

Economic and Social Reports

Labour market participation of parents with young children



by Youjin Choi

Release date: November 22, 2023



Statistics
Canada

Statistique
Canada

Canada

How to obtain more information

For information about this product or the wide range of services and data available from Statistics Canada, visit our website, www.statcan.gc.ca.

You can also contact us by

Email at infostats@statcan.gc.ca

Telephone, from Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at the following numbers:

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| • Statistical Information Service | 1-800-263-1136 |
| • National telecommunications device for the hearing impaired | 1-800-363-7629 |
| • Fax line | 1-514-283-9350 |

Standards of service to the public

Statistics Canada is committed to serving its clients in a prompt, reliable and courteous manner. To this end, Statistics Canada has developed standards of service that its employees observe. To obtain a copy of these service standards, please contact Statistics Canada toll-free at 1-800-263-1136. The service standards are also published on www.statcan.gc.ca under “Contact us” > [“Standards of service to the public.”](#)

Note of appreciation

Canada owes the success of its statistical system to a long-standing partnership between Statistics Canada, the citizens of Canada, its businesses, governments and other institutions. Accurate and timely statistical information could not be produced without their continued co-operation and goodwill.

Published by authority of the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada

© His Majesty the King in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of Industry, 2023

All rights reserved. Use of this publication is governed by the Statistics Canada [Open Licence Agreement](#).

An [HTML version](#) is also available.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français.

Labour market participation of parents with young children

by Youjin Choi

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25318/36280001202301100003-eng>

Abstract

Using Labour Force Survey data, this study analyzed recent trends in the labour market participation of parents with children aged 0 to 5 and labour market characteristics of working and non-working parents with young children in 2021. This study demonstrated that the labour market participation of parents with young children continued to evolve over the last three decades and varied by various demographic characteristics. From 1990 to 2021, labour market participation among parents with young children aged 0 to 5 years became more common. In 2021, two-earner couples accounted for 68% of all couple families with young children, and the employment rate of mothers with young children in one-parent families reached 62%. In that year, compared with other provinces, Quebec had a larger share of two-earner couples, especially both parents working full time, among couple families with young children. The province also had a higher employment rate among mothers in one-parent families with young children. The percentage of couple families with young children that had two earners varied by mothers' immigrant status and population group. Lastly, a non-trivial share of non-working mothers were unemployed or non-student discouraged workers (defined as non-students who were not in the labour force but wanted a job). Findings suggest that the employment patterns of parents with different characteristics may be influenced differently by the implementation of a Canada-wide early learning and child care system.

Keywords: Families with young children, parental labour market participation, couple families, one-parent families, parents

Author

Youjin Choi is with the Social Analysis and Modelling Division, Analytical Studies and Modelling Branch, at Statistics Canada.

Acknowledgment

This study was funded by Employment and Social Development Canada.

Introduction

The 2021/2022 federal budget laid out a five-year plan to build a Canada-wide early learning and child care (CWELCC) system to provide families with young children low-fee, flexible, inclusive and high-quality child care across provinces and territories (Government of Canada, 2021). Starting from the first step of a 50% reduction in average fees for children aged 0 to 5, this plan aims to lower fees for regulated child care to \$10 per day on average by 2026 nationwide through bilateral agreements with provinces and territories. Among the goals of this policy effort were to promote gender equality in the labour market and social equality across families from diverse income and demographic groups, and to increase labour force participation of women, which could bring an added workforce to the Canadian labour market (Government of Canada, 2021).¹

Since the mid-1970s, the labour force participation of mothers with young children has steadily risen in Canada. The employment rate of mothers aged 25 to 54 with children younger than 6 grew from 32% in 1976 to 59% in 1991 and to 70% in the mid-2000s, recently peaking at 72% in 2019 and 2021 (Statistics Canada, n.d. a). With the increased employment rate of mothers with children, the economic structure of Canadian families with children has also changed. Among families with children aged 15 or younger, the share of two-earner couples increased from 33% in 1976 to 55% in 2014 and the share of couple families with a single-earner father decreased from 51% to 17% (Uppal, 2015).

As the low-fee early learning and child care system will be implemented nationwide over the next few years, detailed knowledge about employment patterns for families with young children during recent years can be used as a baseline on parental labour market participation prior to the implementation of CWELCC. However, there is a lack of up-to-date information on employment patterns for families with young children, especially children younger than 6.

Using data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), this study analyzes labour market participation and labour market characteristics of families with young children aged 0 to 5 years. While some trend analysis covers the period from 1990 to 2021, the focus is on the results in 2021. Specifically, this study aims to examine the following research questions:

1. How did the employment status of families with young children change over time?
 - Were there changes in the employment patterns of families with young children after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. Were there differences in the employment patterns of families with young children by age of the youngest child, province and mother's diversity characteristics (immigrant status and population group)?
3. What were the employment patterns (e.g., two full-time working parents in two-earner couples) of couple families with young children in 2021?
4. What were the work characteristics of working parents and labour market characteristics of non-working parents with young children in 2021 (separately for couple and one-parent families)?

By providing up-to-date information on employment patterns and labour market characteristics for families with children younger than 6 years, this study will potentially fill the information gap and provide a comparison point for evaluating CWELCC implementation effects in the future.

1. Other main goals of this policy were to increase participation for children and thus to improve child outcomes.

Data and measures

Data

Data from the LFS were used for a descriptive analysis of the labour market participation of parents with young children. The LFS is a monthly household survey to collect information about the labour market activity of the working-age population in Canada (all persons aged 15 and older), such as detailed labour force status, weekly work hours, occupations and wages. The LFS also collects some demographic information (such as age, sex and family relationship) of all household members. Each household remains in the sample for six consecutive months, after which it is replaced by a new household. Since April 2020, the LFS has collected supplementary data, called the LFS Supplement on the Labour Market Impacts of COVID-19, from a subset (five-sixths) of the LFS sample. This LFS supplement aimed to provide timely information to help assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Canadian labour market, including telework arrangements and labour market activity by population groups.

The target population of the LFS is all persons aged 15 years and older residing in the provinces of Canada, excluding persons living on reserves as defined under the *Indian Act*, full-time members of the regular armed forces and persons living in institutions.² National totals presented in this study do not include households located in the territories. Although the survey is conducted for the territories, the territories are usually not included in the national total because a different methodology is used for data collected in that region (Statistics Canada, 2020). For results to be nationally representative (except for the territories), survey weights were applied. For annual statistics, monthly LFS data were annualized through averaging over the 12 months in a calendar year. The reference year is 2021 (averaging over January to December 2021) for the up-to-date snapshot of parental employment patterns, and the period from 1990 to 2021 was used to examine annual trends in employment patterns.

