



Message From The Chairperson

As my appointment as Chairperson of the Vital Statistics Council for Canada draws to an end, I have been reflecting back over the past two years and giving thought to the direction that the Council has taken and will be taking into the future. The longevity and success of the Council is due in large part to the strong partnerships that exist not only between the provincial/territorial Vital Statistics registrars but also with Statistics Canada and the commitment that all members have to creating, promoting, supporting and maintaining an effective and efficient Canadian Vital Statistics System. While this partnership and commitment are key aspects of the Council, equally important is the foundation that the Council has begun to build over the last few years to meet the many challenges facing us all. As Chairperson and member of the Council, I am proud of the accomplishments that we have made in establishing strategic initiatives, building new partnerships, and raising the profile and importance of the provincial, territorial and national vital statistics systems.

One area I believe that is not widely known or understood is the key role that legislation plays in the administration and operation of the vital statistics programs across Canada. Most Vital Statistics registrars directly administer vital statistics, marriage, and change of name legislation. But other pieces of legislation also impact and influence the administration of our programs; these include adoption, child welfare, public health, and privacy legislation.

In particular the vital statistics, marriage, and change of name legislation plays a key role in allowing Vital Statistics registrars to build and support the national vital statistics system. This is made possible because of the uniformity of the provincial/territorial legislation across the country and the consistency by which policies and procedures are applied in the administration of the legislation. Without uniformity there would be no Canadian Vital Statistics System and it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for Vital Statistics registrars to achieve the benefits derived from the integration of our programs, which are enhanced by employing uniform practices wherever possible.

To assist provinces/territories in maintaining uniform legislation, policies, and procedures in the

administration of their programs, the Uniform Law Conference of Canada developed both a model *Uniform Vital Statistics Act* and a *Uniform Change of Name Act*. These Acts can be used and have been referenced by Vital Statistics registrars as their legislation is under review for recommended changes. One of the challenges facing the Council in the next year will be to request that the uniform Acts be updated to accommodate and address specific issues that all registrars have been currently faced with, including such issues as same-sex parents, domestic partnerships, confidential name changes, and the opening of adoption records.

More recently, privacy legislation has had some impact on vital statistics programs. While most provinces/territories have had *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy* legislation for a number of years, recently many provinces/territories have been developing and enacting *Health Information Protection* legislation as well. Such legislation may have a significant impact on what information can be collected, how it is collected and maintained, and under what circumstances and to whom the data can be disseminated by vital statistics agencies. One hopes that such legislation can strengthen the protection and privacy of personal data while at the same time maintaining the usefulness of the data for research and program delivery by agencies.

In closing, I want to take this opportunity to thank all of the members of the Council for their support and dedication over these past two years. I have thoroughly enjoyed my term as Chairperson of the Council and have found it to be a very rewarding experience. I am very proud to be part of such an illustrious group of individuals and have every confidence in the future success of not only the Vital Statistics Council for Canada but also the Canadian Vital Statistics System. ♦

*Shelley Ann Gibson, Chairperson
Vital Statistics Council for Canada*

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The Choice of Surname for Children in Québec, Part II

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In utilizing the database of births for 1996, the choice of surnames was examined according to a number of variables. As well as civil status and language community, variables such as the age and education of the mother were also considered.

Almost half of the children born in 1996 were born to unmarried mothers, 47% to married mothers, and 3% to divorced or widowed mothers. Even when the mother is single, the surname of the father is chosen for 60% of the babies. More than 20% of children receive a mother-father combination surname, while 6% of the children are given a combination surname beginning with the father's surname. The assignment of the mother's surname is no longer associated only with cases where the father is unknown; in effect, 1% of married women give their surname to their child. Children of single mothers are twice as likely to receive a combination surname than are children of married mothers, these rates being 28% as opposed to 15%. Divorced and widowed mothers make choices similar to unmarried mothers, but choose the mother's surname more frequently than that of the father.

Table 1

Choice of surname based on mother's marital status, Québec, 1996

Name	Single	Married	Other	Total
Father	60.9	82.6	56.7	71.0
Mother	10.7	0.9	14.4	6.2
Father-mother ¹	6.1	3.1	6.6	4.7
Mother-father ²	21.7	12.0	22.0	17.1
Father=mother ³	0.6	1.3	0.3	0.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n	42,077	40,153	2,900	85,130

1. Surname of father followed by mother's surname.

2. Surname of mother followed by father's surname.

3. Father's surname and mother's surname are identical.

NOTE: Numbers may not add up due to rounding.

