Variations in the Length of Male Parenting in Canada

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Abstract

This paper documents the basic parental involvement of fathers by measuring the quantity or the total amount of time lived by men with their children over their life course. Majority of men spend a great number of years living with their children, from their late 20s to late 50s or even early 60s - a period of about 28 to 32 years. But, there are variations in men's length of parenting. Men of higher status start parenting late and end early, that is, whenever resources allow, the choices are for delayed start of parenting and early launching of children and consequently, shorter duration of parenting. Culture and opportunity structures also affect the length of parenting. And, there are indications that the trend is

Résumé

Nous documentons la participation des pères par la quantité de temps durant laquelle ils vivent avec leurs enfants au cours de la vie. La majorité des hommes passent un temps considérable vivant avec leurs enfants, de la fin de la vingtaine à la fin de la cinquantaine, ou même au début de la soixantaine, une période moyenne de 28 à 32 ans. Par ailleurs, des variations importantes. Les hommes à statut supérieur commencent tard et finissent plus tôt; donc quand les ressources leur permettent, les choix semblent favoriser un délais de la paternité, un départ plus rapide des enfants et donc une plus courte durée de la paternité. Les différences entre cultures et la structure des opportunités affectent aussi la durée de la paternité. Il semble que la tendance est dans la direction d'une plus courte durée de paternité, mais d'autres analyses sont nécessaire pour déterminer l'effet des changements dans la structure des familles sur la paternité.

Key words: Male parenting, life course, social status and cultural differences

Introduction

The gender division of roles has predominantly assigned women the responsibility for rearing children. Therefore, it is not surprising that in many life cycle studies describing family life from formation to dissolution, women were the focus of analyses (Uhlenberg, 1974; Glick, 1977; Spanier and Glick, 1980; Norton, 1980; 1983; Rogers and Witney, 1981; Gee, 1986, 1992). Furthermore, data on fertility, particularly on the number of children and timing of births, were only collected from women. Thus it is inevitable that studies on parenting is associated primarily with women, giving the impression that children do not "belong" to men (Beaujot, 2000).

While men are not as greatly involved in parenting as many women (or men themselves) would like them to be, there is no question that men father and live with children. Moreover, men certainly had (and to a great extent, still do have) responsibility for the family income needed to feed, clothe, provide shelter, and educate their children (Beaujot, 2000). In recent years, men have been urged to participate more in child-rearing. With greater involvement of women in paid employment, it seems logical and fair for men to take on more active roles in parenting (Presser, 1995). As Goldscheider and Waite (1991) remarked, the choice among the young is clear: either to have "new families" with men taking on more of the traditional roles played by women for centuries, or to have "no families" at all. Consequently, with changing parental involvement in child-

rearing, it becomes imperative that men's parenting patterns be examined more closely.

This paper aims to document the basic parental involvement of fathers by measuring the total amount of time that men lived with their children over their life course. However, some aspects of parenting such as, the quality or the types and intensity of day-to-day involvement in child-rearing are left out because such an analysis requires a different focus and the data set does not permit such as examination. For our purposes, "parenting" is defined simply as living in the same household with one's children. We examine the start and end of parenting and their variations with men's socioeconomic characteristics. The birth of first child is marked as the beginning and the home-leaving of the last child, the end of parenting[1.] This analysis of changes in the lives of men born early in the 20th century to about 1955 is integrated into this research project on life courses of Canadian men and women.

Social Status, Cultural Influences, and Regional Differences in Canada

The proximate determinants of length of parenting over the life course are the timing of the birth of the first child, the number and spacing of children, and the timing of home-leaving of the last child. These in turn are affected by various socio-economic characteristics. Studies have shown that life courses of members of the same cohorts vary greatly by socio-economic characteristics like social class, community backgrounds, and culture (Elder,1978; Hareven; 1980, Modell and Hareven, 1978; Hogan, 1981; Imhoff, 1986). These factors also affect the subset of the life course that is of interest here. To anticipate what the effects of socio-economic characteristics are, we briefly review the relevant literature on timing of first birth and on the number and home-leaving of children. In particular, we focus on studies that examine the effects of social status, cultural influences, and community backgrounds.