This study focuses on parents with children younger than 6 in economic families³ where the reference person⁴ of the family is living with their own children younger than 6 in the same household. Note that this definition does not cover a small fraction of young children living in economic families where someone else (e.g., grandparents, other relatives) is the reference person of the family. These families were excluded from the study sample because the child's parents can be assumed only based on the family relationship centred around the reference person. Children living with foster parents were also excluded. The sample of parents was limited to civilians (not full-time Canadian Armed Forces members) and those younger than 55 years. Detailed information on the labour market activities of non-civilian parents was not collected. Parents aged 55 and older were excluded because this age range is closer to the retirement age and may have different labour market behaviour compared with younger parents. For couple families, both parents must be civilians and younger than 55 to be included in the sample. These civilian and age restrictions exclude about 2% of families with children younger than 6 years in 2021. The final sample in 2021 consisted of about 47,600 monthly observations of economic family units (42,000 for couple families and 5,600 for one-parent families), and approximately 42,800 and 46,900 monthly observations of fathers and mothers, respectively.

2. For more details, refer to Statistics Canada (2020).

3. An economic family is defined as a group of two or more persons who live in the same dwelling and who are related by blood, marriage (including common law) or adoption (Statistics Canada, 2020).

4. The reference person is defined as an adult who is primarily responsible for the care of the family.

Measures

Families with young children were defined as an economic family where the reference person lives with at least one of their own children younger than 6 years. These families are grouped into two types of economic family structure: couple families and one-parent families. Couple families are defined as economic families in which two parents of young children are living together (including both opposite-sex and same-sex couples). One-parent families are economic families where only one parent is present.

Employment status of families with young children was summarized by economic family structure and parents' employment status into eight categories (four for couple families and four for one-parent families):

- 1) couple families, both parents employed
- 2) couple families, only father employed
- 3) couple families, only mother employed
- 4) couple families, no earners
- 5) one-parent families, mother employed
- 6) one-parent families, mother non-employed
- 7) one-parent families, father employed
- 8) one-parent families, father non-employed.

As the scope of couple families includes both opposite-sex and same-sex couples, "couple families, only father employed" includes male same-sex couples with only one employed father. "Couple families, only mother employed" is similarly defined.

The employment status of families was analyzed by the age of the youngest child. The youngest child's age was coded in years in the LFS data, and three groups of 0 to 1 year (i.e., younger than 24 months), 2 to 3 years, and 4 to 5 years were used.⁵ When the employment status of families was analyzed by the youngest child's age, families of young children were compared with families whose youngest child was of primary school age (6 to 12) to show whether parental labour market participation changed once children were in school.⁶ For an analysis of couple families, couple families with young children were also compared with couple families with no children living together to show the difference that occurs when a family has children.⁷ These two comparison groups are not exactly comparable to families with younger children because in general these parents possess different characteristics. Compared with parents with children younger than 6, parents with school-age children are generally older and have more experience in the workforce, and parents without children may have a larger share of younger and less experienced workforce and older and more experienced workforce. Despite these limitations, these two groups serve the needs of this study for informative comparisons.

For regional variations, provinces were grouped into the Atlantic region (composed of Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick; grouped because of a small sample size in each province), Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia.

For two-earner couple families, the full-time job status was analyzed for two categories: both parents working full time; and one working full time, the other working part time.

5. Ages 0 and 1 were combined for all eight categories of employment status to meet the sample size requirements for release.

6. A similar set of sample restrictions was applied to the comparison group. For the group of parents whose youngest child was aged 6 to 12, the sample of parents was limited to civilians and those younger than 60 years, instead of 55.

7. This group of couples without children was limited to couple families where both spouses or partners were civilians and younger than 55. Because birth or family history is unavailable in the data, this group may include some parents who did not live with their children in the same household.

Work characteristics of working parents and labour market characteristics of non-working parents were analyzed by sex separately for couple families and for one-parent families. Levels of education were reported for both working and non-working parents. Education level was defined as the highest level of education that a person completed and grouped into four categories: less than high school, high school diploma, postsecondary certificate or diploma (college, trades and university certificate below bachelor's degree), and bachelor's degree or above.

Several work characteristics of working parents were analyzed. For all working parents, the percentage of parents who were absent for a full week from work because of parental leave or caring for their own children and the percentage of multiple job holders were reported. Also, the set of work characteristics includes class of workers (public employee; private employee; self-employed, including unpaid family worker), an indicator for whether a parent had varying weekly work hours, full-time or part-time status (working full time was defined as working 30 or more hours in a usual work week), and average usual weekly hours.

Occupations were based on National Occupational Classification (NOC) 2021, and an NOC 2021 labour force grouping was analyzed. Occupations were also assigned into six categories based on the degree of training, education, experience and responsibilities (TEER) required (Statistics Canada, n.d. b). TEER categories 0, 1 and 2 are occupations that require relatively high levels of necessary training, education, experience and responsibilities: managerial responsibilities (TEER category 0), completion of a university degree (TEER category 1), or completion of a non-university postsecondary education or apprenticeship training of two or more years or supervisory or significant safety responsibilities on the job (TEER category 2). Occupations in TEER category 3 require less than two years of non-university postsecondary education, less than two years of apprenticeship training or more than six months of on-the-job training or training courses. TEER categories 4 and 5 are occupations that have no requirement for postsecondary education or apprenticeship training. TEER category 4 requires completion of secondary school or several weeks of on-the-job training, and TEER category 5 does not require any formal education.

For employees who worked for an employer (i.e., paid employees), job permanency status (permanent job vs. non-permanent job), union status, and average hourly and weekly wages were also analyzed. This information was unavailable for the self-employed or unpaid family workers.

Information on multiple job holders, self-employment, varying weekly work hours, full-time or part-time job status, job permanency status, and union status provides some insights for non-standard work arrangements. Note that information on the timing of work (e.g., starting early versus late, working on demand, working on weekends versus weekdays) is unavailable in LFS data.

For non-working parents, a few labour market characteristics were analyzed, including detailed labour force status (unemployed or not in the labour force) and indicators for having never worked and for having worked in the last year. For parents who worked in the last year, the percentage who left a job mainly to care for their own children or because of pregnancy was reported. Parents not in the labour force were further broken down by reason for not being in the labour force in three categories: students, non-students who did not want a job at that moment and non-students who wanted a job. Non-students who did not want a job at that moment could be stay-at-home parents, and non-students who wanted a job are likely discouraged workers from the labour force.

The employment patterns of couple families were reported by mother's immigrant status and population group. For this analysis, the sample was limited to opposite-sex couple families only to avoid unintended residual disclosure of small numbers of male same-sex couple families. A landed immigrant was defined as a person who was currently, or has ever been, a permanent resident in Canada. A person who was not a landed immigrant was grouped into two groups of "born in Canada" and "non-immigrants born

outside Canada” based on the respondent’s country of birth. For population groups, a detailed grouping (e.g., White, South Asian, Chinese, Black) was used where the sample size allowed.

