

Family Change and Diversity in Canada

by

Shelley Clark (McGill University)

and

Sarah Brauner-Otto (McGill University)

Prepared for

Regional Expert Group Meeting for North America

in preparation for the 30th anniversary of the International Year of Family, (IYF+30) 2024
Orlando, Florida, 11 November 2023

Acknowledgments

The authors gratefully acknowledge the research assistance provided by Ann-Marie Helou (McGill University) and Mahjoube Amanichakani (McGill University).

Megatrends & Families:

Focus on Demographic Change,

Migration and Urbanization in North America

Session 1: Demographic Change in North America

Family Change and Diversity in Canada

Introduction

Families in Canada, as in other high-income countries, have experienced profound changes over the last few decades (Billari and Kohler 2004; Heuveline and Timberlake 2004). Demographers often refer to these changes as the Second Demographic Transition (SDT), which include the precipitous decline in fertility to well-below replacement levels and the increased diversity in family forms, as adults increasingly forego marriage in preference to remaining single or forming cohabiting partnerships (Lesthaeghe 2020). These changes correspond to a growing proportion of children being born and raised outside of marriage and a rising number of older adults living on their own.

How these changes unfold varies considerably across countries. Differences in historical, institutional and policy contexts and economic structures have resulted in divergent patterns of fertility, cohabitation, and children's living arrangements (Heuveline and Timberlake 2004; Lesthaeghe and Neidert 2006; Perelli-Harris and Lyons-Amos 2016). In addition, other demographic trends, specifically declines in mortality and increases in migration, also influence family structures and diversity both across and within countries. Amongst high income-countries Canada stands out for both its relatively high life expectancy and its high rates of international migration.

The universal healthcare system in Canada and lower levels of socioeconomic inequality have contributed to improvements in health and life expectancy (Siddiqi et al. 2013). Life expectancy at birth in Canada increased from 77.78 years in 1991 to 81.87 years in 2021 (Statistics Canada 2022a). In 2020, COVID-19 contributed to a temporary reduction in life expectancy at birth of 0.41 years. But while the COVID-19 pandemic claimed many lives among the oldest Canadians, this population continued to grow rapidly. Between 2016 and 2021, the number of Canadians aged 65 and older increased by 18.3% to 7.0 million. Women still outnumber men among people 85 and older, although this ratio is decreasing (Hallman et al. 2022). Longer life expectancy has the potential to increase intergenerational contact and support as grandparents, parents, and children share a greater proportion of their lives together. Longer lives also mean more time for existing unions to end and new unions to form adding to family complexity.

Canada has high levels of immigration, with over 23% of the population foreign-born in 2021, exceedingly most other advanced economies countries. Immigrants increasingly originate from Asian countries (62%) like India (10.7%), China (8.6 %), and the Philippines (8.6%), rather than European nations (10.1%) or the United States (11.6%) (Statistics Canada 2017). In contrast, although the U.S. has a higher number of immigrants, they account for only 13.7% of its population (Budiman 2020). The proportion of women among all immigrants in Canada is higher (52.4%) in comparison to men, especially in recent years between 2016 and 2021, reflecting the growing feminization of migration (Statistics Canada 2023a). A large proportion of immigrants to Canada arrive at peak working and reproductive ages (Statistics Canada 2022b). Hence, immigration has both a direct effect on population growth through the arrival of immigrants, and an indirect effect on future births to immigrants and their descendants (Edmonston 2016). It also contributes to Canada's relatively young age structure compared to other advanced economies like Japan and Italy (Statistics Canada 2022b). Nonetheless, immigrants have lower overall mortality rates than Canadian-born individuals (Trovato 2020). Border restrictions around the world during the Covid-19 pandemic decreased immigration significantly in Canada. Just under 185,000 immigrants were

admitted in 2020, compared with more than 340,000 in 2019 (Statistics Canada 2022b). In 2021, it welcomed over 405,000 newcomers and intends to increase the number of new permanent residents to 500,000 in 2025 (Statistics Canada 2021a). These large influxes of immigrants from around the world bring with them a variety of practices and preferences related to both fertility and family formation. As such, they make important contributions to both the changes in Canadian families as well as their diversity.

This report takes a close look at Canadian families during the Second Demographic Transition. First, we begin by examining how Canadian families have changed over the past 30 years with respect to the three main characteristics of the SDT: 1) fertility, 2) union status, and 3) children's living arrangements. Second, we assess diversity in families by their ethnic and racial origins and heritage and by geographic location. Third, we explore the implications of these changes over time and growing diversity of Canadian families for children and for older adults. As such, it can help guide government agencies in developing a host of social and family policies, including family law, education, health, and housing.

