

Capturing Diversity within Canadian Families: Demographic Characteristics of Mixed Unions

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Introduction

The main objective of this study is to examine diversity within families in Canada as it is often overlooked in the celebration of multiculturalism and diversity. Mixed unions bring individuals of different ethnic groups together into the same family unit. One way that inequality is maintained is through the institution of family and restrictions on out-group marriage, and this warrants the need for the study of diversity within families (Childs, 2002).

Background

Mixed unions categorized by self-reported visible minority (VM) status are on the rise in Canada making up 2.6% of all couples in 1991, to 3.1% in 2001, 3.9% in 2006 (Milan, Maheux & Chui, 2010).

What does this mean?

- Inter-marriage between whites and visible minority as a sign of integration or assimilation of minority groups to the white, mainstream host society (Hamplová & LeBourdais, 2010)
- Decrease in social distance and increase in social contact between different ethnic groups (Qian & Lichter, 2007)
- An indicator of future diversity of society

Moreover, couples in mixed unions have been found to be younger, more educated and urban than their counterparts in co-ethnic unions (Milan, Maheux & Chui, 2010). However, the socio-demographic characteristics of individuals in white-white and visible minority co-ethnic unions; and mixed unions with one or more visible minority individuals is not known, along with individuals in same-sex, mixed unions.

The relative wage earned by each individual in the partnership, by gender is also of interest. The gender wage gap dictates the relative resources contributed by the partners, and therefore, the bargaining power of each individual (Erickson, 2005). Mixed couples can be viewed as non-traditional due to societal and familial expectations to marry within ethnic and racial boundaries, therefore, examining relative wage contributions can indicate whether the gender norms of traditional partnerships that contribute to the gender wage gap hold true in mixed unions.

Data and Measures

The 20% sample of 2006 long-form census of Canada. This is well suited for my analysis because I can identify couples in common-law and marital unions, their self-reported visible minority status, and their demographic characteristics.

Mixed Unions – Marital or common law partnerships between individuals across visible minority status. For the purpose of this study, white-visible minority unions and visible minority-different visible minority unions will be separated. And I will examine same-sex and opposite-sex couples by the different union types.

Education – The highest level of education completed within the couple is reported in four categories: less than high school, high school, college (including apprenticeship, trades and some university) and university (bachelors degree or higher).

Location – This denotes whether the couples' place of residence is classified as urban or rural based on Statistical Area Classification (SAC).

Relative wage – The relative contribution of respondent to the sum of wages reported by the couple.