Results

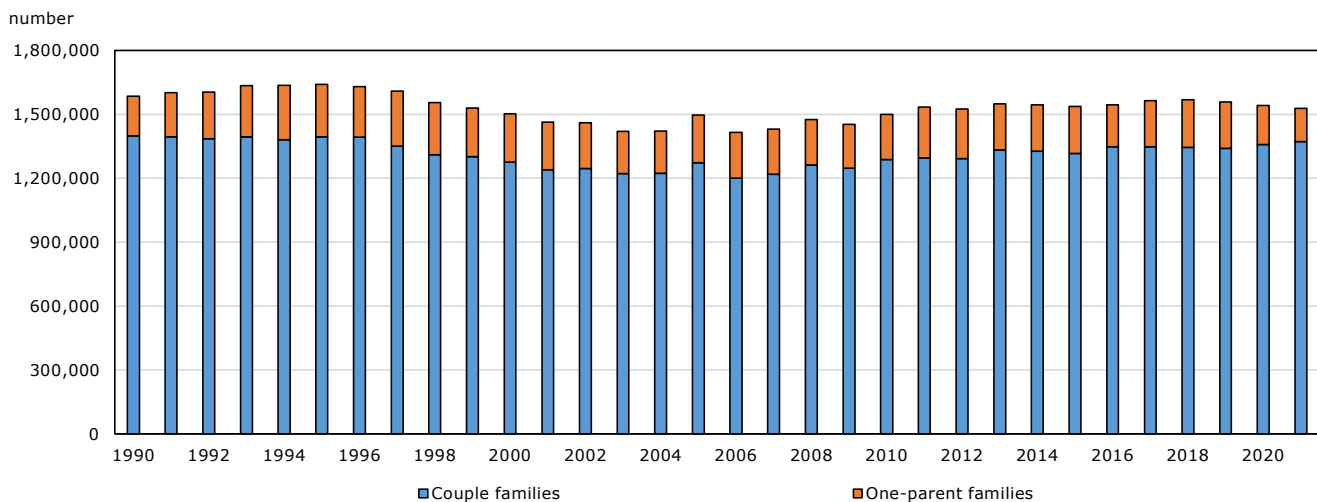
According to the LFS, the estimated number of children younger than 6 years living in the 10 provinces in Canada was about 2,200,000 in 2021—99% of the corresponding population counts from the 2021 Census.⁸ Among the 2.2 million children, 85.7% were living in couple families; 8.8% in one-parent families; and 5.5% in other types of families, such as families where grandparents or other relatives were the reference person for the family or foster families. This indicates that couple families and one-parent families cover more than 90% of children younger than 6 and their parents in the provinces of Canada.

Trends in labour market participation of parents with young children

Annual trends during the period from 1990 to 2021

The total number of couple families and one-parent families with children younger than 6 fluctuated during the period from 1990 to 2021 (Chart 1). It increased in the early 1990s, peaking at 1.64 million in 1995, and decreased to 1.42 million in 2006, the lowest number in the last three decades. This decrease may be related to a lower number of births during the period from 1996 to 2006 compared with earlier or later periods (Statistics Canada, n.d. d). It then increased and has remained stable between 1.50 million and 1.57 million since 2010.

Chart 1
Couple families and one-parent families with children younger than 6, 1990 to 2021



Source: Labour Force Survey.

8. According to the 2021 Census, there were about 2,222,000 children younger than 6 living in the 10 provinces in 2021 (Statistics Canada, n.d. c).

During the three decades, the percentage of couple families varied in a narrow range from 84.0% (1997) to 89.7% (2021), and the percentage of one-parent families varied from 10.3% to 16.0%. During the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021, compared with 2019, the number and percentage of one-parent families with young children decreased and those of couple families increased. This change may be related to the lower incidence of divorce during the pandemic (Statistics Canada, 2022).

The employment patterns of couple families and one-parent families are presented as the percentage distribution of the total number of families with children younger than 6 in Table 1. Two-earner couples became more common among couple families with young children during the last three decades. The percentage of two-earner couples as the percentage of total families with young children increased from 47.1% in 1990 to 61.3% in 2021. In the meantime, the percentage of male-single-earner couples decreased from 32.2% from 1990 to 21.2% in 2021.

Table 1

Employment patterns of couple families and one-parent families as percentage of families with children younger than 6, 1990 to 2021

Year	Couple families			One-parent families				
	Both parents employed	Only father employed	Only mother employed	No earners	Mother, employed	Mother, non-employed	Father, employed	Father, non-employed
				percent				
1990	47.1	32.2	3.9	5.1	4.5	6.5	0.5	0.2
1991	46.5	29.0	5.0	6.5	4.7	7.4	0.6	0.3
1992	45.8	28.2	5.4	7.0	4.4	8.3	0.6	0.3
1993	46.1	27.0	5.2	7.0	4.7	9.1	0.6	0.3
1994	46.7	26.3	4.4	7.0	5.4	9.1	0.7	0.5
1995	47.9	26.6	4.3	6.2	5.0	9.0	0.7	0.3
1996	48.8	26.1	4.3	6.3	5.3	8.1	0.8	0.4
1997	49.3	25.2	3.8	5.7	6.4	8.3	0.9	0.5
1998	50.3	24.7	4.0	5.2	6.3	8.4	0.9	0.3
1999	51.8	24.7	3.7	5.0	6.5	7.1	1.1	0.3
2000	52.4	24.9	3.5	4.1	6.6	6.5	1.4	0.5
2001	51.5	25.1	3.9	4.3	7.3	6.2	1.2	0.5
2002	52.1	24.4	4.4	4.4	7.0	6.1	1.3	0.3
2003	53.3	24.2	4.2	4.4	6.9	5.8	1.0	0.3
2004	54.4	23.4	4.4	3.9	6.9	5.5	1.3	0.3
2005	54.6	22.6	4.0	3.8	7.3	5.7	1.5	0.3
2006	54.0	23.6	3.5	3.8	7.4	5.7	1.6	0.4
2007	55.7	22.3	3.6	3.6	7.7	5.4	1.4	0.3
2008	54.3	23.8	3.9	3.5	7.2	5.4	1.5	0.4
2009	53.3	22.7	5.2	4.7	6.8	5.4	1.5	0.6
2010	54.1	22.3	5.0	4.5	6.9	5.4	1.5	0.4
2011	53.9	22.4	4.3	3.8	7.5	6.1	1.6	0.4
2012	55.3	21.7	4.1	3.6	7.5	5.8	1.5	0.4
2013	57.4	21.1	4.0	3.6	6.9	5.4	1.3	0.4
2014	56.3	21.4	4.2	3.9	7.2	5.2	1.4	0.4
2015	55.9	22.1	4.0	3.5	7.2	5.0	1.8	0.5
2016	57.9	21.4	4.2	3.8	6.2	4.8	1.5	0.4
2017	58.2	20.9	3.7	3.4	7.0	4.9	1.8	0.4
2018	57.1	21.5	3.8	3.3	7.4	4.8	1.8	0.2
2019	58.8	20.8	3.6	2.9	7.5	4.2	1.9	0.4
2020	56.9	21.2	5.4	4.6	6.1	3.9	1.5	0.5
2021	61.3	21.2	4.2	3.1	5.3	3.3	1.5	0.2