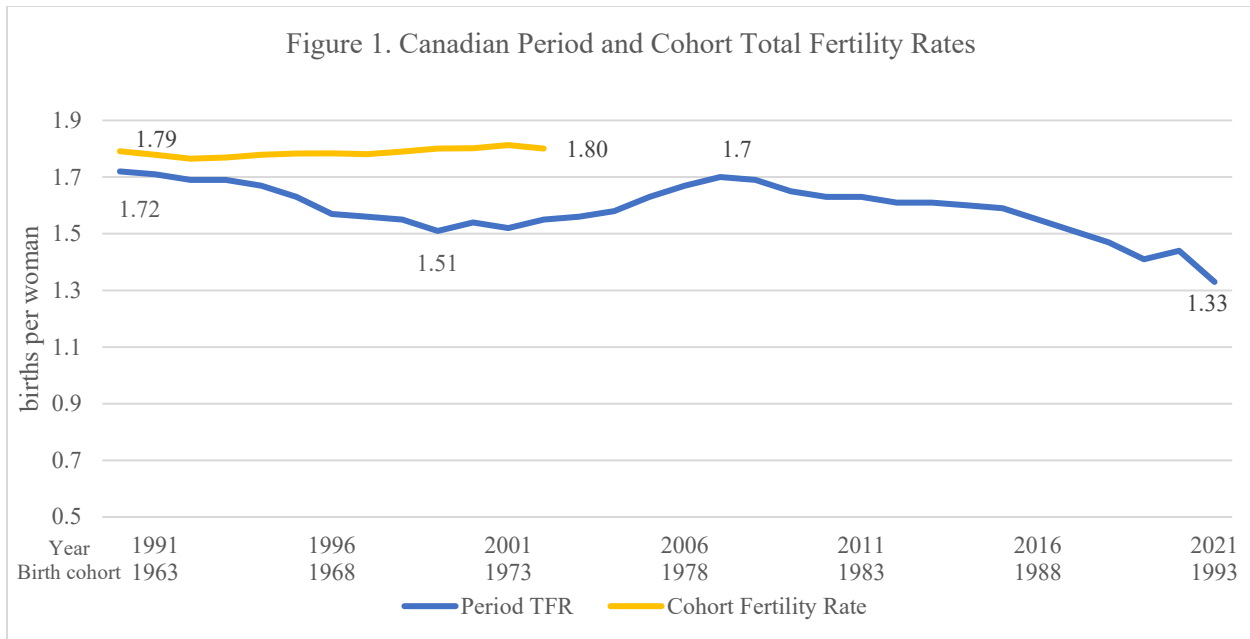
Trends in Family Change in Canada

Changes in Fertility

Figure 1 below shows fertility in Canada from 1991 to 2022. These data show that, despite a modest increase between 2000 and 2008, fertility rates in Canada, have been on an overall downward slope, and are currently at the lowest level recorded (Statistics Canada 2023b). The decade started with a period Total Fertility Rate (TFR)¹ of 1.72 births, the highest it had been since the 1970s. Fertility then fell until 2000, when it reached a low of 1.5, after which it rose until 2008 when it hit 1.7. The last 15 years have seen a steady decline down to the 1.33 reported for 2022, the lowest it has ever been in Canada. There was a slight increase in 2021 from 1.41 to 1.44 births, but this is likely due to the postponement of births during the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Canada's fertility has long been in the middle of other wealthy countries (Rindfuss et al. 2016): lower than that seen in Northern and Western Europe, Oceania, and the U.S., but higher than that seen in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe, and East and Southeast Asia. However, the dramatic decrease in recent years puts it closer to fertility levels seen in countries in the lower branch, like Germany, than to those in the upper branch, like the US or France. The recent decrease in period fertility is at least partly due to changes in the timing of childbearing. Here we turn to the completed cohort fertility rate which measures the number of children women gave birth to up to age 44, in contrast to the TFR which is a hypothetical number that does not reveal the actual behavior of women. Completed cohort fertility has been relatively stable—between 1.77 for women born in 1965 and 1966, and 1.81, for women born in 1974 (Human Fertility Database 2023). Additionally, the percent of women who remain childless up to age 44 has been stable at around 18% for women born after 1960. However, the mean age of childbearing has increased every year since 1975 when it was 26.7 years. It now stands at 31.6 years for women giving birth in 2022 (Human Fertility Database 2023; Statistics Canada 2023c). The impact of this rising age of childbirth for the completed fertility of younger cohorts is not known. However, the desired number of children has been declining since 2008 and was lower among those aged 15 to 24 years old (1.35 children) than among older adults aged 35 to 49 (1.58) (Statistics Canada 2023d).

¹ The period TFR is the number of births a woman would have if she experienced that years Age-Specific-Fertility Rates over her entire reproductive life. The cohort fertility rate is the average number of children born alive to women born in given year during their reproductive lives (aged 15-44 in these data). Cohort fertility rates are matched to periods (calendar years) according to the mean age at childbearing for that cohort.