Research Questions

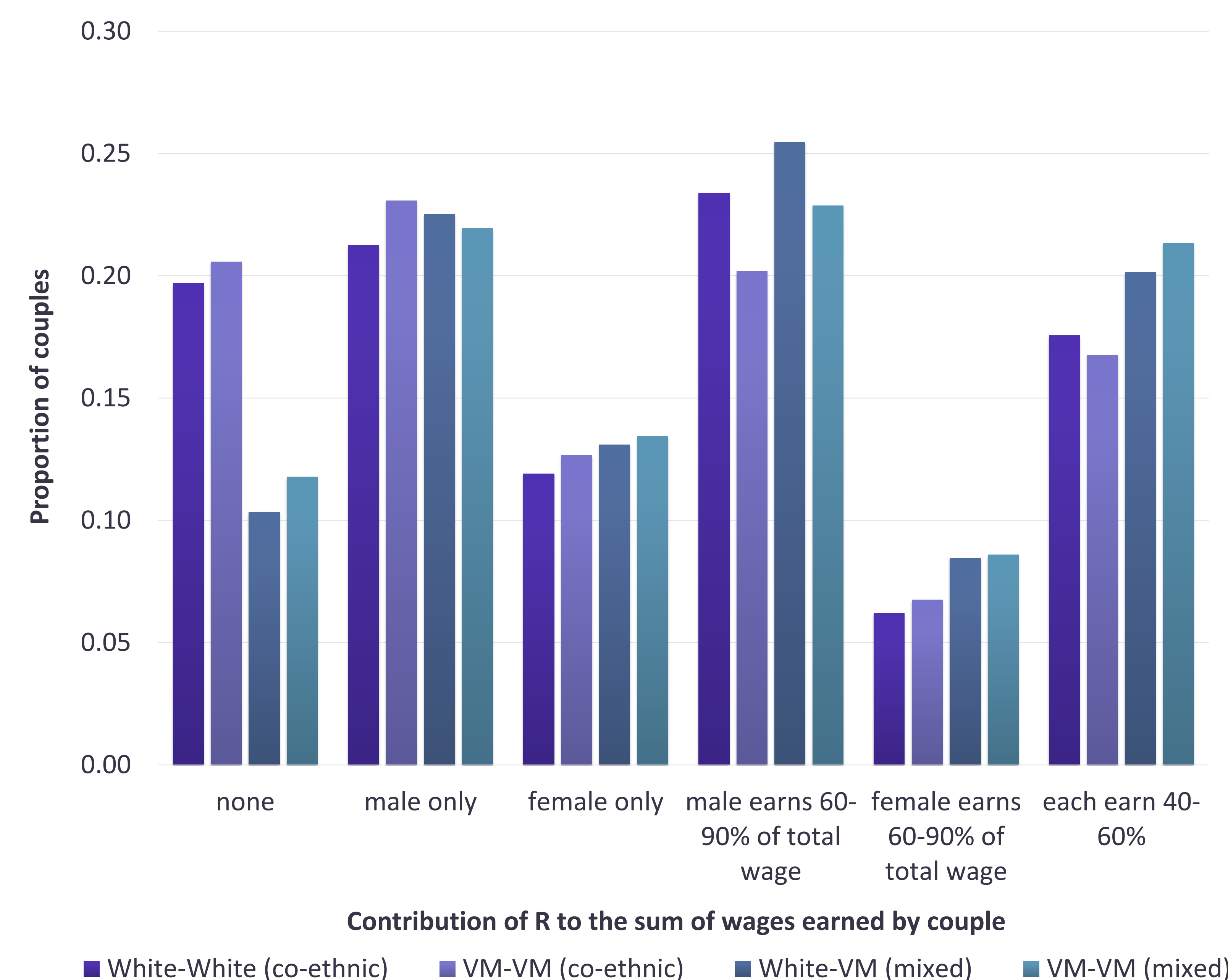
1. How are same-sex and opposite-sex couples in mixed unions different compared to their counterparts in co-ethnic unions, in terms of demographic characteristics such as age, education and place of residence?
2. What is the relative wage contribution of each partner of opposite-sex couples in mixed unions, compared to their counterparts in co-ethnic unions?

Table 1: Distribution of educational attainment and place of residence (proportion), by type of union.

Type of union based on VM status	Opposite-sex couples				Same-sex couples	
	White-White (co-ethnic)	VM-VM (co-ethnic)	White-VM (mixed)	VM-VM (mixed)	Co-ethnic	Mixed
Highest level of Education*						
<High school	0.10	0.11	0.05	0.06	0.03	0.01
High school	0.17	0.17	0.14	0.13	0.11	0.07
College	0.46	0.29	0.42	0.37	0.33	0.29
University	0.27	0.43	0.40	0.44	0.52	0.62
Total	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Residence						
Rural	0.25	0.01	0.14	0.02	0.13	0.06
Urban	0.75	0.99	0.86	0.98	0.87	0.94
Total	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

