



Table 1²¹ shows that key characteristics of women and their current spouses differ across levels of abuse severity, especially in regards to women suffering high severity abuse. Women who experience high levels of abuse are less likely to possess post-secondary and university education and are more likely to come from violent homes than women reporting mild or no abuse. Abusive spouses are much more likely to have violent family backgrounds and to have been unemployed in the past twelve months than non-abusive spouses. They are also less likely to have university education. Despite the differences among the samples, the labor force behavior of abused women is quite similar to that of non-abused women in terms of weeks worked and participation rates.

However, the sample of currently married women may not be an appropriate sample of women to consider when discussing domestic abuse, because women who suffered more severe abuse may be more likely to divorce. In other words, the women for whom we would expect to observe more serious health-related effects from domestic abuse may be precisely the women who are excluded from the sample. Table 2 supports this claim, as divorce rates for women abused in first marriages are dramatically different than those for non-abused women: while the divorce rate for non-abused women is 15%, women who experienced high severity abuse in a first marriage have a divorce rate of 75%.²² Furthermore, table 3 shows that the average characteristics of women vary considerably across marital histories. Divorced women, even those who have remarried, are more likely to participate in the labor force and are more likely to come from violent homes. In addition, approximately one-half of past marriages are abusive, while only 15% of all current marriages report abuse. Clearly, domestic violence plays a role in the dissolution of many marriages. Since women in the various marital histories are quite different in terms of standard economic and abuse-related characteristics, we examine the within-history comparisons of labor force behavior for abused and non-abused women. Table 4 shows that married women who are abused do not have employment behavior that is markedly different from non-abused married women. However, divorced women who have suffered severe abuse at the hands of a past spouse are

²¹ Survey weights are used in calculating all statistics to control for variations in non-response rates across provinces and the under- and over-sampling of some regions (see Statistics Canada, 1994).

²² Lloyd (1997b) also finds that women who experienced severe abuse are more likely to be divorced in her data on low-income families.

less likely to participate and are less likely to choose full-year employment. Furthermore, remarried women abused in the current marriage are less likely to participate and if abused in a past marriage, are less likely to choose full-year employment. Therefore, the sample statistics suggest domestic abuse is an influential factor in both marital and labor status choices and the role of divorce is important when determining the effects of domestic abuse on employment.

3. Model

Although rich in abuse-related information, the VAWS is a cross-sectional data set with incomplete marital and employment histories. Keeping in mind this limitation of the data, we use a simple, multi-state, finite horizon framework to study the relationships between marriage, employment and domestic abuse. Two important aspects of marital and labor force status decisions are incorporated. First, the model captures the sequential nature of marital status decisions and the forward-looking behavior of women. Second, the labor force status decision in each period depends on the entire marital history, not simply on whether a woman is currently married or single.²³

There are four marital states available to women (single (S), married (M), divorced (D) and remarried (R)) and the following transitions between states are permitted. Single women can remain single or move to the married state. Married women can choose to remain married or to divorce, but cannot proceed directly to the remarriage market. Once divorced, women can remain divorced or remarry. Since information is not available on more than one remarriage in the data, it is assumed for simplicity that women who decide to divorce after remarriage remain divorced. The utility received in each state depends on a random component (ϵ_i) that is realized upon entering marital state i , $i=S,M,D,R$. Women also have unobserved preferences over work (ϵ_p) that are assumed to be known in the initial marital state (S), time invariant, and independent of ϵ_i .²⁴

²³ Van der Klaauw (1996) estimates a dynamic model of labor force participation and marital status choices, where current utility depends on whether women were single or married in the current period and the preceding period. However, he does not analyze the relationship between current decisions and the entire marital history.

²⁴ The latter assumption is relaxed in Section 4.