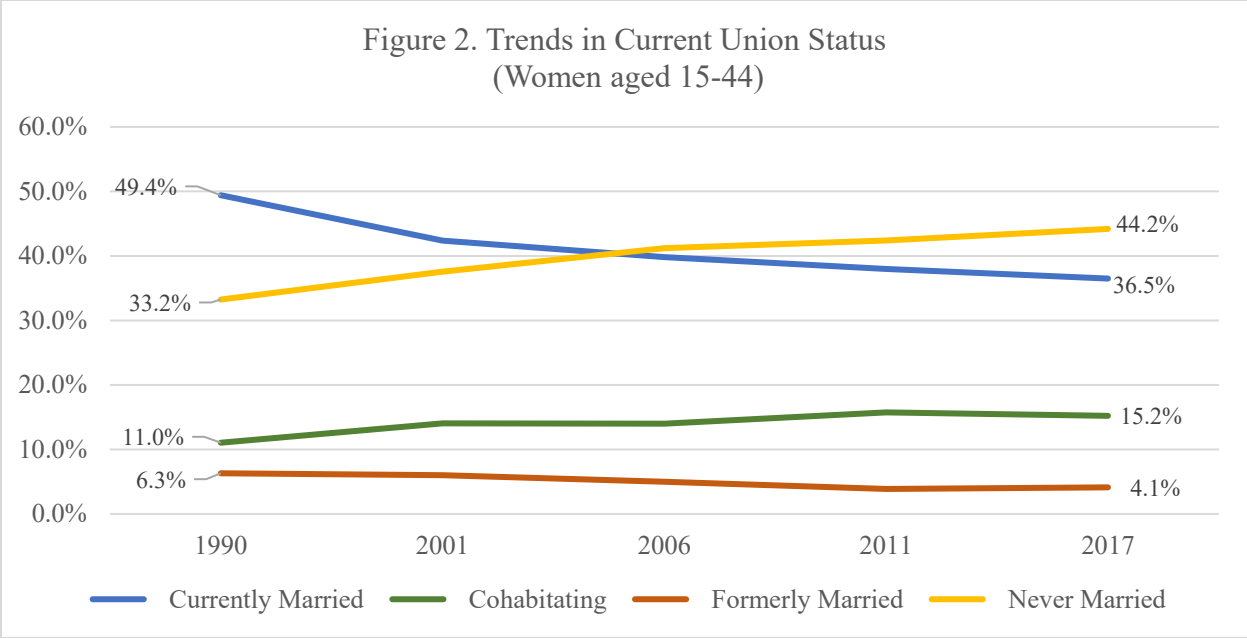


Source: Statistics Canada. [Table 13-10-0418-01 Crude birth rate, age-specific fertility rates and total fertility rate \(live births\).](#)

Changes in Union Status

Over the past few decades there has been a well-documented retreat from marriage (Statistics Canada 2022g). This decline in marriage is due to a growing number of adults remaining single and forming cohabiting partnerships (Kerr et al. 2006; Statistics Canada 2019c, 2022h), rather than to rising rates of divorce. In fact, between 1991 and 2020 divorce rates declined from 12.7 to 5.6 divorces per 1,000 married persons (Statistics Canada 2022c) and only about a quarter of Canadian marriages end in divorce (Margolis et al. 2019). Among the G7 countries, Canada had the second lowest crude divorce rate, but the highest share of couples in cohabiting unions in 2019 (Statistics Canada 2022c). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on unions in Canada is still speculative, but the increased social isolation and loss may have strained many relationships, while reinforcing others (Pietromonaco and Overall 2022). Between 2019 and 2020, there was a sharp decrease in the number of divorces registered in Canada, but this may simply reflect limited access to court services (Statistics Canada 2022c).

Figure 2 documents national trends in women’s union status using data from the General Social Survey from 1990 to 2017. One of the most striking findings is that women of reproductive age (15 to 44) are now more likely to be never married than to be currently married, despite an overall aging population. Further while the proportion of married women has declined by 13 percentage points and cohabitation has increased by 4 percentage points, women in 2017 were still more than twice as likely to be in a marital union than in a cohabiting partnership. Other studies also suggest that cohabitation in Canada is often a prelude to marriage with about 40% of married couples cohabiting before marriage (Statistics Canada 2019c).



Source: Canadian General Social Survey 1990 to 2017 (authors' calculations)

Although the overall trends show declining marriage and divorce rates over the past 30 years, important differences in union status emerge when disaggregated by age. Marriage rates have declined most steeply among young adults. Yet, despite this trend and Canada's global leadership in eliminating child marriage, nearly 2,300 Canadian children younger than age 18 are in a formal or common-law marriage (Koski and Clark 2021). Further, divorce has declined most sharply among Canadians younger than 35. In contrast, since 1991 there has been a slight rise in divorce among those aged 50 and older (Margolis et al. 2019; Statistics Canada 2019a). The most recent data from 2021 suggests that this rise in "grey divorce" has halted (Statistics Canada 2022c).

Data on trends in other types of unions including same-gender and transgender or gender non-binary unions, couples "living together apart," and polyamorous unions are limited. Canada was amongst the first countries to collect census data on same-sex cohabiting couples (2001), same-sex married couples (2006) and gender diversity (2021). Between 2006 and 2016, the number of same-sex couples increased by over 60% (Statistics Canada 2021b). However, marriage is much more prevalent among different-sex couples (Waite, Denier, and Pajovic 2021). According to the 2015-2018 Canadian Community Health Survey, 56% of heterosexuals aged 25-64 were married compared to only 17% of lesbians/gays. Lesbians and gays were more likely to be living common-law than heterosexuals (31% vs 16%) (Statistics Canada 2021b). The 2021 Canadian census also showed that 0.4% of couples in Canada included at least one transgender or non-binary person and 1.1% of couples identified as same-gender (Statistics Canada 2022h). Further, the proportion of couples who are "living apart together" has been increasing, particularly among younger adults. In 2021, 29% of adults aged 20 to 34 were in couples that were "living-apart-together." (Statistics Canada 2022h). Nationally representative data that capture multi-partner unions is not available. There is evidence, however, that polygamous unions are commonly formed among members of some religious groups and that polyamorous unions are on the rise especially among youth in metropolitan areas (Boyd 2017).