Studies in Canada regarding the timing of births (or fertility, in general) have mainly focussed on women however, it is reasonable to assume that many of the findings apply to men as well. Women with a lower level of education begin family formation and child-bearing at younger ages and have greater number of children than women with a higher level of education (Rao and Balakrishnan, 1988; De Wit and Rajulton, 1992; Ravanera *et al.*, 1997, Beaujot, 1995). The direction of differentials in age at home-leaving of children by parents' socio-economic status is not clear. In an earlier study on home-leaving, Zhao *et al.* (1995) found that there was no significant difference in the age at home-leaving by parental education. However, that study did not distinguish parents by gender, which might have confounded the education levels of men and women. In the study of home-leaving patterns in the US, Aquilino (1991) showed that

children from families with higher socio-economic status were more likely to leave before age 19. Goldscheider and DaVanzo (1989) also argued that higher family income increased the chance of young adults leaving home because greater financial resources of parents could be used to help children start independent living. It is also likely that economic deprivation among lower status families may force children to leave home early to seek employment (Young, 1987). Thus, men of lower social status likely start parenting early and end it late because of the greater number of children, however the direction of the influence of social status on the timing of the launching of children is not very clear *a priori*.

A number of fertility studies in Canada indicate that the differentials in fertility by cultures as indicated by mother tongue, ethnicity, or place of birth have been decreasing or have disappeared in recent years (Balakrishanan, *et al.*, 1993; Beaujot, 1995). However, this study focuses on the timing of parenting among cohorts born from early in the century to about 1955 for whom this differential may still hold. Immigrant women and those whose mother tongue is neither English nor French have their first birth at older ages (Ravanera *et al.*, 1998). De Wit and Rajulton (1992) also found that in certain cohorts, women born outside Canada had first births at older ages than those born in Canada. As for the end of parenting, members of non-mainstream cultural groups launch their children at older ages. In Canada, higher proportions of young adults are living with parents whose mother tongues are Greek, Portuguese, Italian, and Chinese (Boyd and Pryor, 1989). And in the US, Goldscheider and DaVanzo (1989) found that children from more traditional ethnic and religious groups left their parental homes later. Therefore, it is expected that a differential in parenting with a late start and late end among immigrants and among men is influenced by traditional culture.

Community background (crudely measured by place of residence) before or at the time of occurrence of events affects the life courses of individuals. Information on the types of residence, such as whether it is urban or rural, the employment levels in a location, and other time-varying indicators are necessary to capture the effect of community background on a life course event such as the start and end of parenting. However, analysis is often done only by region or province of residence mainly due to the unavailability of data. While this measure is not ideal, it may still capture important differences among Canadians. In the case of Canadian women, it has been found that ages at first birth in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia are higher than in the Atlantic provinces and the Prairies (Ravanera *et al.*, 1998). Beaujot's (1995) analysis of the 1991census data shows that the number of children (as obtained from women) in the Atlantic provinces and in the West is higher than in Quebec and Ontario although regional differentials are much less than what were found in 1971 and 1981. As for eventual home-leaving, more unmarried children aged 20-29 are still living with parents in the East (including the Atlantic provinces) and less in the Western provinces and in the Territories (Boyd and Norris,

1995). Therefore, community backgrounds roughly indicated by places of residence do influence parenting patterns, with a clear expectation that men in Atlantic provinces would have longer duration of parenting given their greater number of children, and their earlier start and later end of parenting.

Data and Methodology

This study uses data gathered through the General Social Survey of Families conducted in 1995 (GSS95) by Statistics Canada. This survey collected refined measures of timing, asking for both the year and month when each life course event occurred (Statistics Canada, 1997). The variables for the socio-economic characteristics are from the main data file whereas the ages of respondents at birth of first child and at home-leaving of the last child are taken from the children's data file. Only the biological children are included in the analysis since this study is confined to cohorts of men born between 1916 to 1955, a great proportion of whom have ended parenting as of the survey date. Few in these cohorts have gone through single- or step-parenting and the length of time added to the average total parenting duration was minimal (Rajulton and Ravanera, 1997).