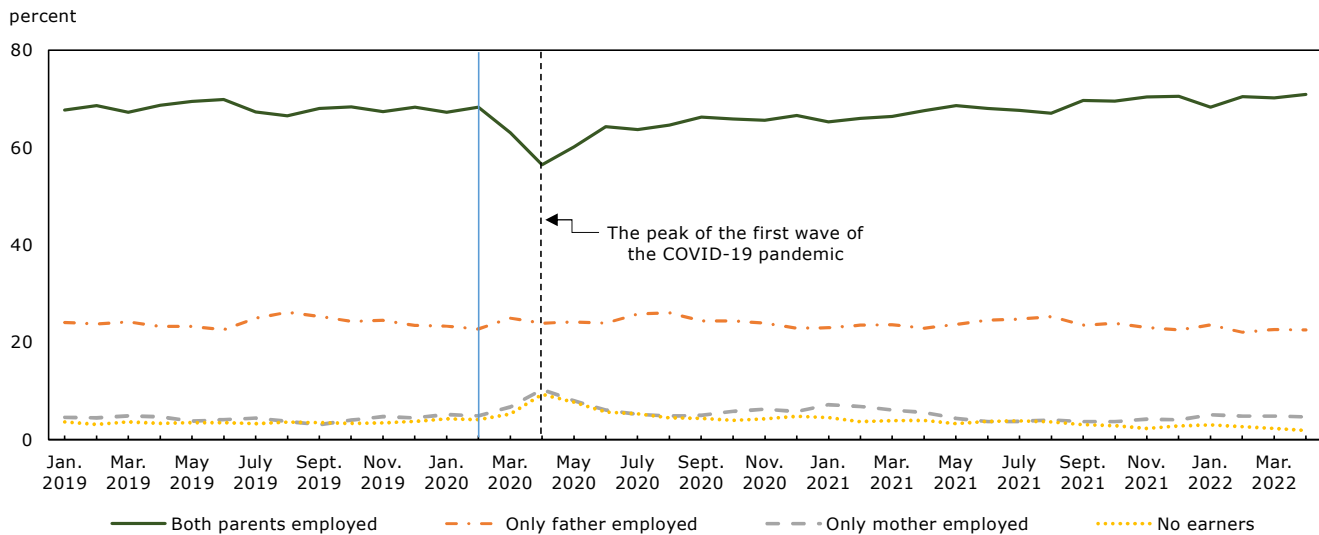
Source: Labour Force Survey.

Among one-parent families with children younger than 6, the share of working parents increased over the three decades. The percentage of non-employed mothers in one-parent families was higher than the percentage of employed mothers in one-parent families before 2000. The majority of mothers in one-parent families with children younger than the age of 6 were employed starting from 2001—the year when parental benefits were extended from 25 weeks to 50 weeks in total, including maternity benefits. The employment rate of mothers in one-parent families increased from 54.0% in 2001 to 64.2% in 2019. The percentage of fathers in one-parent families increased from 0.8% of total families with young children in 1990 to 1.7% in 2021, and most fathers in one-parent families were employed (e.g., 87.7% in 2021).

Monthly trends during the COVID-19 pandemic

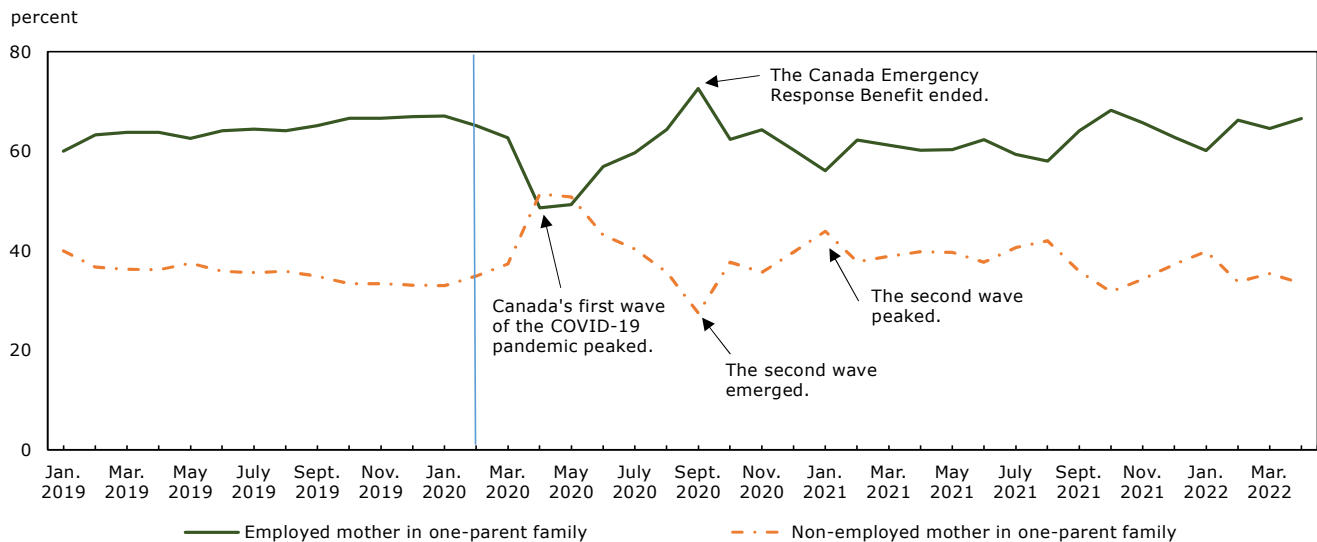
Charts 2 and 3 present monthly trends in the employment patterns of parents with children younger than 6 during the period from January 2019 to April 2022 separately for couple families and mothers in one-parent families. Monthly estimates for employed and non-employed fathers in one-parent families with children younger than 6 are not presented to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*.

Chart 2
Employment patterns of couple families with children younger than 6, January 2019 to April 2022



Note: The blue vertical line marks February 2020, which is the month before the COVID-19 pandemic began.
Source: Labour Force Survey.

Chart 3
Employment patterns of mothers in one-parent families with children younger than 6, January 2019 to April 2022



Note: The blue vertical line marks February 2020, which is the month before the COVID-19 pandemic began.
Source: Labour Force Survey.

Among couple families, the percentage with two earners decreased by 12 percentage points from February 2020, which was the month before the COVID-19 pandemic began, to April 2020, which was the month when the first wave of the pandemic peaked (Chart 2). In the meantime, the percentages of couple families that had only a mother employed and that had two non-working parents increased by 5 percentage points each. However, these percentages returned to the pre-pandemic level (i.e., the level in February 2020) between May and September 2021. Among mothers in one-parent families with children younger than 6, the employment rate decreased from 65% in February 2020 by 16 percentage points until April 2020 and then rebounded (Chart 3).