Changes in Children's Living Arrangements

As a consequence of these changes in union formation, a rising proportion of Canadian children are being born and raised outside of traditional two different-sex, married parent families. There has been a sharp rise in the proportion of children born to unmarried mothers from 18% in 1990 to 32% in 2017 (author's calculations of children aged 0 to 17 in the 1990 and 2017 GSS). The majority of these children are born to cohabiting couples and some of these couples transition to marriage after childbirth. However, the likelihood of making these transitions is highly differentiated by education. Canadians who do not hold a bachelor's degree are much less likely than those who do to have a child within a cohabiting partnership and are much less likely to transition from cohabitation to marriage (Wright 2018).

Approximately one in five children aged 0 to 14 live with a single parent in 2021 and this percentage has stayed fairly steady since 2006 (Ménard et al. 2017; Statistics Canada 2022d). Although most single parent families continue to be headed by women, the proportion of single parent families with fathers has increased from 14% in 1981 to 21% in 2021 (Statistics Canada 2022d). High rates of remarriage and multi-partner fertility have also created more complex living arrangements for children who are increasingly likely to share their homes with step-parents and step- and half-siblings. Among parents with two or more children, 10.6% of men and 13.1% of women have children from more than one partner (Fostik and Le Bourdais 2020). Stepfamilies are common comprising 12% of couples with children. Cohabiting couples with children (31%) are more likely than married couples with children (7%) to be stepfamilies (Statistics Canada 2022h). Stepfamilies are also more common among same-gender couples (39%) than non-binary couples (22%), transgender couples (16%), or different-gender couples (12%) (Statistics Canada 2022h). Same-gender couples are also less likely to have children living at home than different-gender couples (15% versus 50%). Among same-gendered couples with children, however, the large majority (79%) are comprised of two women (Statistics Canada 2022h). Nonetheless, gay men with children under the age 12 living in the household are more likely than heterosexual men with children to be married, suggesting the importance of marriage (as opposed to cohabitation) for gay male parents (Waite et al. 2021).

Variation in Families by Indigenous, Visible Minority and Immigrant Status

Diversity in Fertility

Where people are born and their racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage shape their fertility and family preferences and behaviors. Average fertility rates are known to vary in Canada between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, between people who identify as being a visible minority² and those who do not, and between immigrants and those who were born in Canada. Indigenous peoples in Canada include First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, who comprise about 5% of Canada's total population (Statistics Canada 2022e). On average, Indigenous peoples have much higher fertility than non-Indigenous Canadians. For example, in the 2006 census Indigenous families were more likely to be living with three or more children (17 % vs. 9.9 %) (Statistics Canada 2012).

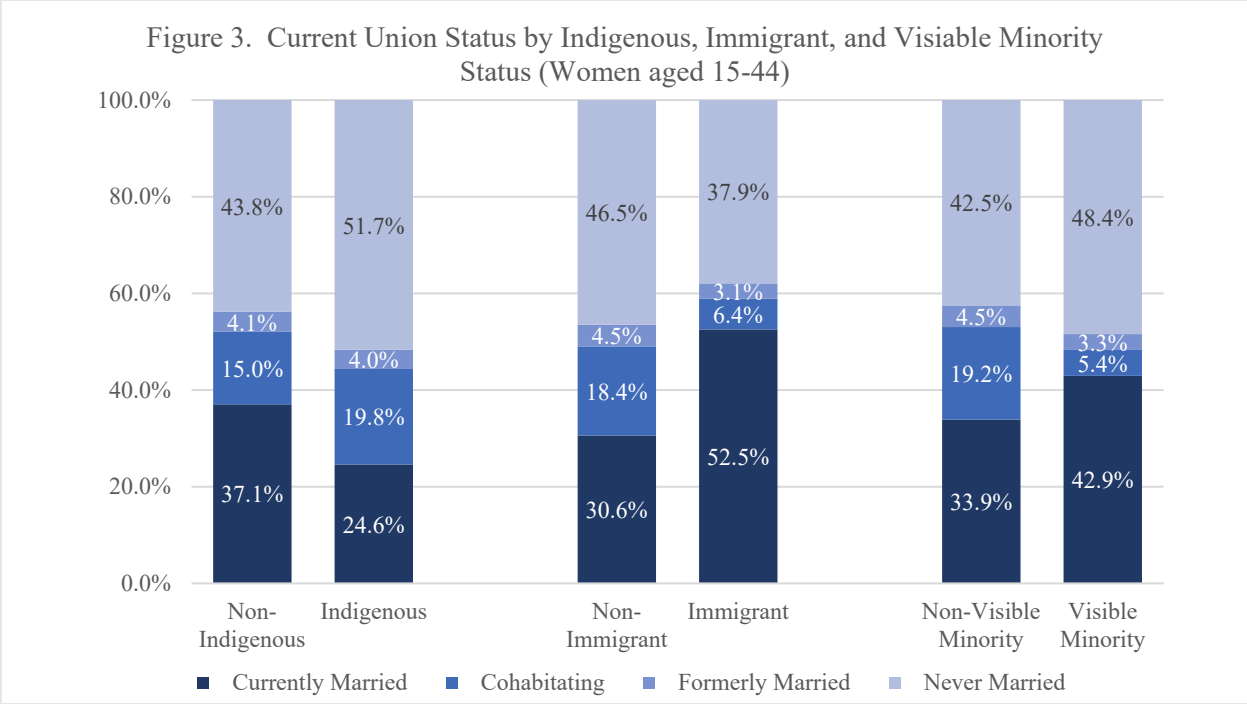
As in many countries, in Canada, fertility is higher among immigrants than among the native-born (Belanger and Gilbert 2003), however it is important to consider subgroup differences. In the 2001 Census, immigrants from the UK, Eastern Europe, and Eastern Asia had lower fertility than native-born Canadians, but those from other areas had higher fertility (Belanger and Gilbert 2003). Since a decreasing proportion of immigrants are from the UK and Europe, we may expect to see changes in the comparison between immigrant and native-born fertility. Exactly how fertility

