25 - 29	31.4	29.9	0.5	0.2	0.6	1.3	8.9	25.9	1.3	100	59,853
30 - 34	39.9	32.0	0.9	0.3	0.7	1.7	8.5	14.9	1.1	100	56,825
35 - 39	46.8	28.6	1.4	0.4	1.2	2.0	8.3	10.4	0.8	100	51,730
40 - 44	51.8	23.4	2.5	0.6	2.2	2.5	8.1	8.0	0.9	100	45,695
45 - 49	55.1	19.1	3.4	0.7	3.7	3.4	7.6	6.2	0.8	100	35,250
50 - 54	54.7	16.2	4.0	0.8	7.5	4.1	6.6	5.2	0.9	100	27,693
55+	45.5	9.9	3.1	0.7	24.9	4.1	6.1	4.5	1.3	100	63,401
<b>Total</b>	<b>34.7</b>	<b>19.9</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>34.5</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>468,853</b>
<b>Males</b>											
15 - 19	0.6	1.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	95.7	1.5	100	32,619
20 - 24	10.2	15.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.4	1.7	70.4	2.0	100	30,925
25 - 29	27.3	28.2	0.3	0.2	0.2	1.1	2.8	38.2	1.8	100	29,326
30 - 34	37.8	32.6	0.6	0.2	0.2	1.3	3.3	22.4	1.5	100	28,264
35 - 39	46.0	30.6	0.9	0.4	0.4	1.8	3.5	15.4	1.1	100	25,699
40 - 44	53.5	25.7	1.4	0.5	0.7	2.1	3.4	11.4	1.2	100	22,773
45 - 49	59.0	21.1	2.4	0.6	1.1	2.8	3.4	8.5	1.1	100	17,564
50 - 54	60.2	19.1	3.0	0.6	2.5	3.8	2.7	6.8	1.3	100	13,905
55 +	56.2	13.2	3.1	0.7	11.7	4.6	2.9	5.9	1.8	100	29,858
<b>Total</b>	<b>35.0</b>	<b>20.1</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>34.9</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>230,933</b>
<b>Females</b>											
15 - 19	6.9	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.3	3.6	77.6	1.1	100	32,798
20 - 24	26.3	26.1	0.3	0.1	0.4	1.0	10.5	34.3	1.0	100	32,064
25 - 29	35.3	31.6	0.7	0.2	1.0	1.5	14.7	14.2	0.7	100	30,527
30 - 34	41.9	31.5	1.2	0.3	1.1	2.0	13.6	7.6	0.7	100	28,561
35 - 39	47.6	26.6	2.0	0.5	2.0	2.3	13.1	5.5	0.5	100	26,031
40 - 44	50.2	21.1	3.5	0.6	3.6	2.9	12.9	4.6	0.5	100	22,922
45 - 49	51.2	17.1	4.5	0.8	6.3	3.9	11.9	3.8	0.4	100	17,686
50 - 54	49.2	13.4	4.9	0.9	12.6	4.4	10.5	3.6	0.5	100	13,788
55 +	36.0	7.0	3.1	0.7	36.6	3.7	8.9	3.2	0.9	100	33,543
<b>Total</b>	<b>35.5</b>	<b>20.6</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>10.8</b>	<b>19.9</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>237,920</b>

**Note:** Derived from Appendix B.9.1

### 9.3.3 Singulate Mean Age at Marriage

The age at which women marry has relation to their status in the society. According to Selvaratnam (1988), in societies where the girls marry early, the age difference between brides and grooms may average 10 to 12 years, and in some instances be as much as 20 years, which implies that the woman's already subordinate position at the time of marriage is further compounded by the additional advantage her husband has accrued with his age and experiences<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> S. Selvaratnam (1988) "Population and Status of Women" an Article in Asia-Pacific Population Journal, Vol.3, No.2 or (PDF)

Apart from using age at marriage as indicator of status of women, it helps to determine the length of time women are exposed to the risk of childbearing; hence the lower the singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM), the higher the risk of fertility in the absence of contraceptive use or abstinence.

The SMAM is the mean age at first marriage among those who ever marry (or, in practice, among those who marry by some predefined age-limit)<sup>4</sup>. It is computed from the proportions that are single, that is, never married, in each age group. This method assumes that no first marriage occurs after age 50 or before age 15 years.

In Guyana, the singulate mean age at first marriage was 27.8 years for females and 30.1 years for males in 1991; reducing to 21.4 and 26.5 years respectively in 2002 (Table 9.4). It is not meaningful to compare 1991 and 2002 SMAM because of differences in definition of married. For example, in 1991 the definition referred to marital status, (married, never married, divorced, widowed and separated), while in 2002, it was meant to measure union status; with the intent to include consensual unions.

Consequently, additional categories such as common-law, was common-law; in addition to those who were even married but not in union, either because one of the partners was absent, were inserted in the marriage module. As such, since the 2002 questions explicitly covered consensual unions, to the extent that those who were even in causal cohabitation of common-law relationship but were no longer living together were captured, it resulted to somewhat higher number of ever married couples; thereby reducing the singulate mean age at marriage.