These findings suggest that there were changes in the employment patterns of families with children younger than 6 at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the changes were temporary. Generally, employment patterns in 2021 looked similar to those observed in 2019. Based on this finding, the remainder of this study focuses on the year 2021 as the baseline reference year.

Family structure and employment patterns by age of the youngest child

Family structure and employment patterns of families with children younger than the age of 6 and families whose youngest child was aged 6 to 12 as a comparison group are presented in Table 2. Overall, when the youngest child was older, the percentage of couple families was lower, while the percentage of one-parent families increased. When the youngest child was 0 to 1 year old, 94% of families with young children were couple families. The percentage decreased by 10 percentage points for families whose youngest child was aged 4 to 5 years and further by 5 percentage points for families whose youngest child was aged 6 to 12 years. This pattern may be in line with the family dynamics of separations and divorces among couple parents over the time of their partnership.

Table 2
Employment patterns of families with children younger than 6 by age of the youngest child, 2021

	Youngest child younger than 6				Youngest child 6 to 12 years
	Total	0 to 1 year	2 to 3 years	4 to 5 years	
Total families	1,528.2	603.6	487.4	437.2	1,296.5
			thousands		
			percent		
Couple families	89.7	93.7	90.3	83.5	78.5
Both parents employed	68.3	67.2	69.7	68.4	74.8
Only father employed	23.6	24.9	22.7	22.7	16.6
Only mother employed	4.7	4.4	4.6	5.3	5.7
No earners	3.4	3.5	3.1	3.6	3.0
One-parent families, mother	8.6	5.5	8.6	12.8	16.6
Mother, employed	61.6	53.3	59.8	68.0	76.3
Mother, non-employed	38.4	46.8	40.2	32.0	23.8
One-parent families, father	1.7	0.8	1.1	3.7	5.0
Father, employed	87.5	x	x	86.6	85.7
Father, non-employed	12.5	x	x	13.3	14.2

x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*

Source: Labour Force Survey, 2021.

After differences in family structures were accounted for, couple families with children younger than the age of 6 showed very small variations in employment patterns by the youngest child's age. Among couple families, the percentage of two-earner families ranged from 67% (0 to 1 year) to 70% (2 to 3 years). For couple families whose youngest child was aged 6 to 12, two-earner couples accounted for 75%. Similarly, 25% of couple families with a 0- to 1-year-old child had one male earner, and the percentage was lower by only 2 percentage points for couple families whose youngest child was 2 to 5 years old. When the youngest child was of primary school age, 17% were male-single-earner couples. Note that, in LFS data, employed persons include those who were absent from work for a full week because of illness, personal or family responsibilities (including caring for their children and maternity and parental leave), or vacation. Therefore, parents of a 0- to 1-year-old child who were taking maternity or parental leave were counted toward employed parents.⁹

Larger variations in the employment patterns by the youngest child's age were found among mothers in one-parent families. The employment rate of mothers in one-parent families was just over 50% for those with an infant aged 0 to 1 and was 68% for those whose youngest child was aged 4 to 5. The employment rate further increased to 76% among mothers whose youngest child was of primary school age. The employment rates of fathers in one-parent families were similar whether their youngest child was aged 4 to 5 or older than the age of 5.

Family structure and employment patterns by province

Table 3 shows geographical variations in family structure and the employment patterns of families with children younger than the age of 6. Ontario had the largest number of families with young children, followed by Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia. The percentage of couple families was lowest in the Atlantic region (83%), highest in Alberta and British Columbia (92%), and similar to the national average (90%) in other provinces. In terms of employment patterns of couple families, the percentage of couple families that had two earners was highest in Quebec and Saskatchewan (74%) and lowest in Alberta

9. Among employed mothers of a 0-year-old child, 75% were absent for a full or part week from work during the reference week because of maternity leave or parental leave.

(60%). At the same time, the percentage of couple families that were single-earner couples with a working father was lowest in Quebec and the Atlantic region (18%) and highest in Alberta (32%).

Table 3**Employment pattern of families with children younger than 6 by province, 2021**

	Total	Atlantic region	Quebec	Ontario	Manitoba	Saskatchewan	Alberta	British Columbia
	thousands							
Total number of families	1,528.2	82.7	353.0	591.8	60.6	52.7	212.3	175.0
	percent							
Couple families	89.7	83.1	88.4	90.2	88.9	88.0	91.9	91.8
Both parents employed	68.3	70.6	74.3	67.8	66.3	74.2	60.0	66.7
Only father employed	23.6	18.5	17.7	23.9	26.8	19.9	32.1	25.8
Only mother employed	4.7	7.3	4.4	4.8	3.9	3.8	4.1	4.7
No earners	3.4	3.6	3.5	3.6	3.1	2.1	3.8	2.7
One-parent families, mother	8.6	14.7	8.8	8.5	9.5	10.5	6.7	6.6
Mother, employed	61.6	62.0	72.9	57.8	56.5	53.3	50.9	67.7
Mother, non-employed	38.4	38.0	27.1	42.2	43.5	46.7	49.2	32.3
One-parent families, father	1.7	2.2	2.8	1.2	1.7	1.5	1.4	1.6
Father, employed	87.5	x	85.3	x	x	x	x	x
Father, non-employed	12.5	x	14.7	x	x	x	x	x

x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*

Source: Labour Force Survey, 2021.

Among mothers in one-parent families with children younger than 6, the employment rate varied across provinces in a range around the national average employment rate, at 62%. Alberta had the lowest rate of employment among mothers in one-parent families, at 51%, followed by Saskatchewan (53%) and Manitoba (56%). Quebec showed the highest employment rate among mothers in one-parent families, at 73%, followed by British Columbia (68%).

Compared with other provinces, Quebec showed a larger share of two-earner couples among couple families with young children and a higher employment rate among mothers in one-parent families with young children. These provincial differences may be partially related to differences in availability and accessibility of early learning and child care.

Couple families

The following sections describe labour market characteristics of parents with young children in more detail separately for couple families and one-parent families.

Two-earner couple families

Table 4 presents the full-time job status of two-earner couple families with children younger than age 6 by the youngest child's age and region of residence. Two-earner couples with young children were compared with couple families with no children to show the difference that occurs when a family has children, as well as with couple families whose youngest child was of primary school age to show whether families with children adjusted their employment patterns once their children were in school.