Because the assignment of the surname is a cultural behaviour, an examination of the choices made by the province's largest linguistic groups is revealing. To do this analysis we selected the language used by the mother in the home, which will very probably be the mother tongue of the child. This implies that non-French and non-English couples are still close

to their original culture, and therefore are often recent immigrants.

Choices made by francophones obviously resemble those of the population as a whole, but the choices of combination surnames (mother-father) are more frequent, given to one child in five. Anglophones, more often than francophones, use the name of the father (78%) and less often the combination mother-father surname (12%). It is noted that isonymous couples are twice as numerous in the anglophone population, being 1.1%, as opposed to 0.6% for francophones.

The Spanish traditionally give a double surname beginning with one part of the father's surname, and this is the case in six out of ten cases. A little more than a quarter of children are given the father's surname. The Portuguese cause a surprise with a considerable proportion of combination surnames beginning with the mother's surname assigned to four in ten cases, while five others are given the father's surname.

Creole-speaking women assign their surnames often, in 15% of cases, while three in four children receive the father's surname. These women, quite often of Haitian origin, are in a French cultural milieu, but only 5% give combination mother-father surnames to their children. This percentage is well behind anglophones and the Portuguese, but exceeds that of the Asian groups.

Italians and Greeks, who have been in the area for a long period, seem reluctant to use combination surnames: 95% of children are given the father's surname. And the most conservative group to retain the patronymic is the Yiddish, where all 201 children were assigned the father's surname (if we add the cases of isonymous couples).

To the contrary, Inuit children are assigned the mother's surname seven out of ten times. These have a strong frequency (80%) of unmarried mothers and unnamed fathers. Children born in a home where an Amerindian language is spoken receive the surname of their mother in one out of five cases, but they are almost as numerous in receiving a combination surname beginning with the mother's surname.

However, the biggest surprise in Table 2 is the high percentage of isonymous couples in populations of Asian origin. Due to the broad scope of these linguistic groups, a precise identity of the communities is not possible. However, 15% of children born in a home where an Indo-Pakistani language is spoken have a mother and father with

the same surname. With more than 900 births, this group is quite significant. It should be mentioned as well that this group presents a challenge to statisticians insofar as a number of children (7%) receive a surname that is neither that of the father nor the mother. Mothers speaking a language from Southeast Asia, principally Vietnamese, form an isonymous couple in 4% of cases; the proportion is 2% in Chinese speakers. There are too few people of Turkish origin to be included in Table 2, but in their case, the proportion of isonymous couples is one in ten. Finally, 3% of Arabic women have a husband who has the same surname.

Certain studies associate isonymy with consanguinity. The relationship is probably not close for Asiatic populations. It is nevertheless interesting that francophones display very small proportions of isonymous couples as compared with recent immigrant populations. This group adds to the proportion of isonymous couples in Québec. It should be noted that our primary objective was not to measure isonymy, which is in fact underestimated; it would be necessary to subtract from the denominator unnamed fathers and also to account for surnames with the same pronunciation, but which are written differently.

Other variables which we have examined – such as age and education of mothers – did not provide as significant results as marital status and language, and we will deal with these briefly.

Women aged 25-29 years behave most traditionally, and three-quarters of their children are assigned the father's surname. Very young mothers, under 20

years of age, make the most diverse choices: one in four children use the mother's surname, one in five a combination mother-father surname, one in ten the combination father-mother surname, and more than four in ten the father's surname. It should be recalled that slightly over one in five mothers under 20 years of age do not declare the name of the father. Older women are also less inclined to assign the father's surname; only two-thirds of children receive the father's surname, while one in four is assigned a combination surname.

If one considers marital status, there are relatively few differences according to age in the choice of surname among married mothers 20 years of age and over. The choice of the father's surname is at the highest level in women aged 25 to 29 (84%), and diminishes gradually to 79% in older women. These variations are more marked in unmarried mothers. Here, it is again those aged 25 to 29 who most often assign the father's surname (in two of three cases), while the proportion diminishes to less than half in older mothers. It is unmarried women 35 years of age and over who most often assign a combination mother-father surname, in about three out of ten cases.

More educated women (15 years of education and over) and those moderately educated (12 to 14 years of education) assign the same choices of surname. Women with less education often assign their surname; it could be that in these latter cases, the father is more often unknown.