The sample survey covers the whole of Canada excluding residents of Yukon and Northwest Territories and full-time residents of institutions. There were 10750 respondents aged 15 and older, of whom 4836 are men. We limit our study to 2325 men born between 1916 to 1955. The sampling procedure followed by Statistics Canada ensures that the sample is representative of the population. Since the survey had a complex design rather than simple random sampling, weights are used throughout all our analyses.

As a retrospective survey, the GSS95 has certain limitations. The first is the selection bias: those included in the sample are those who survived and remained in the country as of survey date. We need to assume that those who died or emigrated would have experienced the events in the same way as those who did not. The bias introduced by this assumption is probably not substantial because the trends obtained from these data are similar to those found in previous studies (for example, on first marriage and first birth of women) using census and/or registration data (Dumas and Peron, 1992; Ram, 1990; Ravanera, 1995). The second limitation is the problem of recall, which can be severe particularly among the elderly when obtaining information on past events. The problem can also exist in the case of any information not directly pertaining to the respondents themselves, for example, about the respondent's parents; many are not able to recall the education level of their parents. As much as possible, we choose variables with the least number of missing cases. A third limitation is the problem of misdating of events that arises from inability to recall accurately when an event occurred. While this study did not systematically check the extent

of all these errors, our previous analysis of the same data set tends to show that the data gathered through this survey are reasonably reliable.

Life table analysis is used to examine the variations in timing of parenting. The well-known advantage of this approach is that it takes care of right censoring of data. This means that those who have not experienced the event as of the survey date are taken into account in computations yielding unbiased probability estimates. For each category of independent variables, a single-decrement life table is done for (a) the start of birth parenting, (b) the end of birth parenting, and (c) the duration or length of parenting. For these life tables, the analysis is confined to those who are at risk of experiencing the events. All men are included for the start of birth parenting, but only those who have started parenting as of the time of the survey are included for the last two events. Life table analysis provides an examination of the gross effects of the socioeconomic variables on the timing and duration of parenting. The small sample size does not allow for the simultaneous control of the other variables.

The proportional hazards model is used to analyze the net effects of the variables on parenting[2]. This multivariate analysis, which simultaneously controls for the effects of the variables, is done for the start and end of parenting. We also made an analysis of the duration of parenting (that is, the difference in the age at start and end of parenting) but found that the effects of the independent variables are not different from those on the age at end of parenting. This is mainly because the model of end of parenting controls for the start of parenting thereby effectively achieving the net effects of the variables on the duration of parenting.

As discussed in the last section, variations in parenting by social status, cultural influences and region of residence are examined. Both mother's education and respondent's education were used as indicators of social status[3]. For cultural influences, the mother tongue (or first language) and immigration status variables are used. Preference would have been to use ethnicity, however this question was not asked in the survey. Correspondingly, broad categories were used due to the small sample size. As for community backgrounds, it would have been better to use such indicators as rural-urban, non-CMA - CMA, or such aggregate variables as levels of employment but these are not available from the data set. Therefore, the study focus was primarily on the region of residence as of the time of the survey. The bias on the results of this analysis would be proportionate to the extent of internal migration between regions during the period of parenting.

In addition to the above independent variables, four categories of 10-year birth cohorts (1916-25 to 1946-55) as a demographic control variable.

Description of Tables

Table 1 presents the descriptive findings displaying the median ages at start, end, and duration of parenting obtained from the life tables. The median duration of parenting was separately obtained from a life table indicating the difference between the start and end of parenting[4]. An initial glance at the table shows that Canadian men live with children for about 28 to 32 years. They start parenting at ages between the ages of 27 to 29 years and end parenting (as defined here) at about 56 to 61 years of age. These differences in timing and duration are referred to as gross effects.

