

# Baby boom women

*Diane Galarneau*

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**B**aby boom women have experienced a very different social and economic climate than women of previous generations. Because of changes in society's attitudes and values, they stayed in school longer, married later, and had fewer children. And over the last three decades, they entered the labour force in unprecedented numbers.

However, because the baby boom spanned two decades, those born in the early years of the period were adults when the last boomers were infants. As a result, baby boom women joined the labour force at different times. The different rates of economic growth since the 1960s meant that at each stage of their working lives early boomers experienced different economic conditions than did late boomers. This, in turn, affected their employment and earnings.

## What is the baby boom?

The baby boom is the increase in births that occurred after World War II ([Chart A](#)). While no consensus exists on the exact timing of the phenomenon, for ease of analysis, the period from 1946 to 1965 is a close approximation. This article divides baby boom women into two "waves": the first consists of those born from 1946 to 1955, and the second, those born from 1956 to 1965.



### **Chart A At the peak of the baby boom, annual births topped 460,000.**

*Source: Canadian Centre for Health Information*

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The second wave was considerably larger than the first. For instance, at ages 16 to 25, typically the age

range when people first enter the labour market (see [Data source and definitions](#)), second-wave women totalled 2.3 million. By contrast, first-wave women had numbered 1.9 million. As they advanced to the next age range, both groups were augmented by immigrants, though the numerical gap remained. At ages 26 to 35, second-wave women totalled almost 2.5 million, compared with 2.1 million for the first wave. Consequently, second-wave women encountered more competition in the labour force, both from their peers and from the first wave.

# Employment

## Labour force entry and the economy

In the 1960s, the first wave of baby boom women began to enter the labour market. During this decade, Canada was undergoing economic expansion. Gross domestic product (GDP) growth was high - an annual average of 5.2% - while unemployment and inflation were low, averaging 5.0% and 2.9%, respectively. At the beginning of the 1960s, relatively few women were in the labour force (29% in 1961). [\(1\)](#) However, by 1971, women's overall labour force participation had risen to 39%. The rate among the first wave of baby boom women, who were then aged 16 to 25, was even higher at 54%.

The labour market entry of second-wave women in the 1970s coincided with the start of an era of more moderate economic growth. Annual increases in GDP remained high in the early part of the decade, averaging 5.1%, but a recession in 1974 and 1975 was followed by a lower average annual growth rate of 4.6% from 1976 to 1979. Inflation rose to an annual average of around 8% in the latter half of the 1970s, and unemployment increased from 5.9% in the first half of the decade to 7.6% in the second.

Despite the deteriorating job market, by 1981, 70% of second-wave baby boom women, then aged 16 to 25, were in the labour force, a considerable jump from the figure for the first wave at the same age (54%) ([Chart B](#)). And while the second wave's unemployment rate was also higher than that of the first at the same age, so was the overall rate of unemployment. In 1981, the unemployment rate of second-wave women was 18.4%, compared with 14.3% for the first in 1971. The unemployment figures for all women were 8.3% in 1981 and 6.6% in 1971.



### Chart B At every age, second-wave baby boom women were more likely to be in the labour force ...

Source: *Census of Canada*

The 1980s began with the 1981-82 recession. GDP actually declined (-3.2%) in 1982 and averaged only

3.3% per year for the decade. The annual rate of inflation reached 12.4% in 1981 and 10.9% in 1982, but then fell below 6% for the rest of the 1980s. Unemployment, however, rose to almost 12% in 1983 and remained above 10% until 1986.

Nevertheless, by 1991, when second-wave women were aged 26 to 35, their labour force participation rate was 78%. Again, this was much higher than the figure for first-wave women at that age (65%). Furthermore, at these ages 50% of employed second-wave women had full-time, full-year jobs; the comparable proportion for the first wave in 1981 had been 45%.

## Later marriage ... fewer children

Trends in family and marital status also distinguished baby boom women from the previous generation. For instance, increasingly, they were postponing marriage. [\(2\)](#) At ages 26 to 35, 20% of second-wave women had never married, compared with 14% of the first wave and 11% of pre-boom women (born from 1936 to 1945) at the same age.

Similarly, female baby boomers were waiting longer to start families. At ages 26 to 35, the proportion with no children was 38% for the second wave and 30% for the first. By contrast, in this age range only 22% of pre-boomers had no children. And those baby boomers who did have children had relatively few. Just 13% of second-wave women aged 26 to 35 had three or more children, compared with 16% for the first wave, and 34% for pre-boomers.

