

CST Census snapshot of Canada — Families

The richest source of information on the social, cultural, demographic and economic status of Canadian society is the census which is conducted every five years. Canadian Social Trends will be highlighting some of the key trends observed in data released from the 2006 Census.

Data from the 2006 Census indicate that the large majority (84%) of the population still live in census families¹, while 11% live alone and 5% live with others including relatives and non-relatives. The characteristics of families in Canada continue to change as growth between 2001 and 2006 varied by family structure. Overall, families grew in number by 6% over this period, but common-law couple families grew by 19%, lone-parent families by 8% and married couple families grew by 4%.

Still, in 2006, married-couple families made up 69% of all families in Canada, while common-law couples and lone parents each represented 16% of all families. In comparison, two decades ago, common-law-couple families accounted for only 7% of all census families and lone-parent families made up 13%.

Common-law couples account for a particularly large share of all families in Quebec. In 2006, 29% of all families in Quebec were common-law couples whereas in the remaining provinces the figure ranged from 14% in New Brunswick to just 10% in both Ontario and Prince Edward Island. As a result, Quebec accounted for 44% of all common-law-couple families in Canada in 2006.

Common-law couples also make up a higher share of all family units in the three territories. In fact, in 2006, over one in four families in the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut were headed by a couple living in a common-law relationship. At the same time, lone-parent families also constitute a relatively large share of families in the territories. That year, almost one in four (23%) of all families in the territories were headed by a lone parent. In contrast, the share of all families headed by a lone parent was fairly close to the national rate in all ten provinces, with the figure ranging from 17% in Nova Scotia, Quebec and Manitoba to 14% in Alberta.

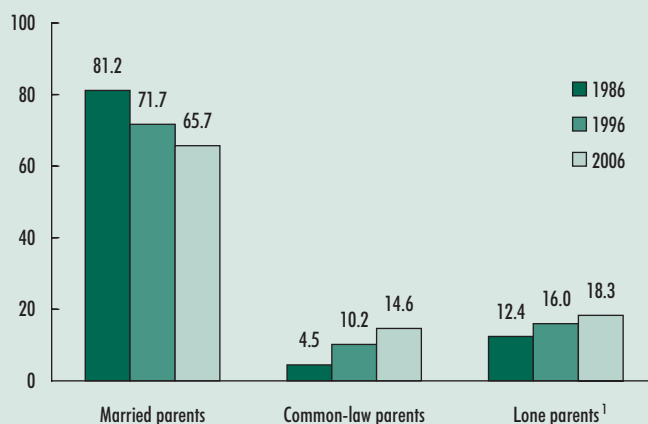
Growth among lone-parent families headed by men exceeded that for such families headed by women. Between 2001 and 2006, for example, the number of male-headed lone-parent families increased by 15%, compared with just

6% among those headed by women. In 2006, women still made up the large majority (80%) of lone parents in Canada. That year, there were a total of 1.1 million female-headed lone-parent families in Canada, which have historically been among the most economically disadvantaged families in the country. While the overall growth rate in the number of lone-parent families has moderated in the past decade, these families continue to account for a relatively large share of all children in Canada. For example, 18% of all children under age 15 lived with a lone parent.

For the first time, Canada had more couples without children than with children. In 2006, 41% of families were couple families who had children while 43% of families were couple families without children. The latter includes couples whose children have left the home, an increasing trend with the aging baby-boom generation. Twenty years earlier, 52% of families were couples with children.

With the rapid increase in common-law couple families, a growing proportion of children under age 15 lived with common-law parents. In 2006, 15% of children under age 15 who lived in private households lived with common-law parents, up from 5% twenty years earlier. In 2006, the majority of children (66%) still lived with married parents while 18% lived with a lone parent.

% of children under age 15 living with parents

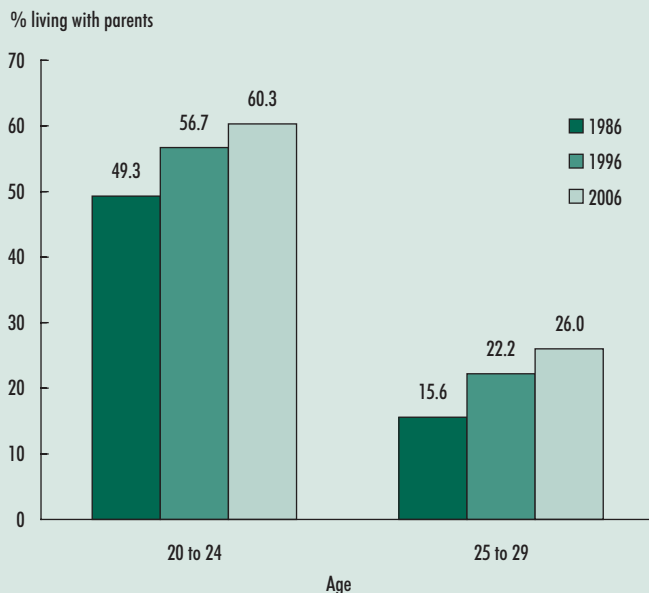


1. Historical comparisons for census families, particularly lone-parent families, must be interpreted with caution due to conceptual changes in 2001.

Note: A small percentage (2.1% or less) of children are counted in the 'other' category and are not shown on this chart.

Source: Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population, 1986, 1996 and 2006.

The latest census also confirmed the long-term trend for young adults to either remain in, or return to, the parental home. In fact, in 2006, 44% of all young adults aged 20 to 29 were living in their parental home, up from 41% in 2001 and 32% in 1986.



Source: Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population, 1986, 1996 and 2006.

Data from the latest census also showed a substantial rise in the number of same-sex couples in Canada. In 2006, there were just over 45,000 same-sex couples in Canada, up 33% from 2001. This was over five times the growth rate of opposite-sex couples, the number of which rose by 6% in the same period. That year, same-sex couples made up just under 1% of all Canadian families, a figure comparable with other industrialized nations which collect such data. As well, just under half of all same-sex couples in Canada lived in the census metropolitan areas of Toronto (21%), Montréal (18%), and Vancouver (10%).

The 2006 census also counted same-sex married couples for the first time, reflecting the legalization of same-sex marriages for all of Canada as of July 2005. Overall, 17% of same-sex couples were married couples.

For more information about families and households from the 2006 Census, or about the Census in general, visit the Census website at <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census/index.cfm>.

1. A census family is composed of a married or common-law couple with or without children, or a lone parent living with at least one child in the same dwelling.