Table 2 presents the results of the proportional hazards model of age at start of parenting. This model has fewer variables than the one for the end and duration of parenting. The respondent's level of education has been excluded in this analysis since it could change after birth of first child. For this model, mother's education adequately captures the effect of social status. The parameters presented in the Table are the beta estimates, the standard errors and the relative risk. In our discussion, we shall mainly focus on the relative risk, which is the exponential of the beta estimate. This represents the risk of experiencing the event, here the start of parenting, relative to the reference category. The reference category is identifiable in the table as it has a beta estimate of 0 and a relative risk of 1. A relative risk greater than 1 implies a higher risk of starting parenting (which translates to an earlier age at first birth). Conversely, a relative risk of less than 1 means a lower risk of starting parenting (or a later age at first birth) than the reference category.

Table 3 presents the results of the proportional hazards model of age at end of parenting. This model includes the respondent's education and a number of other variables that capture the earlier life course transitions - the number of children, experience of cohabitation, and the age at start of parenting. As noted earlier, the inclusion of the start of parenting as a control variable effectively makes this model similar to that of duration of parenting. The additional socioeconomic variables included in the model therefore represent the net effects that are mainly associated with the process of launching children and length of parenting. As with the start of parenting, focus will be on the *relative risks*. In this model, the higher the risk, the earlier the end of parenting or the shorter the duration relative to the reference category, and conversely, the lower the risk, the later the age at which parenting ends or the longer the duration.

A more comprehensive analysis of life course events affecting the end of parenting can include related events of union formation and dissolution as well as episodes of step-parenting. [Note that this study restricts parenting to biological children only. However, in case of marital dissolution, end of parenting of biological children can be preceded by start of step-parenting.] Such an analysis would throw light on the evolution of different family types in individual life histories (such as intact, single parent, blended and step-parent

Table 1
Weighted Number and Percentage Distribution of Socio-Economic Variables,
Life Table Median Ages at Start and End of Parenting and Median Duration of Parenting
for Canadian Men, 1916-1925, 1926-1935, 1936-1945 and 1946-1955 Birth Cohorts.

	number	percent	Median Age at Start	number	percent	Median Age at End	Median Duration
Social Status							
Respondent's Education							
HS or Less	713	32.0	26.8	568	31.0	57.4	30.8
HS Diploma	301	13.5	27.4	255	13.9	57.1	29.0
Some College	277	12.4	28.2	227	12.4	56.4	27.6
College/University Diploma	938	42.1	28.6	783	42.7	56.8	28.2
N	2229	100.0		1833	100.0		
Mother's Education							
Elementary	946	53.3	27.7	805	54.5	58.1	30.4
High School	644	36.3	28.4	529	35.8	56.2	27.9
College/University	185	10.4	29.6	142	9.6	56.2	28.4
N	1775	100.0		1476	100.0		
Cultural Influence							
First Language							
English	1176	53.0	27.6	966	52.9	56.0	28.6
French	612	27.6	27.7	501	27.4	56.6	28.8
Other	431	19.4	29.3	359	19.7	61.1	32.0
N	2220	100.0		1826	100.0		
Immigrant Status							
Canadian Born	1723	74.1	27.6	1417	74.5	56.3	28.9
Immigrant	602	25.9	29.4	486	25.5	59.2	31.5
N	2325	100.0		1903	100.0		
Place of Residence							
Region	192	8.3	26.8	163	8.6	57.8	30.8
Atlantic	588	25.3	28.3	468	24.6	56.8	29.4
Quebec	879	37.8	28.2	728	38.2	57.4	30.4
Ontario	360	15.5	27.9	292	15.3	55.9	27.9
Prairies	306	13.2	28.5	253	13.3	56.5	28.2
British Columbia	2325	100.0		1904	100.0		
N							
Control Variables							
Cohorts							
1916-1925	309	13.3	29.1	243	12.8	57.2	28.9
1926-1935	471	20.3	27.8	386	20.3	58.2	30.8
1936-1945	616	26.5	27.0	534	28.1	56.8	29.4
1946-1955	929	40.0	28.4	740	38.9		
N	2325	100.0		1903	100.0		

Table 2
Parameters of Proportional Hazards Model of Age at
Start of Parenting for Canadian Men,
1916-1925, 1926-1935, 1936-1945 and 1946-1955 Birth Cohorts.