At the same time, the labour force participation rate of married women was rising sharply. In 1991, when the second wave was aged 26 to 35, the disparity between the participation rates of those who were married and those who were single was 8 percentage points: 77% versus 85%. In 1981, the difference had been 24 points for the first wave, while in 1971, 43 points separated the participation rates of married and single pre-boom women.

As well, the presence and age of children appeared to have a diminishing impact on women's labour force participation. At ages 26 to 35, the participation rate of second-wave women with at least one preschool child at home was 68%, compared with 50% for the first wave, and 29% for pre-boomers.

## More education

Baby boom women had more formal education than the previous generation. Furthermore, the level of attainment of the second wave surpassed that of the first. At ages 26 to 35, 16% of second-wave women were university graduates ([Table 1](#)). The corresponding figure for the first wave was a somewhat lower 13%, while at the same ages, just 5% of pre-boom women held degrees.



## Table 1 **Distribution and labour force participation of first- and second-wave female baby boomers, by selected characteristics**

*Source: Census of Canada*

Not only was the level of education of female baby boomers rising, but more of them were earning degrees in traditionally male-dominated fields such as business, law, medicine, and mathematics ([Stout, 1992](#)).

### **Expanding range of jobs**

The rise in educational attainment and the shift toward traditionally male fields were reflected in the occupational distribution of baby boom women ([Table 2](#)). [\(3\)](#) As each wave aged and upgraded its education, the proportions in managerial and male-dominated professional positions increased. And second-wave women were considerably more likely than the first wave to hold such occupations.



## Table 2 **Occupations of first- and second-wave female baby boomers**

*Source: Census of Canada*

For example, at ages 26 to 35, managerial-occupations accounted for 9% of second-wave women, compared with 6% of the first wave at the same age. Trends were similar in engineering, natural sciences, social sciences, and the arts.

On the other hand, teaching and health accounted for larger shares of first- than of second-wave women. At ages 26 to 35, 9% of employed first-wave women versus 6% of the second wave were in teaching. The figures for health were 11% and 9%, respectively.

The leading occupational category for all baby boom women was clerical, but at older ages their concentration in such occupations diminished. This was particularly noticeable among the second wave: at ages 16 to 25, 39% were in clerical occupations; by ages 26 to 35, the figure had dropped to 31%.

Second-wave women were more likely than the first to be in services. In 1991, at ages 26 to 35, 14% of employed second-wave women were in service occupations, whereas the proportion had been 11% for

the first wave in 1981. To some extent, these variations were attributable to the changing requirements of the economy, notably the shift of employment from goods-producing to service industries.

## Employment income

The earnings of baby boom women and the pace at which they increased were affected by the economic conditions that prevailed when these women entered the workforce and as their careers advanced. [\(4\)](#)

### Varying rates of change

In 1980, [\(5\)](#) the year before the 1981-82 recession, second-wave women with full-time, full-year jobs were earning more than the first wave had earned at the same age in 1970: \$19,800 versus \$16,900 (constant 1990 dollars) ([Table 3](#)).



#### Table 3 Employment income of first- and second-wave female baby boomers

Source: *Census of Canada*

The next 10 years were coloured by the 1981-82 recession and slower economic growth. This period brought a rise in employment income of 31% for the second wave, whereas that of the first wave had increased 55% during the 1970s. As a result, in 1990, second-wave women were earning slightly less than the first wave had when they were in this age range: \$25,900 versus \$26,200 in 1980.

### Less than men

At ages 16 to 25, neither women nor men are likely to have much work experience, and because many have not settled into a stable job, their earnings are fairly similar. But as their careers proceed, men's employment income tends to rise more rapidly than women's. This was true for baby boom women, although there was some narrowing of the gap.

The female/male employment income ratio for full-time, full-year workers was relatively high for the first and second waves when they were aged 16 to 25 (76% and 77%, respectively). [\(6\)](#) By ages 26 to 35, the gap had widened, although less so for the second wave: the ratio was 75% for the second wave, compared with 71% for the first.

## Women contributing more

The massive influx of baby boom women into the labour market has made dual-earner families the majority. Thus, it is not surprising that women's overall share of family employment income [\(7\)](#) has increased. For example, at ages 26 to 35, second-wave women were contributing 36% of family income, up from 33% for the first wave. As well, women's share increased at every income level, even at the top (\$100,000 or more), where it rose from 26% to 32% ([Chart C](#)).