Table 4
Full-time job status of two-earner couple families by province, 2021

	Total	Atlantic	Quebec	Ontario	Manitoba	Saskatchewan	Alberta	British
		region						Columbia
percent								
Panel A: Two-earner couples as percentage of couple families								
No children at home	84.2	82.4	87.0	83.4	83.5	84.6	82.9	83.5
0 to 1 year	67.2	69.3	71.5	65.8	62.9	69.7	61.6	69.9
2 to 3 years	69.7	70.3	75.6	69.8	67.0	75.6	61.3	66.6
4 to 5 years	68.4	72.8	77.5	68.1	71.0	80.5	56.4	62.0
6 to 12 years	74.8	74.3	79.5	73.4	76.1	77.6	69.8	74.8
Panel B: Two full-time working spouses or partners as percentage of two-earner couple families								
No children at home	82.2	86.0	83.4	83.5	79.0	80.7	81.3	77.7
0 to 1 year	79.0	81.2	85.4	79.7	79.4	67.4	71.7	73.3
2 to 3 years	76.6	79.7	82.4	79.7	71.6	75.3	69.7	61.7
4 to 5 years	74.2	77.3	81.3	73.4	74.9	70.9	69.3	65.3
6 to 12 years	77.5	81.5	83.6	79.3	74.8	75.7	70.2	68.6

Source: Labour Force Survey, 2021.

The first column of Table 4 shows the percentage of two-earner couple families by the youngest child's age for all Canadian provinces. Among couple families that did not have children living with them, 84% had two earners. The percentage of two-earner couples among couple families was lower by 16 percentage points when the youngest child was 0 to 5 years of age (68%). When the youngest child was 6 to 12 years of age, it increased to 75% but was still lower by 9 percentage points than that of couples without children.

In terms of the full-time job status of two-earner couples (Panel B in Table 4), 82% of couples without children had both spouses or partners working full time. Relative to couples with no children, the percentage of families with two parents with full-time jobs was lower by 3 percentage points for parents of an infant aged 0 to 1 and by 8 percentage points when the youngest child was aged 4 to 5. The percentage of families with one spouse or partner working full time and the other working part time was 16% among couples without children and was lower among couples with an infant (20%) than among couples whose youngest child was aged 4 to 5 (25%) (not presented in the table). Once all children were in school, it decreased to 21% but was still higher than the percentage for families with no children (not presented in the table).

When the percentage of couple families that had two employed parents (Panel A in Table 4) and the percentage of two-earner couple families that had two full-time working parents (Panel B in Table 4) were further broken down by region of residence, different patterns were found across regions. For all four groups of the youngest child's age, the percentage of two-earner couples in Quebec (72% for ages 0 to 1, 76% for ages 2 to 3, 77% for ages 4 to 5, and 80% for ages 6 to 12) was higher than other provinces, except for ages 4 to 5 in Saskatchewan (81%). Furthermore, Quebec had a larger share of two full-time working parents among two-earner couple families (85% for ages 0 to 1 and 81% for ages 4 to 5) than other regions for all age groups.

In contrast to Quebec, Alberta showed the largest differences in the percentage of couple families that had two earners between those without children and those with young children (Panel A in Table 4). Compared with couple families without children, the percentage of two-earner couple families in Alberta was 21 percentage points lower when the youngest child was aged 0 to 1 and 27 percentage points lower when the youngest child was aged 4 to 5. Quebec's corresponding decreases were 15 percentage points and 7 percentage points, respectively.

Compared with other provinces, having both parents working full time was less common among two-earner couple families in British Columbia. Among two-earner couple families in this province whose youngest child was aged 2 to 3, 62% had two full-time working parents (Panel B in Table 4), and the other 38% had at least one parent working part time (not presented in the table). The corresponding figures for Quebec were 82% and 18%.

These findings may suggest that some parents who kept a full-time job during the first one to two years after a child was born switched to a part-time job because of family responsibilities over the years until children reached school age. Some parents returned to a full-time job once all children were in school, but some parents remained with a part-time job. These patterns were different across provinces.

Work characteristics of working parents in couple families

Among parents of children younger than 6 years living with a spouse or a partner in 2021, 73% of mothers and 92% of fathers were working, and their work characteristics are presented in Table 5.

For working mothers, 88% completed postsecondary education, including 55% holding a bachelor's degree. One in four working mothers (26%) were absent from work for a full week, and 75% of them were absent because of parental leave or caring for their children. About one-third of working mothers were public employees, and 1 in 10 working mothers were self-employed or unpaid family workers. The percentage of mothers who had varying weekly work hours was 27%. One in five working mothers had a part-time job. On average, full-time working mothers worked 37.8 hours per week, and part-time working mothers worked 18.6 hours.

Table 5
Work characteristics of working parents with children younger than 6 by family type and sex, 2021

	Couple families		One-parent families	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
Total	1,003.4	1,257.4	80.7	23.0
	thousands			
	percent			
Education level				
Less than high school	1.5	4.6	5.6	7.2
High school diploma	10.1	16.8	17.3	20.0
Postsecondary certificate or diploma	33.1	37.4	43.9	47.1
Bachelor's degree or above	55.3	41.2	33.1	25.8
Absent full week				
Because of parental leave or caring for their children	26.2	7.7	17.9	8.4
	74.9	27.6	53.1	x
Multiple job holders				
	4.3	5.1	5.6	3.1
Class of workers				
Public employee	36.2	17.8	26.5	17.3
Private employee	53.3	66.0	62.5	61.2
Self-employed (including unpaid family workers)	10.5	16.3	11.0	21.5
Varying weekly work hours				
	27.0	29.7	32.8	31.9
Full-time or part-time status				
Full time	80.1	95.9	79.5	93.9
Part time	19.9	4.1	20.6	6.1
Occupation				
Management occupations	6.6	12.2	3.4	14.5
Business, finance and administration occupations	24.5	10.2	25.0	7.2
Natural and applied sciences and related occupations	6.0	15.7	3.4	12.6
Health occupations	18.9	3.7	15.5	4.3
Occupations in education, law and social, community and government services	22.1	8.8	19.4	11.8
Occupations in art, culture, recreation and sport	2.7	2.0	x	x
Sales and service occupations	15.6	11.9	25.4	10.0
Trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations	1.7	27.7	3.5	31.6
Natural resources, agriculture and related production occupations	0.5	2.8	x	x
Occupations in manufacturing and utilities	1.3	5.3	2.5	4.2
Occupational requirements of training, education, experience and responsibilities (TEER)				
TEER category 0	6.6	12.2	3.4	14.5
TEER category 1	38.1	25.5	23.8	17.7
TEER category 2	21.0	32.5	22.4	36.0
TEER category 3	17.2	13.0	22.2	12.3
TEER category 4	11.6	9.7	19.3	10.4
TEER category 5	5.7	7.1	9.0	9.1
Job permanency status, paid employees only				
Permanent job	91.5	93.6	89.1	96.0
Non-permanent job	8.5	6.4	10.9	4.0
Union status, paid employees only				
Union member or covered by a collective agreement	39.8	32.1	34.8	38.3
Not a union member or covered by a collective agreement	60.2	67.9	65.3	61.7
	average			
Average usual weekly hours				
Full time	37.8	41.3	38.0	41.5
Part time	18.6	18.6	19.0	18.3
Average hourly wages (\$), paid employees only				
Full time	33.8	38.0	27.4	35.8
Part time	28.5	30.9	22.5	32.0
Average weekly wages (\$), paid employees only				
Full time	1,273	1,528	1,033	1,429
Part time	551	577	448	583

x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*

Source: Labour Force Survey, 2021.