Total number of weighted cases		2323	
Total number of weighted censored cases		362	(15.5%)
The likelihood ratio (Chi Square)		450.2656	(12 d.f.)

	Estimate	Std. Error	Relative Risk
Social Status			
Mother's Education			
Elementary	0.0000		1.0000
High School	-0.0944	0.0516	0.9100 **
College/University	-0.2471	0.0787	0.7811 ***
Cultural Influence			
First Language			
English	0.0000		1.0000
French	0.2596	0.0833	1.2964 ***
Other	-0.0856	0.0717	0.9179
Immigrant Status			
Canadian Born	0.0000		1.0000
Immigrant	-0.0461	0.0625	0.9550
Place of Residence			
Region			
Atlantic	0.0000		1.0000
Quebec	0.2737	0.1075	1.3149 ***
Ontario	1.3694	0.0875	3.9330 ***
Prairies	0.3452	0.0983	1.4553 ***
British Columbia	0.7698	0.1008	2.1594 ***
Demographic Variable			
Cohorts			
1916-1925	0.0000		1.0000
1926-1935	0.1302	0.0807	1.1391 **
1936-1945	0.2239	0.0769	1.2510 ***
1946-1955	-0.0807	0.0741	0.9225

*** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.

Table 3
Parameters of Proportional Hazards Model of Age at
End of Parenting for Canadian Men,
1916-1925, 1926-1935, 1936-1945 and 1946-1955 Birth Cohorts.

Total number of weighted cases		1844	
Total number of weighted censored cases		58	(3.1%)
The likelihood ratio (Chi Square)		2285.014	(18 d.f.)

	Estimate	Std. Error	Relative Risk
Social Status			
Respondent's Education			
HS or Less	0.0000		1.0000
HS Diploma	0.1205	0.0784	1.1281 *
Some College	0.3684	0.0835	1.4454 ***
College/University Diploma	0.2143	0.0599	1.2390 ***
Mother's Education			
Elementary	0.0000		1.0000
High School	0.2117	0.0563	1.2357 ***
College/University	0.1305	0.0845	1.1394 **
Cultural Influence			
First Language			
English	0.0000		1.0000
French	0.0116	0.0833	1.0117
Other	0.0971	0.0767	1.1020
Immigrant Status			
Canadian Born	0.0000		1.0000
Immigrant	-0.1226	0.0677	0.8846 **
Place of Residence			
Region			
Atlantic	0.0000		1.0000
Quebec	0.7805	0.1119	2.1825 ***
Ontario	1.5335	0.0920	4.6343 ***
Prairies	0.5922	0.1033	1.8079 ***
British Columbia	0.9871	0.1063	2.6402 ***
Demographic and Life Course Variables			
Cohorts			
1916-1925	0.0000		1.0000
1926-1935	0.4895	0.0957	1.6314 ***
1936-1945	1.5378	0.1043	4.6545 ***
1946-1955	3.7946	0.1256	44.4593 ***
Age at Start of Parenting	-0.0491	0.0049	0.9521 ***
Number of Children	-0.0915	0.0186	0.9126 ***
Marital Status			
Never Cohabited	0.0000		
Cohabited	0.1265	0.0851	1.1349 *

*** p <. 001; ** p <. 01; * p < .05.

family types) and its impact on the end of parenting. The small number of cases (74 out of 1844) involving step-parenting makes it difficult to do a complete analysis of the evolution of family types. One way of circumventing this problem is to examine the impact of the immediately preceding event. In the analytical framework used, if the end of parenting is preceded by start of parenting (which in turn was preceded by first union), such a sequence would clearly imply an intact family type. If the immediately preceding event is either start of first union or end of first or second union, then we can infer some form of single parent family type. Similarly, if the preceding event is step-parenting, then a step-parent family type; and if preceded by start of second union, then some form of blended family type. Using the approach described above, we can do a proportional hazards analysis of end of parenting by immediately previous life course event. These results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Parameters of Proportional Hazards Model of End of Parenting by Immediately Preceding Life Course Event

