

Study: Work activity of families with children in Canada, 2005 to 2015

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Couple parents, especially those of young children, are less likely to work full time, year-round, than other couples.

In 2015, about a quarter of couples with at least one child under the age of 6 both worked full time, full year. When the youngest child was between 6 and 17, the proportion increased to 37%.

Overall, these proportions changed little from 2005 to 2015. However, they declined significantly for certain types of families with children, including couples with less education and recent immigrant families.

These findings come from a new study, "[Results from the 2016 Census: Work activity of families with children in Canada](#)." It is the first in a series of articles that will, over the coming months, shed light on a range of social and economic topics in Canada based on deeper analysis of the 2016 Census results.

This study examines changes in the work activity of parents aged 25 to 54 from 2005 to 2015. The decade was marked by a global recession, significant fluctuations in commodity prices, as well as the decline of manufacturing and the growth of service industries, all of which may have affected the work activity of families across Canada.

The work activity patterns of Canadian parents are diverse, and reflect economic circumstances, family obligations, work-life balance choices and many other factors.

The proportion of two-parent families with both parents working part year or part time rises from 2005 to 2015

From 2005 to 2015, 25% of couples with young children under the age of 6 had both parents working full year and full time. This compared with 37% of families with children aged 6 to 17, and 41% of couples who did not have children.

While these proportions have changed little since 2005, there were notable changes in other types of work activity.

Among two parent families with children under the age of 6, for example, the proportion with both parents working part time or part year rose from 14% to 18%.

Meanwhile, the proportion of families with one partner working full year and full time while the other worked part time or part year declined from 34% to 30%. These trends were similar for couple families with children aged 6 to 17.

Most of these changes are attributable to changes in the work activity of men, many of whom became less likely to work full year and full time over the period. Reasons for these changes include job losses in manufacturing and, for those living in oil-producing provinces, the effect of the fall in oil prices on the labour market since 2014.

These results are important because families with lower work activity may be at greater risk of falling into low income. They may also have more difficulty accumulating assets through savings or contributions to a pension plan.

Less educated parents and recent immigrant parents were not as likely to work full year and full time

In the case of 35% of couples where both parents had at least a bachelor's degree, two parents worked full year and full time in 2015, up slightly from 34% in 2005.



However, in couples where both parents had a high school diploma at most, work activity fell. In 2015, 23% of these families had two parents working full year and full time, down from 29% in 2005. This is consistent with other research showing that less-skilled workers typically bear the brunt of employment losses during economic downturns.

Immigrant couples with children also reported lower work activity over this period, even if work activity was already low relative to those born in Canada. Such results are important, because immigrants represent a growing portion of the Canadian workforce.

In 2015, 12% of recent immigrant couples with children—defined as those in which both partners landed in the five years preceding the census reference year—had two parents who worked full year and full time. This was one-third the proportion recorded among Canadian-born couples (36%).

Meanwhile, almost as many recent immigrant couples with children (close to 12%) reported no labour market activity from either parent, compared with 2% among Canadian-born couples. These results are consistent with the less favourable labour market outcomes of recent cohorts of immigrants compared with other workers, documented in previous studies.

One-third of female lone parents with young children did not report any labour market activity in 2015

Lone parent families also experienced lower work activity from 2005 to 2015. In 2016, there were 800,000 single parents aged 25 to 54 with children under the age of 18, more than 80% of which were female.

In 2015, 27% of single mothers with a child under the age of 6 worked full year and full time, down from 30% in 2005. About 33% did not report any labour market activity during the year, up slightly from about 30% in 2005.

The work activity of single mothers who had an older child also declined from 2005 to 2015. In 2015, 43% of single mothers with a youngest child aged 6 to 17 worked full year and full time, down from 47% in 2005.

Couples with children in the Maritimes and Quebec were more likely to both work full year and full time

In 2015, among the provinces, the Maritime provinces (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island) and Quebec had the highest proportions of couples with children in which both parents worked full year, full time, while Alberta and British Columbia had the lowest proportions. Among the territories, the proportions were higher in the Northwest Territories and lower in Nunavut.

Several factors can explain provincial and territorial differences in how parents allocate their time between work and family. These include differences in child care and parental leave policies, as well as differences in earnings, labour market conditions, demographic characteristics, and the gender distribution of household work.

Note to readers

The data used in this analysis are from the 2016 Census of Population. Couples considered in the analysis are those in which each partner is between the ages of 25 and 54. Children include those who are aged 17 or under; adult children living with their parents were not taken into account.

In the study, a person working full year and full time is defined as someone who worked at least 49 weeks over the reference year, and at least 30 hours a week during most of these weeks. Individuals working part year and/or part time are those who, during the reference year, worked between 1 and 48 weeks, and/or worked less than 30 hours for most of their weeks worked.

In the analysis, couple families are divided into six types of families: (1) single earner families with one parent working full year and full time; (2) single earner families with one parent working part year or part time; (3) dual earner families with two parents working full year and full time; (4) dual earner families with one parent working full-year full-time and another working part year or part time; (5) dual earner families with two parents working part year or part time; (6) no earner families.

The analysis also examines regional differences in the work activity of parents. Estimates by provinces, territories, and all census metropolitan areas are included in the study.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 3901.

The article "[Results from the 2016 Census: Work activity of families with children in Canada](#)" is now available in *Insights on Canadian Society* ([75-006-X](#)).

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