### Chart C At ages 26 to 35, second-wave baby boom women contributed more to family employment income.

Source: *Census of Canada*

## Summary

For the most part, trends that emerged among first-wave baby boom women persisted and intensified among the second wave: their educational attainment was higher; they waited longer before entering a relationship and having children; and they had fewer children. Moreover, the labour force participation rate of second-wave women was higher than that of the first wave at the same age, regardless of educational attainment, marital status, or number and age of children, and despite the ups and downs of economic conditions. Nonetheless, second-wave women were more likely than their first-wave counterparts to be unemployed. In addition, at ages 26 to 35, second-wave women employed full time year round earned slightly less than first-wave women had at the same ages.

## Data source and definitions

This article is adapted from *Female Baby Boomers: A Generation at Work* (Catalogue 96-315E), one of the "Focus on Canada" series of publications, which provide an overview of the population through analysis of the data collected in the 1991 Census. *Female Baby Boomers: A Generation at Work* compares women born during the baby boom with those born before and after.

This article, by contrast, examines the two "waves" of baby boom women: those born from 1946 to 1955

and those born from 1956 to 1965. It compares their characteristics at the same age, but in different years.

Although labour force statistics usually include 15 year-olds, the use of census data meant that analysis of the two waves of baby boom women had to be based on those aged 16 and over. In the census year 1971, the youngest members of the first wave, born in 1955, were 16 years old. Similarly, the youngest members of the second wave, born in 1965, were 16 in 1981. As well, 1971 data are not presented for the second wave, who were then aged 6 to 15.

**Employment income**, or **earnings**, is total income received as wages and salaries, net income from unincorporated non-farm business and/or professional practice and net farm self-employment income.

**Full-time** workers worked 30 hours or more a week (at all jobs); **part-time** workers, less than 30 hours per week.

**Full-year** workers worked 49 or more weeks a year; **part-year** workers, less than 49 weeks.

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## Notes

### *Note 1*

The participation rate is the proportion of the population 16 years and over that is either employed or unemployed. Figures for 1961 are unpublished data from Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey.

### *Note 2*

Married includes common-law.

### *Note 3*

Occupation data refer only to employed women.

### *Note 4*

Of course, the earnings of baby boom women also depended on factors such as education, occupation, industry, and opportunities for promotion.

### *Note 5*

Because the census collects income data for the preceding year, earnings figures for first- and second-wave women pertain to 1970, 1980 and 1990.

### Note 6

A value of 100% would indicate absolute equality; values less than 100%, that women's employment income is lower. These indices cannot be used as a measure of salary equity between men and women, as they do not take account of factors such as occupation, industry, and work experience.

### Note 7

This analysis pertains only to women who were married or in common-law unions. The figures refer to the proportion of average family employment income that was contributed by these women.

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## References

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## Source

*Perspectives on Labour and Income*, Winter 1994, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Statistics Canada, Catalogue 75-001E). This is the third of six articles in the issue.



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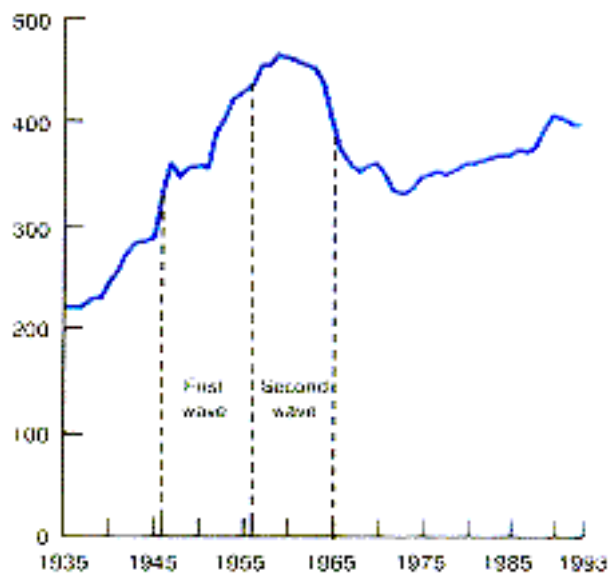


Chart A

**At the peak of the baby boom, annual births topped 460,000.**

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Live births ('000)



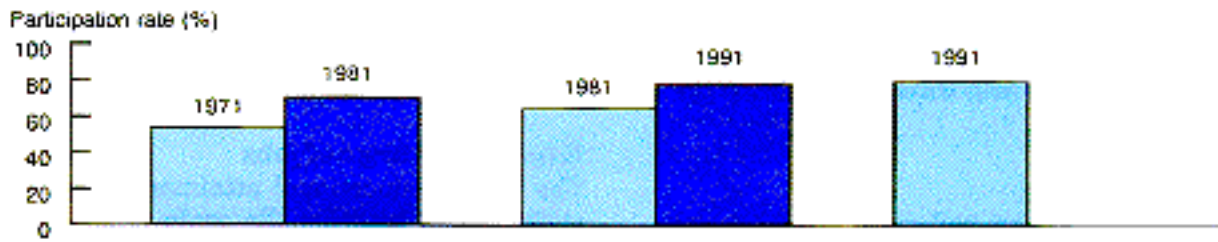
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Source: Canadian Centre for Health Information