² The Government of Canada defines visible minority as "persons, other than aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour"

will vary by immigrant status depends on where future immigrants come from. The fertility of East Asian immigrants tends to be lower than that of native-born Canadians, whereas that of immigrants from South Asia and Africa tends to be higher (Belanger and Gilbert 2003). What differences there are do not appear to be long lasting. Fertility of immigrants becomes closer to that of native-born Canadians the longer women have been in Canada and across generations. Women who immigrated before age six have essentially the same fertility as native-born women (Adsera and Ferrer 2014), and second-generation immigrant women (i.e., the daughters of immigrants) have lower or similar fertility to native-born women (Belanger and Gilbert 2003). We see similar fertility differences between visible minorities and non-visible minorities as we do by home country for immigrants and native-born Canadians. For example, looking at both the 1996 and 2001 Censuses, the TFR was lower among Korean, Chinese, and Japanese women than among non-visible minority women (Malenfant and Belanger 2006). Additionally, the decrease in the TFR from 1996 to 2001 was greater for all visible minority groups than non-visible women, except among Koreans where there was virtually no change.

Diversity in Current Union Status

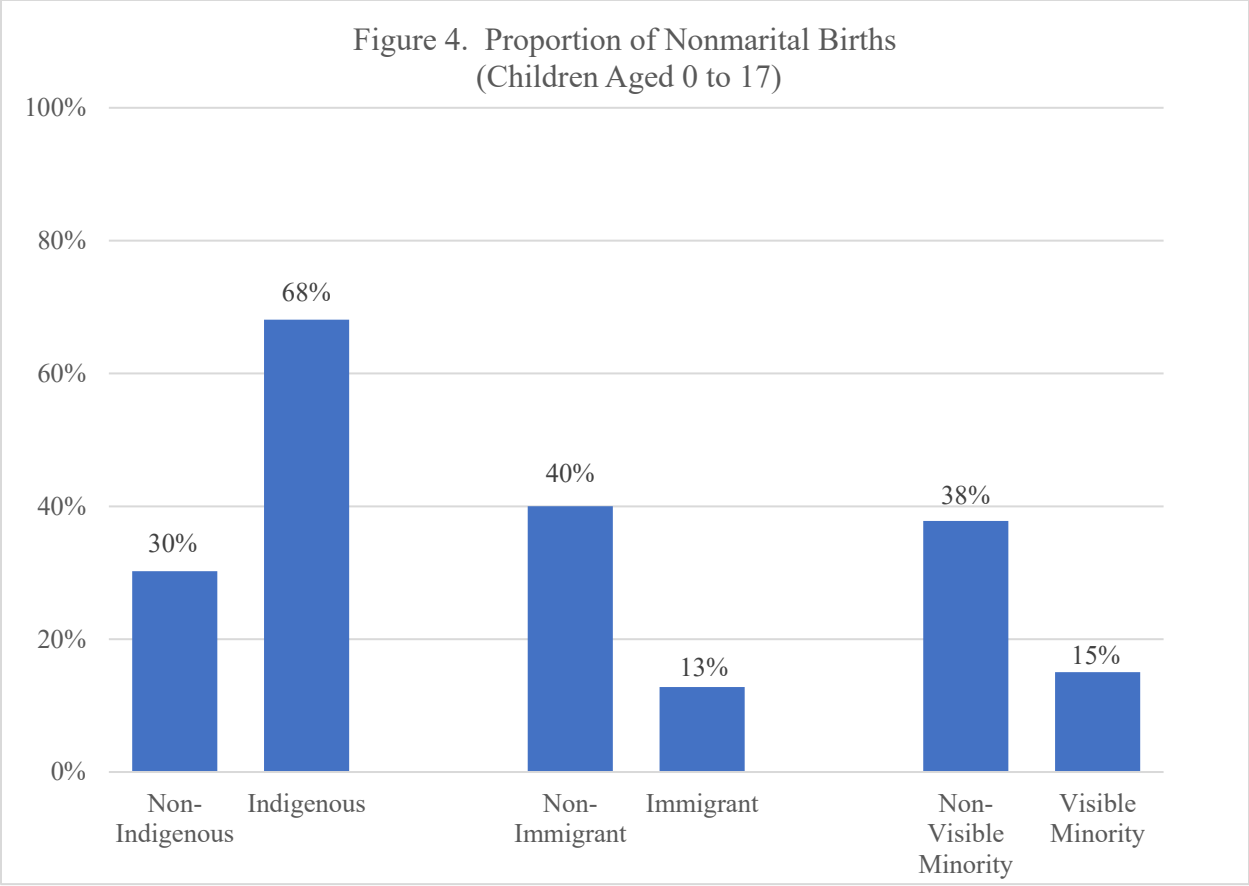
Figure 3 shows women's current union status in 2017 by Indigenous, immigrant and visible minority status. Immigrant women are more likely than any other group of women to be in a formal marriage with over half (53%) currently married (Statistics Canada 2019c). In comparison, only 31% of women born in Canada are currently married. Cohabitation is most common amongst Indigenous women with 20% of Indigenous women living with a cohabiting partner compared to 15% of non-Indigenous women. Cohabitation is very uncommon among women who identify as a visible minority (5%) or immigrant (6%). These differences in types of unions likely reflect both the younger ages of Indigenous women, the higher poverty rates among Indigenous communities, and possibly cultural differences in both the social and legal recognition of cohabiting unions among immigrants. The probability of being currently formerly married, either divorced or widowed, represent less than 4% of women aged 15 to 44 and does not vary substantially among groups. One study, however, found that older immigrants (aged 55 or older) (12%) are slightly less likely than older native-born Canadians (15%) to be currently separated or divorced (Statistics Canada 2019a). More than half of Indigenous women have never been married compared to about 44% of non-Indigenous women. Fewer immigrant women (38%), however, have never been married. These differences also likely reflect their different age structures and potentially selection of married women who migrate to Canada for the purpose of family reunification.