*attained within the partners

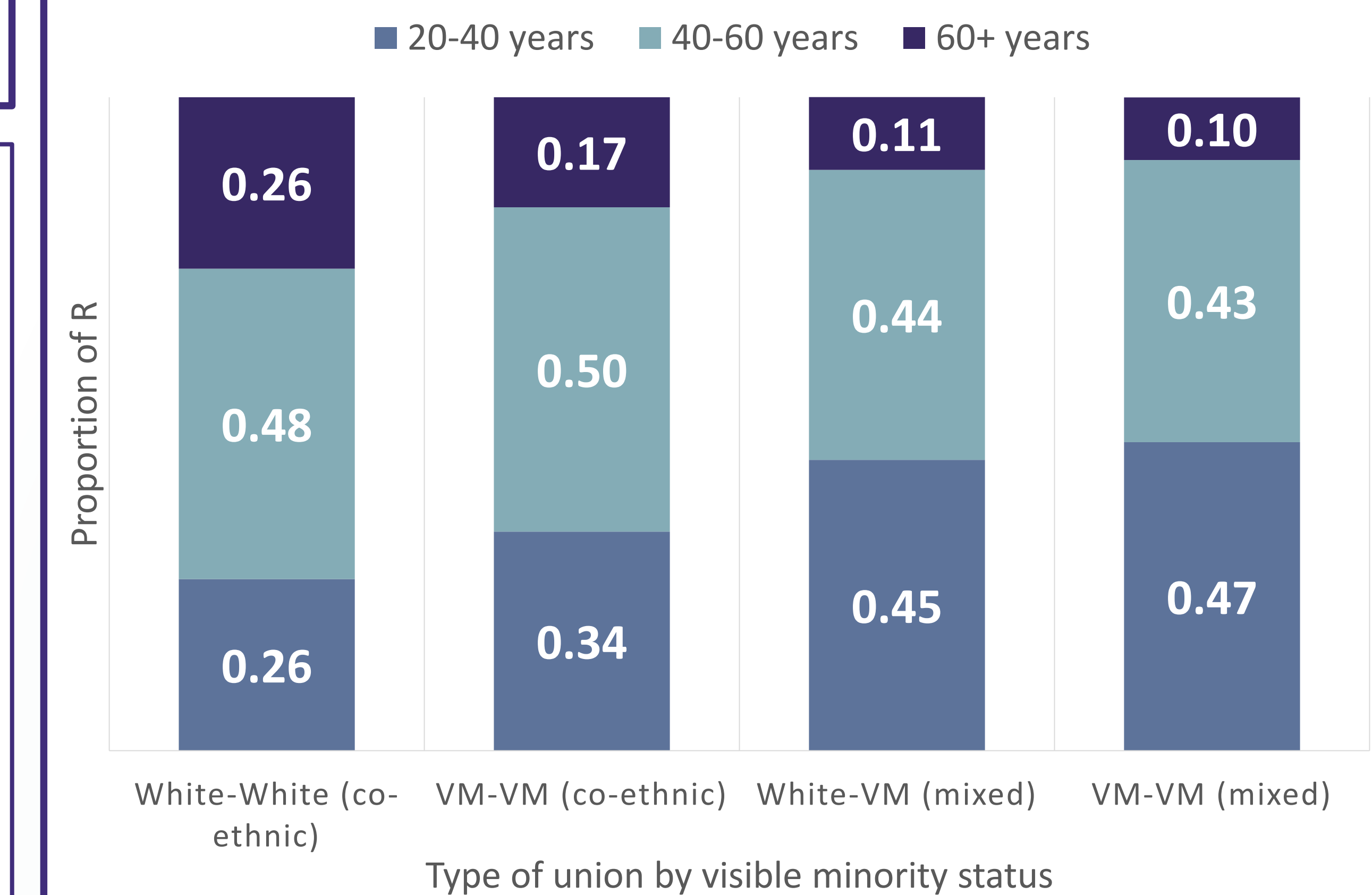
Relative contribution of individuals to the sum of wages earned by couples in opposite-sex partnerships, by type of union