Regarding the differentials in SMAM, Table 9.4 also shows that Region 1 exhibited the lowest for women (18.0 years), followed by Regions 8 and 9, where by the age 18.6 and 19.1 years respectively, 50 percent of women there had already ever married. The estimates for the rest of the regions were similar; ranging from 20.2 years for women in Region 7 to 22.1 years for those in Region 4. The estimates for males, though higher than females, but were consistent, varying insignificantly, for instance, the lowest of 24.3 years for males in Regions 1 and 9 respectively to a highest of 27.4 years in Region 10.

From these estimates, it is now clear why the growth rate in the hinterland regions, particularly Region 8, doubled during the intercensal period. The lower SMAM for women in these regions requires special investigation, as status and development of women are in most instances tied to the tradition and custom under which women take their bridegrooms.

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations (1983) Manual X: Indirect Techniques for Demographic Estimation, UN Publication.

**Table 9.4: Singulate Mean Age at Marriage by Sex and Region, Guyana: 2002**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
Region 1	24.3	18.0
Region 2	26.4	21.1
Region 3	26.2	21.4
Region 4	27.3	22.1
Region 5	26.4	20.9
Region 6	25.5	20.7
Region 7	26.2	20.2
Region 8	24.7	18.6
Region 9	24.3	19.1
Region 10	27.4	21.9
Guyana 1991	30.1	27.8
Guyana 2002	26.5	21.4

## **9.4 Probability of Marriage**

### **9.4.1 The Method**

Marriage probabilities specific for age indicate the chances that a person of a given age will marry during the period, usually a year<sup>5</sup>. Since in this case the marital status data is available for five year age group, the relationship is approximate, and assumes that the persons will change their marital status, that is, married, divorced, etc. anywhere during the interval of the five year period.

First, to derive the central marriage rates used in the relationship between never married and married, the numerator for each age group is the ever married men or women separately, and the denominator is the total population in that age group. Relating marriage to either of the marital status, for instance, that marriage ends in divorce; the numerator is divorced persons by age, while the denominator is the summation of divorced and married. Similarly, the relationship, 'common-law' ends in 'was common-law', the numerator is 'was common-law' and denominator is the summation of both. Here, the method is limited to first marital status, that is, first marriage, divorce, etc.

Once the central rates are obtained as in the preceding paragraphs, the next step is to convert the rates into probabilities, which are obtained analogically, using the Greville's method<sup>6</sup>, developed for transforming age specific death rates into probabilities of death ( ${}_nq_x$ ).

<sup>5</sup> Henry S. Shryock et al (1971) The Methods and Materials of Demography US Government Printing Office

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

### 9.4.2 The Probabilities

Table 9.5 shows the probabilities of marriage for males and females in Guyana. As expected, the probability that teenage girl's premarital relations end into marriage is higher than boys. However, for either of them, the probability of remaining single decreases with increasing age, that by 25-29 years, only 4 percent left who have never had their first marriage. Similarly, the probabilities that first marriage ends into divorce or separation was stronger among teenage boys than girls, but divorce became twice as high for females with increasing age, while separation was done with nearly equal degree of probabilities across the age groups. In all the union categories under review, besides the teenage group, the disruption of first marriage by divorce, widowhood or was common-law, was more likely higher for females than males. In particular, common-law marriage's disruption by "was common-law" or no longer living together is significant, that for females, only a fifth of them maintain the relationship, compared with an average of about three-fifths among the males who stay in the union. Duration before the dissolution of such union ship is important, but unavailability of appropriate data limited our investigation.

**Table 9.5: Probabilities That Never Married Will Lead To Marriage, Marriage To Divorced, Common-Law To Was Common-Law, Marriage To Separation and Marriage To Widowhood, For Males And Females, Guyana: 2002**

Age Group	Never married		Marriage ends in Divorced		Marriage ends into separation		Marriage ends into widowhood		Common-law ends into was common-law	
	ends into Marriage									
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
15 - 19	11.3	61.8	4.7	2.0	13.4	2.0	9.2	4.1	64.6	74.2
20 - 24	75.8	95.9	4.6	5.3	1.9	2.4	4.0	7.4	39.7	78.3
25 - 29	95.8	95.5	5.3	9.4	3.4	3.0	3.7	13.0	36.9	81.8
30 - 34	96.1	94.4	8.0	13.2	2.7	3.9	3.2	11.6	37.4	80.1
35 - 39	95.4	94.0	9.0	18.2	3.8	4.8	4.4	18.4	40.4	83.1
40 - 44	94.9	93.9	12.4	28.2	4.6	5.9	6.4	28.9	44.6	87.3
45 - 49	94.4	93.7	17.8	33.4	4.6	7.9	9.1	43.1	50.8	89.3
50 - 54	94.2	93.8	21.5	36.8	4.7	8.8	18.0	65.6	46.8	91.0

The probability that older women, 30 years and over, disrupt their marriage by divorce than younger women requires investigation as it may relate to status and development of women or some form of violence against older women. Unlike divorce, higher proportion of women as widows is more likely the result of two concomitant factors as mentioned earlier (see section 9.1), that is, higher life expectancy of women than men, and most men seem to marry younger women.

On the one hand, the fact that there is no legal binding in common-law union, suggests the higher probability that any one party can quit after sensing the least sign of dissatisfaction. But, higher probability of males to maintain the relation means males' cohabitations seem somehow stable than females, and may eventually lead to legal marriage. However, the social and economic characteristics of these men too are necessary for in depth understanding of their intentions to keep the relation.