Source: Canadian General Social Survey 2017 (authors' calculations)

Diversity in Children's Living Arrangements

These differences in union status and fertility have implications for where children are born and raised. Our analysis of children aged 0 to 17 in the 2017 GSS data show that only 13% of children of immigrant women are born outside of marriage compared to 40% of children whose mothers were born in Canada (Figure 4). There are similarly large differences in the proportion of nonmarital births among children who are visible minorities (15%) and those who are not (38%). In contrast, more than two-third of Indigenous children (68%) were born outside of marriage compared to less than a third of non-Indigenous births (30%). For both Indigenous and non-Indigenous women most nonmarital births occur in the context of cohabitation. Figure 3 above, which shows particularly high levels of cohabitation among Indigenous women, suggests this accounts for much of these nonmarital births. Analyses of Indigenous children's living arrangements, show that although over a third of Indigenous children live in a in single parent household, more than half of Indigenous children live with two cohabiting or married parents (Statistics Canada 2022e). Indigenous children (14%) are also far more likely than non-Indigenous children (9%) to live with at least one grandparent. Most of these (78%) are multigenerational households with at least one co-residential parent.



Source: Canadian General Social Survey 2017 (authors' calculations)

Geographic Variation in Families
Diversity Across Provinces and Territories

Provinces and territories in Canada are primarily responsible for social and family programs including those pertaining to education and health. Each province and territory has its own distinctive historical, cultural, and policy context. It is, therefore, not particularly surprising that family behaviors vary remarkably across Canada's different regions (Beaujot et al. 2013; Laplante 2014). With respect to fertility, national fertility rates have been brought up by higher fertility in Alberta and Québec (Brauner-Otto 2016; Rindfuss et al. 2016). Fertility is highest in Nunavut where the TFR is twice as high as it is in much of the rest of Canada and is 30% higher than in the Prairies (Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba). Because of Nunavut's comparatively small population size, its high fertility does little to elevate national fertility rates. Since 2006, British Columbia has had the lowest fertility reaching 1.11 births per woman in 2022 (Statistics Canada 2023b). This is exceptionally low. Only countries such as Taiwan and South Korea have lower fertility now (Human Fertility Database 2023). Even the slightly higher fertility rates seen in Ontario and the Atlantic Provinces (roughly 1.2 births per woman) are among the lowest in the world today.

Scholars have attributed this provincial variation to differences in demographic composition and institutional settings. The high proportion of Indigenous women in Nunavut explains the high fertility there. The lower taxes and higher incomes, driven mainly by the oil industry, are often credited with the high fertility in Alberta (Trovato 2010). In Québec, the

generous parental leave policies and subsidized childcare programs helped to boost fertility rates, although these effects appear to be rather modest (Beaujot et al. 2013).

Québec also stands out from the rest of Canada due to its strikingly higher levels of cohabitation (both with and without children). In Québec, cohabiting unions comprise 43% of all couples, while less than a quart of couples in all other provinces are in cohabiting unions. Nearly a third (31%) of adults aged 25-64 in Québec are in a cohabiting partnership. In comparison, in the Atlantic Provinces, which has the second highest rate of cohabitation (excluding the territories) only 15% of adults are cohabiting (Statistics Canada 2019c). In fact, cohabitation rates in Québec are amongst the highest in the world, comparable to Sweden, while cohabitation in the rest of Canada resembles patterns in the U.S. (Government of Canada 2019b, 2022b; Le Bourdais and Lapierre-Adamcyk 2004).

