
FACT SHEET: FAMILIES, BREAKDOWN AND POVERTY IN CANADA

For further sources, see *Private choices, public costs: How failing families cost us all*, by Rebecca Walberg and Andrea Mrozek

POVERTY, WELFARE AND SINGLE PARENTS

- Canadian researchers Finnie and Sweetman suggest in a 2003 study that “consistently, a change in family status from lone parenthood to any other category decreases the probability of moving into low income, in most cases more than halving the rate relative to those who remained single mothers.”
(Source: Finnie, R. and Sweetman, A. (2003). Poverty dynamics: empirical evidence for Canada. *Canadian Journal of Economics*, 36 (2), p. 306.)
- 8.2 per cent of couple households with children are in poverty (as measured by the Low Income Cut-Off, LICO)
- 16.0 per cent of single father households live below the LICO
- 32.2 per cent of single mother households live below the LICO (almost four times more likely to be poor than a couple household)
- 29 per cent of all single parents live below the LICO
(Source: 2006 Census)
- On average across Canada, single-parent families are 8.8 times more likely to depend upon welfare than couple households. Among the provinces, the multiplier ranges from a low of 5.1 in Quebec to a high of 16 in Newfoundland and Labrador.
(Source: Human Resources Social Development Canada welfare data with calculations by authors)
- Single-parent households derive more of their income from government transfers than do two-parent households, in both relative and absolute terms. Nationally, the average two-parent household collects \$1476 less than the average single parent household in government transfers. In British Columbia this gap is the smallest at \$484. It is the highest in Alberta at \$2164. (Source: 2006 Census and HRSDC statistics with calculations by authors)

THE CHANGING CANADIAN FAMILY (2006 Census data)

- 25.8 per cent of families with children are single parent families in Canada today
- 20.7 per cent of families with children are female lone parent families
- 5.1 per cent of families with children are male lone parent families
- 11.3 per cent of families with children are cohabiting couples
- In most Canadian provinces, married parents remain the norm. 68.6 per cent of all families are married parent families. In Quebec, cohabitation is more common: 54.5 per cent of Quebec families are married parent families
- 72.3 per cent of families are married parent families in the rest of Canada excluding Quebec
Conversely, 28.8 per cent of families in Quebec live common-law, where the average for the rest of Canada excluding Quebec is 11.7 per cent. (Source: 2006 Census with calculations by authors)
- Children with cohabiting parents are 5 times more likely to experience a parental split than kids of married parents.
(Source: Osborne, C., Manning, W.D., Smock, P.M. (2007, December) Married and Cohabiting Parents’ relationship stability: A focus on race and ethnicity. *Journal of Marriage and Family* vol. 69, no 5, p.1345.)
- The total divorce rate in Canadian couples today (for those married 30 years ago) is 38.3 per 100 marriages (2003).
(Source: Lambert, Anne-Marie (2005) *Divorce: Facts, Causes and Consequences*. Ottawa: Vanier Institute of the Family. Table 2.)

MARRIAGE AND STABILITY

- Marriage protects against child poverty. There is a correlation between family breakdown and poverty. Long term plans to eradicate poverty should include a discussion of family and marriage. Marriage confers stability on kids. (Source: See footnote 2 in *Private choices, public costs: How failing families cost us all* for an extensive list of sources)