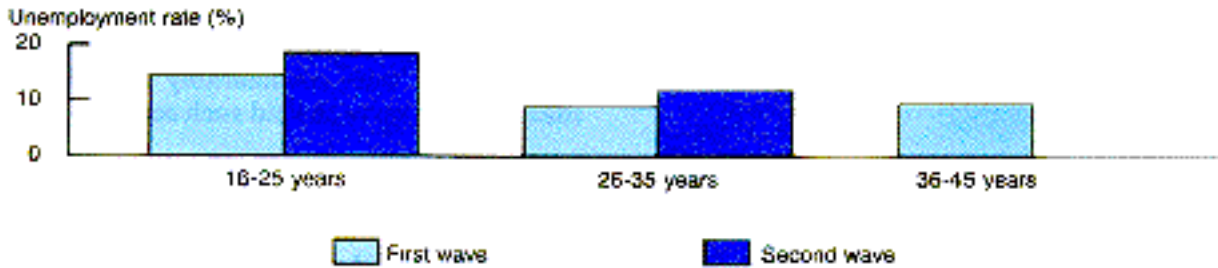
Note: Excludes Newfoundland from 1935 to 1985, and Yukon and Northwest Territories from 1935 to 1965.

Chart B

**At every age, second-wave baby boom women were more likely to be in the labour force ...**



**... and also more likely to be unemployed.**



Source: Census of Canada

Table 1

**Distribution and labour force participation of first- and second-wave female baby boomers, by selected characteristics**

	Ages 16 to 25				Ages 26 to 35			
	Distribution		Participation rate		Distribution		Participation rate	
	First wave in 1971	Second wave in 1981	First wave in 1971	Second wave in 1981	First wave in 1981	Second wave in 1991	First wave in 1981	Second wave in 1991
	%							
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>78</b>
Education								
Less than Grade 9	11	4	36	43	9	4	44	50
Grades 9 to 13	63	60	50	63	42	40	59	72
Some or completed postsecondary	23	31	70	82	36	41	72	83
University degree	3	5	78	88	13	16	82	89
Marital status								
Never-married	62	65	57	70	14	20	85	85
Married*	36	33	48	68	78	72	61	77
Other	2	2	60	70	9	8	75	76
Children at home								
None	77	83	60	75	30	38	89	91
At least one	23	17	30	46	70	62	55	71
One	13	11	36	53	20	21	66	78
Two	7	5	23	38	33	28	54	71
Three or more	2	1	17	28	16	13	44	60
At least one preschooler	22	17	30	45	46	43	50	68

Source: Census of Canada

\* Includes common-law.

Table 2

**Occupations of first- and second-wave female baby boomers**

	Ages 16 to 25		Ages 26 to 35	
	First wave in 1971	Second wave in 1981	First wave in 1981	Second wave in 1991
	%			
<b>All occupations</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Managerial and administrative	1	2	6	9
Natural sciences, engineering, social sciences, religion and the arts	3	5	6	8
Teaching	6	2	9	6
Health care	8	6	11	9
Clerical	37	39	35	31
Sales	7	10	7	8
Services	15	19	11	14
Agriculture	2	2	2	2
Product fabricating	4	4	4	3
Other*	5	6	5	5
Not classified/not reported	10	4	3	5

*Source: Census of Canada*

*\* Includes fishing, trapping, forestry, mining and quarrying, processing and machining, construction, transport equipment operating, material handling, and other crafts and equipment operating.*

Table 3

**Employment income of first- and second-wave female baby boomers**

	Ages 16 to 25		Ages 26 to 35	
	First wave in 1970	Second wave in 1980	First wave in 1980	Second wave in 1990
Full-time, full-year workers*				
Women's employment income (1990 \$)	16,900	19,800	26,200	25,900
	%			
Female/male employment income ratio	76	77	71	75
Women's share of family employment income**	34	34	33	36

*Source: Census of Canada**\* Employed 30 or more hours per week, 49 or more weeks per year**\*\* Includes only women who were married or in common-law unions.*

Chart C

**At ages 26 to 35, second-wave baby boom women contributed more to family employment income.**

Average family  
employment income  
(1990 \$)



Source: Census of Canada