Importantly, in Québec, raising children within cohabiting unions is increasingly becoming the norm, suggesting cohabitation is an alternative to marriage (Laplante 2014; Laplante and Fostik 2016; Statistics Canada 2022h). In other parts of Canada, despite growing popularity of cohabitation, marriage remains the most common context in which to have and raise children (Statistics Canada 2022h) and cohabitation is often considered a precursor to marriage rather than as an equally attractive alternative to marriage (Laplante 2014; Laplante and Fostik 2016). While cohabitation in Québec has been studied extensively, cohabitation is actually most common in the territory of Nunavut, where over half of couples (52%) are in cohabiting unions (Statistics Canada 2022h). Research on cohabitation, or union status more generally, in the territories is limited, however, at least partly because important family surveys in Canada such as the GSS exclude the territories. Across all provinces and territories divorce rates have been declining, but they remain highest in the Yukon and Alberta (Statistics Canada 2022c).

Diversity Across Rural and Urban Areas

Because of their older age structure, rural couples are less likely than urban couples (those living in census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations) to have at least one child living at home (Statistics Canada 2022h). However, these differences in living arrangements do not necessarily reflect differences in fertility. A recent study using data from the GSS found much higher fertility among rural than among urban Canadians. Women aged 15 to 44 living in rural areas have 0.6 more children than those living in urban areas (Clark et al. 2023). With growing concerns about Canada's low fertility rates, understanding why rural women have substantially higher fertility could help guide more effective family policies. This study also found that rural women (22.1%) are more likely than urban women (14.1%) to be in a cohabiting relationship. Similarly, rural children (41.3%) are more likely than urban children (30.1%) to be born outside of marriage. While these results were unexpected, further analysis indicates that higher levels of cohabitation and nonmarital childbirth is largely explained by the limited ethnic diversity and fewer immigrants in rural areas (Clark et al. 2023).

Implications of Family Change and Diversity

Families play a critical role in ensuring the well-being of their members by providing social, emotional, financial, and physical care and support. This care is especially important for children under the age of 15 and older adults aged 65 and above. In 2022, 29% of Canadians were actively engaged in unpaid childcare and 21% provided unpaid care for adults (Statistics Canada 2022f). For children, families are primarily responsible for their physical and mental health as well as their social and emotional development. Families also largely shape children's educational and career

trajectories, thereby playing a decisive role in the transmission of intergenerational poverty or upward social mobility. Because different family structures face different challenges, the family structures in which children are born and raised influence child wellbeing.

Data from Canada is limited, but a large body of research from the U.S. shows that children living with never-married, divorced, or cohabiting parents tend to have worse educational, health, and behavioral outcomes compared to children living in two-parent married households (Amato 2014; Brown 2004; Bzostek and Berger 2017; Panico et al. 2019; Thomson and McLanahan 2012). Partly this is because children living with two married parents are far less likely to live in poverty (McLanahan 2004). Lower household incomes, however, do not account for all these differences, suggesting that limitations on parental time and tensions within family relationships may be important drivers of inequalities. Parents who divorce, for example, usually experience strain and conflict before the union dissolution. In Canada, for example, children whose parents divorce experience significantly worse mental health outcomes, and some of these negative effects were evident before the divorce (Strohschein 2005, 2012). More research is needed to better understand the implications of Canada's changing and diverse family structures on children's wellbeing.

Families play an equally important role in supporting older adults. Spouses and adult children, in particular, provide essential care as adults age, influencing their physical health, financial well-being, happiness, risk of chronic illness, cognitive decline, experiences of social isolation, and dependence on nursing home facilities (Clark et al. 2022; Margolis et al. 2022; Margolis and Wright 2017; Patterson et al. 2020). In Canada, older adults who do not have a partner have worse physical and mental health and experience higher levels of loneliness than those with partners (Margolis et al. 2022). Other research shows that older Canadians who are married are less likely to experience social isolation and that social isolation, particularly low social participation, is associated with higher risks of mortality for both men and women in Canada (Gilmour and Ramage-Morin 2020).

Thanks in large part to increased life expectancy and smaller age gaps between partners and spouses, a growing proportion of seniors aged 65 and older live with a spouse or partner (Statistics Canada 2014). Nonetheless, the rise of "grey divorce" contributes to seniors living alone and because men are more likely to re-partner, senior women are much more likely than senior men to live alone (Statistics Canada 2022h). More research is needed to better understand how changes in family structures and the availability of kin, particularly spouses and older adult children, impact social isolation and, in turn, health, mortality, and dependence of residential assisted living for Canadian seniors.

Recommendations

In some respects, Canada has been at the forefront of collecting family data. The Canadian Census, for example, began collecting data on same-gender cohabiting couples in 2001 and married couples in 2006 when same-sex marriage became legal. More recently, in 2021, Canada conducted the first census that asked about gender diversity. Further, rounds of the Canadian GSS regularly focus on families and provide valuable detailed data on family dynamics. Yet, compared to the U.S. and most European countries, Canadian families remain understudied.