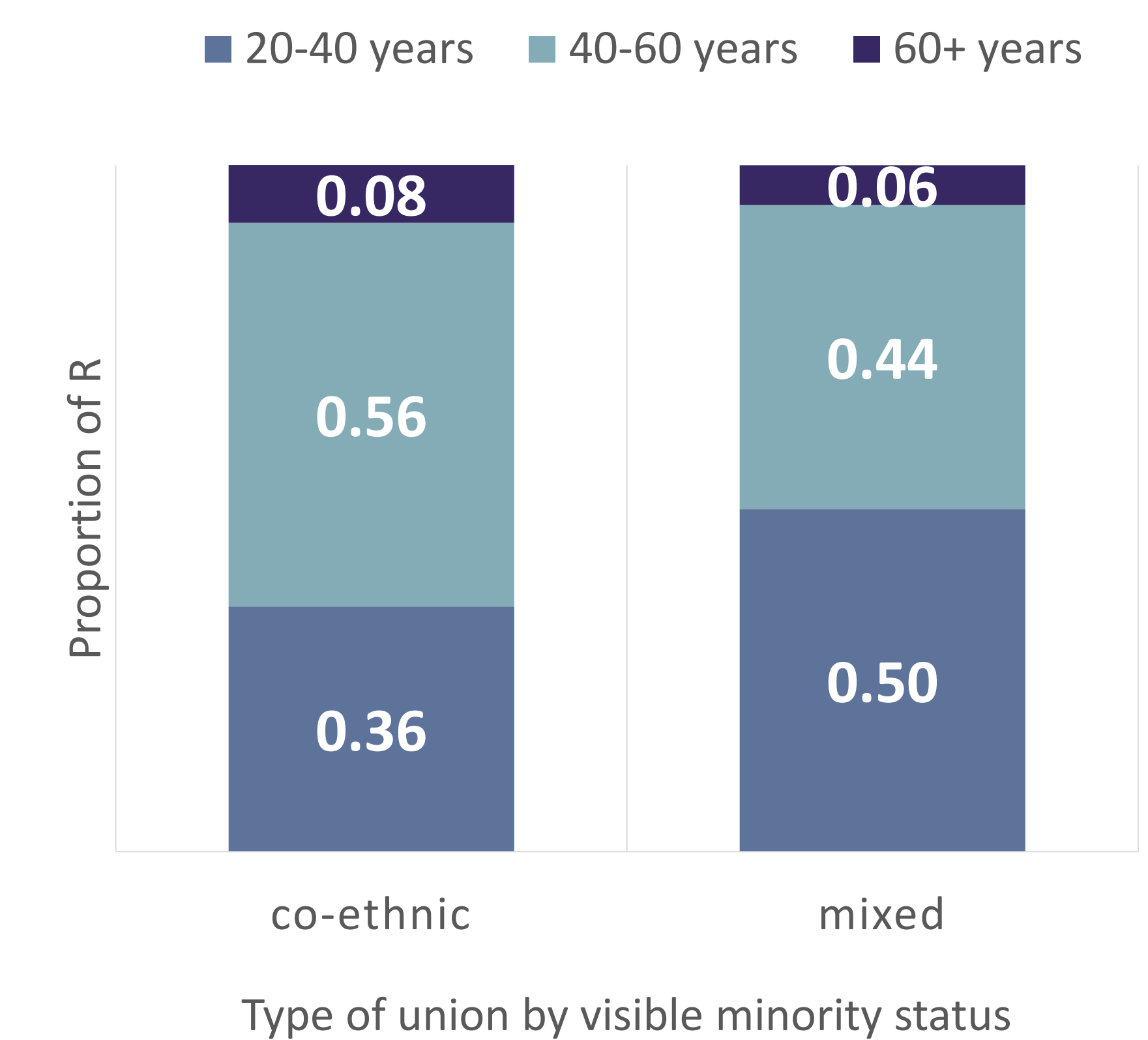
Sample

My sample consists of non-institutional individuals aged 20 years or older, who are in marital or common law unions. The majority of individuals in this sample are white and urban with a mean age around 45-50 years. They range in education levels from less than high school diplomas to graduate degrees.

Age distribution of R by type of union for opposite sex partnerships



Age distribution of R by type of union for same-sex partnerships



Preliminary Findings

Opposite-sex and same-sex couples in mixed unions where one or both partners are a visible minority are younger, more likely to have a bachelor's degree or higher, and are more urban than their counterparts in co-ethnic unions. Moreover, individuals in opposite-sex, mixed unions partnerships report zero wages in lower proportions and are slightly more likely to report contributing about half of the wages earned by the partners.

Given that mixed couples are younger, urban, more educated and made up of at least one visible minority partner, in further analysis of the relative wage contribution of individuals in partnerships, these factors need to be accounted for.