Preceding Event	Estimate	Relative Risk	N
Start of Birth Parenting	0.0000**	1.0000	1262
Start of First Union	-0.2154***	0.8062	78
End of First Union	-0.5727***	0.5640	166
Start of Second Union	0.1401**	1.1504	142
End of Second Union	-0.1536	0.8576	122
Start of Step-parenting	0.3903***	1.4774	74

*** p < .001;   ** p < .01.

Results of Life Table and Proportional Hazards Analysis:

Social Status Effects

The median ages by education categories, both of the respondent and of the mother, show that parenting patterns do differ by social status (Table 1). Men of lower status start earlier and end parenting later. Men whose mothers had elementary education have their first child about 2 years earlier (27.7) than men whose mothers had college education (29.6). Among men who have had children, those whose mothers had the lowest education end parenting about 2 years later (58.1) than those whose mothers had high school or college education

(56.2). Consequently, the duration of parenting is longer for men of lower social status (30.4 years), although men whose mothers had college education have a slightly longer length of parenting (28.4) than those with high-school educated mothers (27.9).

The patterns revealed in the life table analysis hold even after controlling for other variables (Table 2). Men whose mothers had higher education have significantly lower risks of becoming parents, which means that they have their first child at later ages. Table 3 shows that men whose mothers had higher education also have a significantly higher relative risk of ending parenthood, that is, they end parenting early. Respondent's education has similar effects.

The longer duration of parenting by men of lower status is the result of a combination of many factors. The social status differential at the start of parenting may be a continuation of differentials that begin early on in men's life courses. Younger age at birth of first child among those in the lower status, for example, is closely associated with their earlier school completion, starting work earlier and earlier marriage than those with higher social status. The lack of parental resources to support the children's schooling may lead to an early start of regular work, which in turn leads to earlier marriage and early start of parenting. Social class seems to be also related to differential aspirations for children's timing of life course transitions, such as school completion and marriage (Hogan, 1985; Cooney and Hogan, 1991). Parental expectations and aspirations influence their children's own expectations and aspirations which in turn affect their marriage timing, and consequently, the timing of start of parenting.

The later end of parenting of men of lower status is due partly to their greater number of children. Their children also stay longer with them than do children of men of higher status. At first glance this seems contradictory because these lower status men marry and start parenting earlier. Correspondingly, one would expect that their children would leave earlier as well. The likely explanation is that the main reason for home-leaving of children (particularly, males) has shifted from marriage to independent living (Ravanera *et al.*, 1995). Consistent with the argument of Goldscheider and DaVanzo (1989), is that parents with lower status likely lack the resources to help their children live independently at an early age or to finance their children's higher education away from home.

Cultural Influences

Table 1 indicates that there are no significant differences in the timing of parenting between men whose mother tongue is English or French. The age at start of parenting is identical (at about 27.6) and the end of parenting is only slightly higher for French (56.6) than for English (56.0). Consequently, the duration of parenting is almost the same. Men whose first language is neither

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English nor French have the highest age at birth of first child (29.3) and at end of parenting (61.1). Immigrants start parenting later (29.4) than Canadian-born men (27.6). They also end parenting at an older age, therefore ending with longer duration of parenting.

Controlling for the other variables presents a different picture of the start of parenting (Table 2). Men of "other" mother tongue category are not significantly different from the English reference category. Neither is the risk of parenting different between the immigrants and Canadian-born men. This means that all other variables being equal (in terms of mother's education, place of residence, and cohorts), the start of parenting among those of "other" cultures is no different from that of the main-stream English culture. What stands out is the significantly higher risk of start of parenting among men with French as the mother tongue. Controlling for other characteristics, French as a first language is associated with earlier start of parenting and perhaps, higher fertility. This is in contrast to what is found in Table 1 where there is no significant difference in the average age at start of parenting between the two mainstream cultures in Canada. This finding probably indicates that fertility occurred at younger ages among French-speaking men in earlier cohorts but that changes in fertility patterns among the later birth cohorts were more dramatic among French-speaking than among the English-speaking men.