From the beginning of the 1970s to the present, the proportion of children who do not live with the

Table 2

Choice of surname based on mother's tongue, Québec, 1996

Name	French	English	Inuktitut	Amerindian languages	Italian	Greek	Yiddish	Portuguese	Chinese	Spanish	Arabic	Indo-Pakistani languages	Créole	Southeast Asian languages
Father	69.6	78.5	22.0	52.0	95.8	94.4	98.5	51.1	92.6	26.5	93.2	77.9	77.0	79.8
Mother	5.9	6.2	71.0	21.0	1.0	2.0	0.0	1.6	3.5	8.6	0.6	6.2	14.6	11.4
Father-Mother ¹	4.5	2.5	0.9	7.2	0.5	1.5	0.0	4.4	0.4	60.6	0.1	0.4	2.2	1.6
Mother-Father ²	19.3	11.7	3.7	17.8	2.1	2.0	0.0	39.0	1.3	4.0	2.8	0.5	5.2	2.9
Father=Mother ³	0.6	1.1	2.3	2.0	0.5	0.0	1.5	3.8	2.2	0.2	3.3	15.1	1.0	4.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n	66,691	8,060	225	547	385	199	201	183	463	1,040	1,324	928	418	751

1. Surname of father followed by mother's surname.
 2. Surname of mother followed by father's surname.
 3. Father's surname and mother's surname are identical.

father or step-father has doubled, from 7% to 15%. The link of the child with the father has become much more fragile, at the same time as society is insisting on the need for a greater participation of fathers in their relationships with their children. In the case of a divorce, the mother-child bond is more often favoured in matters of custody. These children will have more contacts with the maternal relatives and society is becoming somewhat more matrilineal, if we may use that term.

The choice of a combination surname beginning with the mother's surname or the mother's surname exclusively is an excellent illustration of the trend to matrilineal filiation in society. In the last few years, between 20% and 25% of children are identified with the maternal line. We may well ask if it is the law that has brought on this social change, or the reverse. The requirement for women to retain their maiden surname has put an end to a common family surname for all members of the family. But with half of all births occurring outside marriage, the notion of family surname has become obsolete. The choice of the family surname was not regulated by law, but the tradition was very strong. With the changes in the Civil Code, the choice of a combination surname, and particularly of a combination surname beginning with the mother's surname, has crept up slowly, and currently represents a substantial percentage. However, it seems that, in the last few years, a plateau has been reached, with about one in six children receiving a combination surname beginning with the mother's surname.

There are few international statistics concerning choice of surnames, probably because the choice of the father's surname is still very dominant, and it seems that the situation in Québec is exceptional. Among other Canadian provinces, it is noted that for recent births, combination surnames are assigned in 5% of cases in New Brunswick, and in 3% of cases in British Columbia.

As yet, there are not many parents who have combination surnames. In a few years, it will be interesting to study the choice of surnames of children of these parents. They will be able to choose from among the surnames of their grandparents, and their task will be even more difficult than that of parents today. ♦

The preceding article has been abstracted from a presentation prepared for the Symposium "Surnames – history-anthropology-society" given at the Centre Jacques Cartier, Lyon, France, in December 1998. Part I ran in the January 2000 issue.

In Memory

Wilmer Berg, 1940 – 2000

This issue of *Vital News* is dedicated to the memory of Wilmer Berg who passed away February 28, 2000 in Tampa, Florida.

As the Saskatchewan representative on the Vital Statistics Council for Canada from 1984 through to 1992 and as the Chairperson of the Council from 1987 to 1989 and 1991, Wilmer will be remembered for his contributions and leadership in building and maintaining the integrity of the national system of vital statistics. During his time on the Council, Wilmer became known not only for his dedication and diplomacy but also for his warmth and kindness. To many, Wilmer was not only a valued colleague but also a dear friend.

Wilmer will be sadly missed. On behalf of the Vital Statistics Council for Canada we would like to express our deepest sympathies to his family.

SIN Tele-App Project Wins National Award

*Huguette Lavoie
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A team from the Social Insurance Registry branch of the National Services Division, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) was honoured with a bronze medal for their Social Insurance Number Telephone Automated Application (SIN Tele-App) project. The award was bestowed at the 7th Annual Distinction 99 Awards Gala, in recognition of outstanding achievement in developing and implementing a service delivery improvement project with a specific focus upon individuals and businesses as clients of government.

The gala, which is a "salute to excellence" in the management of information and technology in the public sector, was held in Ottawa last October during Technology-in-Government Week. HRDC, with whom the New Brunswick Vital Statistics has a recent partnership, was nominated as a finalist in two award categories for their SIN Tele-App project. These categories were "Serving Canadians Better through Information Management (IM) / Information Technology (IT) Innovations – Improving Service Delivery to Citizens and Businesses" and "Investing Strategically in IM/IT – Building Partnerships and Alliances."