Mothers' employment was concentrated in a few occupation groups, such as business, finance and administration occupations (25%); occupations in education, law and social, community and government services (22%); health occupations (19%); and sales and service occupations (15%). These four occupation groups accounted for 81% of working mothers in couple families with children younger than 6. In terms of job requirements for TEER, 66% of working mothers had occupations that require higher levels of necessary TEER (45% working in managerial occupations and occupations requiring a university degree and 21% working in occupations requiring completion of a non-university postsecondary education or apprenticeship training of two or more years).

For employees working in the public and private sectors, most mothers had a permanent job, and 9% had a non-permanent job. As well, 60% of mothers working for an employer were not union members or covered by a collective agreement. Mothers working full time earned \$33.80 per hour, or \$1,273 per week, on average. The average wages of mothers working part time were \$28.50 per hour and \$551 per week.

Labour market characteristics of non-working parents in couple families

Non-working parents of children younger than 6 years had some differences in characteristics relative to working parents. First, a larger share of non-working mothers (28%) had three or more children younger than 13, 13 percentage points higher than the corresponding rate for working mothers (not presented in a table). Second, the education profile of non-working parents was different (tables 5 and 6). A smaller share of non-working mothers had a bachelor's degree (37%), 18 percentage points lower than that of working mothers. Similar shares of non-working and working mothers had a postsecondary certificate or diploma (33%).

Table 6

Labour market characteristics of non-working parents with children younger than 6 by sex, 2021

	Couple families		One-parent families	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
Total	371.4	109.6	50.3	3.3
		thousands		
		percent		
Education level				
Less than high school	7.9	13.4	16.7	x
High school diploma	22.0	27.6	36.1	23.0
Postsecondary certificate or diploma	32.7	30.5	35.6	55.5
Bachelor's degree or above	37.4	28.5	11.5	x
Worked last year	20.5	51.3	19.3	39.1
Left a job because of child care	11.2	5.0	x	x
Worked more than a year ago	58.7	38.5	63.8	x
Never worked	20.9	10.2	16.9	x
Labour force status				
Unemployed	16.5	47.3	22.9	57.3
Not in the labour force	83.6	52.7	77.1	42.8
Student	12.1	19.7	19.1	x
Non-student who did not want a job or considered long-term future start	81.3	60.0	68.3	x
Non-student who wanted a job	6.7	20.3	12.7	x

x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*

Source: Labour Force Survey, 2021.

Labour market characteristics of non-working parents in couple families with children younger than 6 are presented in Table 6. One in five non-working mothers had never worked before. Another one in five worked within the last 12 months, and 11% of them left a job because of child care. Lastly, 59% worked more than 12 months ago.

In terms of detailed labour force status, 16% of non-working mothers with a spouse or partner and young children were unemployed. These mothers were not working but looking and available for work, had been temporarily laid off, or had a job to start soon. The other 84% of non-working mothers were not in the labour force, indicating that they were unable to work or unavailable for work and were not actively looking for work. Of the mothers not in the labour force, 81% were non-students who did not want a job or who considered a long-term future start, and 8% were non-student discouraged workers. Among all non-working mothers in couple families, 68% (= 84%*81%*100) were stay-at-home mothers.

For non-working fathers, 51% had worked within the last 12 months, and 47% were unemployed and looking for a job. Among non-working fathers, 32% were stay-at-home fathers.

Employment patterns of couple families by mothers' diversity characteristics

This subsection examines the employment patterns of couple families by mothers' immigrant status and population group (Table 7).

Table 7

Employment patterns of couple families with children younger than 6 by mother's immigrant status and population group, 2021

	Both parents employed	Only father employed	Only mother employed	No earners
	percent			
Mother's immigrant status				
Born in Canada	75.0	18.9	4.1	2.0
Landed immigrants	57.3	31.3	5.5	5.8
Non-immigrants born outside Canada	51.9	37.6	3.8	6.7
Mother's population group				
South Asian	56.1	35.5	4.6	3.9
Chinese	63.3	24.5	6.4	5.9
Black	63.5	25.5	4.6	6.5
Filipino	72.0	16.4	8.6	3.0
Arab	41.6	43.3	3.0	12.2
Latin American	63.1	28.3	2.8	5.8
White	73.1	20.7	4.1	2.1

Notes: The sample for this table includes only opposite-sex couple families to avoid residual disclosure. In 2021, information on population groups was available in the Labour Force Survey Supplement on the Labour Market Impacts of COVID-19.

Source: Labour Force Survey, 2021

Some differences in the employment patterns of couple families with young children were found by mother's immigrant status. Among families with Canadian-born mothers, three in four (75%) had two employed parents, and one in five (19%) had only the father employed, with the mother staying at home. Compared with families with Canadian-born mothers, the percentage of two-earner families among families with immigrant mothers was 18 percentage points lower, and the percentage of families with only the father employed was 12 percentage points higher. The differences in employment patterns were larger when families with foreign-born non-immigrant mothers were compared with families with Canadian-born mothers.

Parents' employment patterns varied across population groups. For couple families with White mothers, 73% were two-earner couples and 21% were single-earner couples with a working father. The percentage of two-earner couples was lower by 10 percentage points for families with Chinese, Black and Latin American mothers; 17 percentage points for those with South Asian mothers, and 32 percentage points for those with Arab mothers. For couple families with Arab mothers, 43% were single-earner couples with mothers staying at home, the highest share among all population groups, followed by families with South Asian mothers (36%).

These differences in employment patterns across different groups may be related to differences in the average family size (i.e., number of children), cultural background and economic characteristics in the labour market (e.g., occupations and wages).

One-parent families

This subsection focuses on the labour market participation of parents in one-parent families with children younger than 6 years (tables 5 and 6). Comparisons were made in work characteristics between working mothers in one-parent families and those in couple families, and between non-working mothers and working mothers in one-parent families.

Work characteristics of working parents in one-parent families

Among parents in one-parent families with children younger than 6 in 2021, 62% of mothers and 88% of fathers were working. The employment rate of parents in one-parent families with young children was lower than that of parents living with a spouse or partner, by 11 percentage points for mothers in one-parent families and by 4 percentage points for fathers in one-parent families.

For education levels, 33% of working mothers in one-parent families had a bachelor's degree and 44% had other types of postsecondary education. Compared with working mothers in couple families, the percentage that had a bachelor's degree was 22 percentage points lower and the percentage that did not complete postsecondary education was higher.