At the end of parenting, the later age at which immigrant men experience the final home-leaving of their children persists even after controlling for other variables. The relative risk of ending parenting is significantly lower for immigrant than for Canadian-born men (Table 3). However, the risk among those with "other" mother tongues is not distinctly different from those with English as their mother tongue. This is an indication of familism which is strongly embedded in the traditional culture that leads to older age at home-leaving of children but that influence may no longer be strong with the younger generations of men born in Canada belonging to these "other" cultures. Thus, the only cultural differential is that immigrant men have a significantly longer duration of parenting.

Regional Differences

Table 1 shows that there are regional differences in parenting: men from the Atlantic provinces have the youngest age at birth of their first child (26.8), and those in the Prairies have the second highest (27.9). These two regions are also distinct in terms of end of parenting with men in the Atlantic provinces ending their parenting latest at age 58 and those in the Prairies earliest at age 56. In other words, the duration of parenting is the highest among men in the Atlantic Provinces (31 years) and the lowest in the Prairies (28 years).

However, controlling for other variables reverses the gross effects on age at first birth. As seen in Table 2, the risk of start of parenting is significantly higher in all other regions compared to that in the Atlantic. This means that, all other variables being equal, men in the Atlantic would start parenting at later ages. The direction of the regional differentials at end of parenting remains constant even when other variables are controlled for (Table 3). The relative risk of ending parenting is highest in Ontario, not in the Prairies. This means that, *ceteris paribus*, men in the Atlantic have the longest parenting years and Ontarians, the shortest.

The differential brought out by the multivariate analysis points to the differences in opportunity structures indicated by regions of residence. The economies in the Atlantic provinces are not as vibrant as in Ontario or the West and have been for decades. This analysis shows that low availability of economic opportunities leads to later start of parenting, everything else being equal, confirming the rationality of fertility decisions. In the environment of fewer opportunities, longer parenting is a rational response to strained economic circumstances. This is consistent with the findings of Boyd and Norris (1995) regarding factors affecting the living arrangements of young adults. Analysis of both the 1981 and 1991 censuses showed that the propensity of young adults to live with parents was high among those who were unemployed or out of the labour force, had low income, or were full-time students (Boyd and Norris, 1995; Boyd and Pryor, 1989). When opportunities for the young are not plentiful, extended parenting is an alternative strategy of optimizing resources of parents and young adults.

Out-migration is also a possible explanation for parenting differentials by region. It may be that those who migrated out of areas with low economic opportunities are also those who tend to end parenting earlier, for example, the highly educated. Or, those who remain in the area may be those whose family values promote longer parenting, which implies that economic opportunities do affect parenting either directly or through migration.

Demographic and Life Course Variables

In addition to the independent variables discussed above, demographic variables were included in both analyses of gross and net effects. Table 1 shows that parenting differs by cohorts: the age at start of parenting was high in the 1916-1925 birth cohort, decreased in the two mid-cohorts and increased again in the 1946-1955 birth cohorts. Table 2 presents the same pattern of risks of parenting by cohorts. This trend in age at start of parenting is consistent with the trends in fertility in Canada that gave rise to the baby boom in the years following the Second World War and the subsequent reversal brought about by the boomers themselves. As for the end of parenting, Table 1 shows the youngest age at end of parenting among the latest cohort, which is also revealed in Table 3 where the risks show an increase over cohorts. This means that later cohorts of men are

experiencing empty-nesting at younger ages. A significant factor contributing to the decreasing age at end of parenting is the decreasing number of children. The very high risk found for the 1946-1955 cohort (44.5 times greater than the 1916-1925 cohort) reflects a selection effect. For some of them, parenting was cut short by separation or divorce and the short length is likely not representative of the entire cohort.

The life course variables included in the analysis of end of parenting (Table 3) have relative risks in the expected direction. A later start of parenting and greater number of children lead to lower risks which translate to later age at end of parenting. This is simply a matter of "accounting" and need no further explanation. Those who have experienced cohabitation have a higher risk of ending parenting, implying an earlier end and shorter duration of parenting. This is consistent with the finding of an earlier study on children's home-leaving (Zhao *et al.*, 1995) and which, borrowing from Goldscheider and Goldscheider (1993), was explained as possibly due to reduced level of familism among those who cohabit.