SIN Tele-App allows citizens to apply for a Social Insurance Number (SIN) and card over the phone – a convenient alternative to appearing in person or making a request by mail. Since the identity of a person must be validated with a birth certificate or

immigration documents prior to issuing a SIN card, HRDC approached New Brunswick Vital Statistics in 1997 to establish a partnership; the resulting arrangement permits the electronic validation of New Brunswick-born individuals via software that gains on-line access to selected Vital Statistics data.

The process is triggered by a client entering his/her birth registration number through an interactive voice response system. The call initiates the process whereby the SIN Tele-App software application simultaneously accesses the SIN registry and the Vital Statistics database. Access to Vital Statistics information remains secure, insofar as only specific identifying information required for the purpose of validating a person's identification is provided. This information, which is routinely extracted by Vital Statistics for all New Brunswick-born residents, is placed in a remote area on the server to serve the specific needs of the SIN Tele-App software application.

After the information is extracted from the SIN and the Vital Statistics registries, the HRDC agent validates and authenticates the information via a routine telephone exchange with the client and, as appropriate, accepts and commits the information to the Social Insurance Registration database, thus processing the SIN card application. The process also ascertains that a SIN does not already exist for the client before a record/card is created, following acceptance of the data provided by the Vital Statistics database.

The SIN Tele-App was successfully piloted in New Brunswick, and a permanent link has been established under the terms of an agreement with HRDC. New challenges now lie ahead for HRDC as they endeavour to roll out the application to other Canadian provinces/territories, with the intention of making the application a national system. ♦

Training Course on Vital Statistics Records and their Administration

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During May 17-21, 1999 I attended a course on Vital Statistics Records and their Administration offered and presented by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. The course was held in Tampa, Florida.

The course was quite intensive and focused on the proper management and administration of a vital

statistics records system. Lectures were supplemented from material derived from actual experiences. Topics included:

- Processing and managing a vital records information system
- Techniques for collecting, editing, querying and completing vital records
- Improving data quality
- Certification and verification procedures
- Maintenance of a records system and guidelines for storage
- Security of vital records
- Protecting confidentiality of vital records
- Controlling fraudulent use of vital records
- Interaction with the public
- Legislative and regulatory policies
- Statistical uses of vital records
- Administrative uses of vital records
- Automation of vital records
- Adoption of Canadian and foreign-born children
- Registration of vital events of U.S. citizens born overseas
- Vital Registration / Vital Statistics in the 21st century

Approximately 50 persons attended this course. The majority of participants were from various parts of the United States, while two participants, including myself, came from Canada. The participants represented a wide range of jobs involving vital statistics: State Registrars, County Registrars, Deputy Registrars, Regional Managers, Administrative Personnel, Supervisors, Statistical Clerks, Field Representatives, Quality Improvement & Quality Assurance Personnel, Records Technicians, and Computer Consultants.

One of the major benefits of this course was that it allowed people from many different registration areas, throughout North America to get together and exchange knowledge, experiences, ideas and material concerning vital statistics records and their administration. This course is offered yearly by the National Center for Health Statistics and is held in a different location in the United States each time. The course is available to individuals involved with vital registrations. As there is no registration fee required, the only expense to the participant is for travel, accommodation and meals.

ON A TYPICAL DAY IN ALBERTA IN 1998

The following events were recorded:

105 LIVE BIRTHS OCCURRED IN THE PROVINCE OF ALBERTA:

- 54 males
- 51 females
- 4 were born to teenage mothers
- 28 were born to parents who were not married to each other
- 7 had low birth weights (less than 2500 grams)
- 4 stillbirths every week

48 DEATHS OCCURRED IN THE PROVINCE OF ALBERTA:

- 25 males
- 23 females
- 17 deaths were due to diseases of the circulatory system including:
 - 8 deaths from heart disease
 - 3 deaths from cerebrovascular disease

- 12 deaths were due to cancer including:
 - 3 deaths from lung cancer
- 3 deaths were due to diseases of the respiratory system
- 2 deaths resulted from accidents
- 1 death resulting from suicide
- 1 death resulting from violence every 2 days
- 1 death due to diabetes
- 1 infant death every 2 days

48 MARRIAGES WERE SOLEMNIZED IN ALBERTA:

- 21 were civil ceremonies
- 27 were performed by religious representatives
- 31 marriages were to couples where both parties were marrying for the first time
- 1 marriage every 3 days to a couple where both parties were teenagers

Source: Alberta Vital Statistics

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