Among working mothers in one-parent families, 18% were absent from work for a full week, and 53% of them were absent because of parental leave or caring for their children. These percentages were lower than the percentages of their counterparts living with a spouse or partner.

By class of workers, 11% of working mothers in one-parent families were self-employed or unpaid family workers, similar to the figure for working mothers in couple families. The percentage of public employees was 27%, lower than the figure for working mothers living with a spouse or partner.

In terms of work hours, 33% had varying weekly work hours. One in five working mothers in one-parent families had a part-time job and worked 19.0 hours per week on average. The average work hours of mothers in one-parent families working full time were 38.0 hours per week. A larger share of working mothers in one-parent families had varying weekly work hours than working mothers in couple families, and the percentage of mothers working full time and the average weekly hours worked were similar regardless of couple status.

For occupations, employment of mothers in one-parent families was concentrated in business, finance and administration occupations (25%), and sales and service occupations (24%), followed by occupations in education, law and social, community and government services (19%), and health occupations (15%). The four occupation groups were the same as those where working mothers in couple families were concentrated, but employment of mothers in one-parent families was more concentrated in

sales and service occupations compared with working mothers in couple families (15%). In terms of job skill levels, 50% of working mothers in one-parent families were employed in occupations that require higher levels of necessary TEER, such as managerial occupations and occupations requiring a university degree (27%) and occupations requiring completion of a non-university postsecondary education or apprenticeship training of two or more years (22%). Mothers in one-parent families were more likely to work in occupations requiring no postsecondary education or apprenticeship training (28% for TEER categories 4 and 5) than mothers in couple families (17%).

Among employees working in the public and private sectors, 11% of mothers in one-parent families had a non-permanent job and 65% were not union members or covered by a collective agreement. For earnings, the average hourly wages of mothers in one-parent families were \$27.40 for those working full time and \$22.50 for those working part time, about \$6 lower than those of corresponding working mothers in couple families.

Labour market characteristics of non-working parents in one-parent families

As seen among couple families, non-working mothers in one-parent families on average had more children than working mothers in one-parent families. The percentage of non-working mothers in one-parent families who had three or more children younger than 13 was 29% compared with 15% for working mothers in one-parent families (not presented in a table). Overall, non-working mothers in one-parent families had lower levels of education (tables 5 and 6). Just under half (47%) of non-working mothers in one-parent families had postsecondary education, in contrast to more than three-quarters (77%) of working mothers in one-parent families. The percentage of postsecondary degree holders was 12%, almost one-third that of working mothers in one-parent families.

An analysis of labour market characteristics of non-working mothers in one-parent families showed that 23% of them were unemployed and 77% were not in the labour force (Table 6). Of those not in the labour force, 68% were non-students who did not want a job or considered a long-term future start (i.e., stay-at-home mothers), and 13% were discouraged workers who wanted a job. Among all non-working mothers in one-parent families, 53% ($= 77\% \times 68\% \times 100$) were stay-at-home mothers, lower than non-working mothers in couple families. The percentages of non-working mothers in one-parent families who were unemployed or discouraged workers were slightly higher than those for non-working mothers in couple families.

Discussion and conclusions

This study described trends and recent patterns of parental labour market participation for families with young children aged 0 to 5 years.

From 1990 to 2021, two-earner couples became a norm among families with young children, accounting for 68% of couple families with young children aged 0 to 5 years in 2021. Also, labour market participation became more common among mothers in one-parent families with young children in the last three decades, with their employment rate reaching 62% in 2021. These rates decreased at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic because of business closures and job losses, as well as child care and school closures, but recovered in 2021.

The labour market participation of mothers in one-parent families was more influenced by the presence and age of young children than that of mothers in couple families. The employment rate of mothers in one-parent families gradually increased with the age of the youngest child. For couple families, the percentage of two-earner couples remained similar when their youngest children were aged 0 to 5 but increased once the youngest children reached primary school age. Generally, the cost of child care services tends to decrease as children get older. The labour market participation of mothers in one-parent families with young children may be more influenced by the implementation of CWELCC, which aims to lower child care costs for young children.

Provincial differences in the employment patterns of families with young children were found. Relative to other provinces, Quebec had a larger share of two-earner couples among couple families with young children and a higher employment rate among mothers in one-parent families with young children. It also had the largest share of two-earner families with young children that had both parents working full time. These differences may be partially related to provincial differences in availability and accessibility of early learning and child care.

An analysis of labour market participation among couple families showed that the percentage of two-earner couples decreased when young children were present in families. Once the youngest child reached primary school age, it increased but was still lower than that of families without children. Also, findings suggest that some parents who kept a full-time job during the first one to two years after a child was born switched to a part-time job over the years until children reached school age. Some parents returned to a full-time job once all children were in school, but other parents remained in a part-time job.

Employment patterns varied by immigrant status and population group. Couple families with Canadian-born mothers were more likely to have two earners than those with foreign-born mothers, and couple families with White mothers had a higher share of two earners than those with mothers from certain other population groups, such as the Chinese, Black, Latin American, South Asian and Arab groups. These differences may be related to differences in average family size, cultural background and economic characteristics in the labour market.

Generally, non-working parents with young children tended to have lower levels of education and more children younger than 13 than working parents with young children. A non-trivial share of non-working mothers were unemployed or non-student discouraged workers. Their non-employment may be influenced by the costs of child care outweighing the benefits of working. Access to lower-cost child care services may help non-working parents in these circumstances take part in the labour market.

This study demonstrated that the labour market participation of parents with young children continued to evolve over the last three decades and varied by various demographic characteristics. Findings suggest that the employment patterns of parents with different characteristics may be influenced differently by the implementation of the CWELCC system.

References

Government of Canada. 2021. *Budget 2021*. Retrieved from <https://www.budget.gc.ca/2021/home-accueil-en.html>

Statistics Canada. 2020. Guide to the Labour Force Survey. Catalogue no. 71-543-G. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-543-g/71-543-g2020001-eng.htm>

Statistics Canada. 2022. "A fifty-year look at divorces in Canada, 1970 to 2020." *The Daily*. March 9. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-001-XIE. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220309/dq220309a-eng.htm>

Statistics Canada. No date, a. Table 14-10-0396-01 Labour force characteristics by family structure, annual, unadjusted for seasonality. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410039601>

Statistics Canada. No date, b. Introduction to the National Occupational Classification (NOC) 2021 Version 1.0. <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/subjects/standard/noc/2021/introductionV1>

Statistics Canada. No date, c. Table 98-10-0020-01 Age (in single years), average age and median age and gender: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations with parts. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=9810002001>

Statistics Canada. No date, d. Table 17-10-0016-01 Estimates of births, by sex, annual. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=1710001601>

Uppal, S. 2015. "Employment patterns of families with children." *Insights on Canadian Society*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 75-006-X.