Table 4 presents the results of the model of end of parenting by preceding life course events with the start of (birth) parenting as the reference category. As mentioned above, this category essentially represents the intact family *up to the time of end of parenting* (it may be that family dissolution either by divorce or spouse's death occurs after the end of parenting). Changes related to first union (either start or end of first union) bring about significantly lower risks of end of parenting when compared to an intact family. In other words, changes in first union status lead to significantly longer parenting than in an intact family. This is perhaps more evident in the small proportion of cases where the immediately previous event is end of first union. In these cases, fathers continue parenting even after widowhood or divorce. Cases where the immediately preceding event is start of first union need more elaborate examination of preceding events not considered in this analysis, such as births outside of unions.

In contrast, cases preceded by either start of second union or start of step-parenting have much higher risks of ending parenting; that is, parenting (of biological children) ends much quicker than in an intact family. This most likely reflects the difficulties in adjustments experienced in blended or step-parent families. As discussed in an earlier study (see Zhao et al., 1995), these difficulties may be practically resolved by children's leaving the parental home at younger ages.

Summary and Conclusion

While this study has focussed on the variations in the timing and duration of parenting, an interesting point here is that, regardless of socioeconomic characteristics, the majority of men spend a great number of years living with

their children, from their late 20s to late 50s or even early 60s - a period of about 28 to 32 years. This study clearly brings out the possible status differentials that can exist within this broad understanding of the length of male parenting. Men of higher status start parenting late but end it early. In other words, whenever resources (either of parents or one's own) allow, the choices made are for delayed start of parenting and early launching of children and consequently, shorter duration of parenting. However, the magnitude of difference in median ages, which is about 2 to 3 years for both the start and end of parenting, indicates that these choices are probably made within normative constraints. There are age ranges within which it is acceptable to start parenting and within which children are expected to leave home.

Cultural differences are manifested in men's parenting too, with immigrant men revealing a longer length of parenting because their children leave home later. The differentials by cultures in the start of parenting seem to be disappearing (or have disappeared) among Canadians.

Community backgrounds, particularly opportunity structures, do affect men's parenting patterns. Consistent with economic rationality in fertility decisions, men start parenting earlier in places where opportunities are greater. And, in regions where children have better chances for employment or higher wages, parenting ends earlier. This seems to imply that the family (or, in this analysis, fathers) is a buffer for children -- the length of parenting adjusts to opportunities provided by society.

Exploration of the differences in the length of male parenting is simply defined as the length of stay with children. Refinement of this analysis should be done in the future with better measurements of parenting, including the different modes of custody of children in the event of separation or divorce of parents. A finding in this analysis by cohort indicates a trend towards a shorter duration of male parenting. One reason for this is the smaller number of children of more recent cohorts. Another reason is the higher rates of union dissolution that effectively end the stay of children with their fathers. Clearly, measuring just the duration of co-residence with children will no longer suffice as an indicator of parenting. Another complication of measurement is the blending of families. Step-parenting shortens co-residence with biological children of previous marriage but opting to have biological children in higher order marriage can lead to longer period of life with children. What this study has done is simply to provide a start or baseline with which more elaborate studies that capture the various nuances of male parenting and the evolving complicated life courses of male parents may be compared.

End Notes:

1. In some cases, the termination of co-residence at the time of union break-up or the death of a last (or only) child marks the end of parenting. These cases constitute a small proportion of the sample.

2. For proportional hazards modeling, we utilize the LIFEHIST program, the two main advantages of which are: it can make use of fractional weights of sample data, and it does not entirely disregard a case if there is missing information only on certain variables.

3. Consideration was given to using father's education and occupation but many respondents particularly those of the earlier cohorts did not know the educational attainment of their fathers. And, the information on father's occupation was not collected in the survey. Compared to the number of respondents able to provide information on their father's education, about 10% more respondents gave information on their mother's education.

4. It would be inaccurate to subtract the median age of the start from the median age of the end of parenting as the two medians were obtained from different groups of men.

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