Our recommendations below highlight key suggestions that could strengthen our knowledge about Canadian families.

- 1) Additional data and analyses are required to move beyond the raw numbers and percentages to better understand the needs and challenges of same-gender and gender diverse families. Canada could also continue its tradition of gathering data on new and emerging family forms by being the first to collect nationally representative data on polyamorous unions and families.
- 2) Partnerships should be formed with Indigenous scholars and communities to better understand how their traditional family practices are changing particularly in light of increased urban residence and growing threats of climate change. National studies on families, such as the GSS, should also include the territories.
- 3) More work is needed on Canadian rural families. Over 6 million Canadians live in rural areas (about 18% of the total population), yet their experiences are overlooked in urban and national studies. Research on rural families is hindered by limited sample sizes and poorly defined measures of “rurality.” Oversampling of rural populations and enabling secure access to more detailed geographic data could substantially improve our understanding of why rural and urban families in Canada appear to be on divergent trajectories.
- 4) Develop better measures of family and family support beyond the households. For decades family researchers have noted that household residence is a poor proxy for families. This is increasingly so as the proportion of people living alone continues to grow. The Canadian “Census Family” is a particularly poor construct of families and impairs our understanding of their complexity.
- 5) Further analyses of the impact of COVID on fertility and families. Gathering and releasing family-focused data via the GSS or other national surveys is critical to accurately assess how COVID has transformed Canadian families and whether these effects will endure.
- 6) Improve infrastructure to support secure analysis of Canadian data. Canada is a global leader on the type of data gathered, but there are considerable barriers preventing researchers from accessing the data. The current infrastructure especially privileges scholars at select institutions. Consequently, our understanding of Canadian families is limited both in terms of the amount of scholarship being done and the voices that are represented. Creating a pan-Canadian partnership of family scholars, the Vanier Institute of the Family, Statistics Canada (including the Centre for Demography and the Diversity and Social Statistics Division), and family-focused NGOs and community groups would be one initial step towards increasing and improving analyses of Canadian families.

References

- Adsera, A., & Ferrer, A. (2014). Factors influencing the fertility choices of child immigrants in Canada. *Population Studies*, 68(1), 65–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2013.802007>
- Amato, P. R. (2014). The consequences of divorce for adults and children: An update. *Drustvena Istrazivanja*, 23(1), 5–24. <https://doi.org/10.5559/di.23.1.01>
- Beaujot, R., Du, C. J., & Ravanera, Z. (2013). Family policies in Quebec and the rest of Canada: Implications for fertility, child-care, women’s paid work, and child development indicators. *Canadian Public Policy*, 221–239. <https://doi.org/10.3138/CPP.39.2.221>
- Belanger, A., & Gilbert, S. (2003). *The fertility of immigrant women and their Canadian-born daughters*. in: *Report on the demographic situation in Canada. current demographic analysis*. (No. 91–209) (pp. 127–15).
- Billari, F. C., & Kohler, H.-P. (2004). Patterns of low and lowest-low fertility in Europe. *Population Studies*, 58(2), 161–176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0032472042000213695>
- Boyd, J.-P. (2017). *Polyamory in Canada: Research on an emerging family structure* (Transition). The Vanier Institute of the Family. <https://vanierinstitute.ca/polyamory-in-canada-research-on-an-emerging-family-structure/>. Accessed 7 October 2023
- Brauner-Otto, S. R. (2016). Canadian fertility trends and policies: A story of regional variation. In R. R. Rindfuss & M. K. Choe (Eds.), *Low Fertility, Institutions, and their Policies: Variations Across Industrialized Countries* (pp. 99–130). Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-32997-0_5
- Brown, S. L. (2004). Family structure and child well-being: The significance of parental cohabitation. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(2), 351–367. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2004.00025.x>
- Budiman, A. (2020). Key findings about U.S. immigrants. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/20/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>
- Bzostek, S. H., & Berger, L. M. (2017). Family structure experiences and child socioemotional development during the first nine years of life: Examining heterogeneity by family structure at birth. *Demography*, 54(2), 513–540. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-017-0563-5>
- Clark, S., Brooks, M. M., Helou, A.-M., & Rachel, M. (2023). Are rural areas holdouts in the second demographic transition? evidence From the United States and Canada. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America, New Orleans, LA.
- Clark, S., Lawrence, E., & Monnat, S. (2022). Support from adult children and parental health in rural America. *Journal of Rural Social Sciences*, 37(1). <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/jrss/vol37/iss1/2>
- Edmonston, B. (2016). Canada’s immigration trends and patterns. *Canadian Studies in Population*, 43(1–2), 78–116. <https://doi.org/10.25336/P64609>
- Fostik, A., & Le Bourdais, C. (2020). Regional variations in multiple-partner fertility in Canada. *Canadian Studies in Population*, 47(1), 73–95. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42650-020-00024-w>
- Gilmour, H., & Ramage-Morin, P. (2020). *Social isolation and mortality among Canadian seniors* (No. 82-003-X) (pp. 27–38). Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-003-x/2020003/article/00003-eng.htm>. Accessed 7 October 2023

- Hallman, S., LeVasseur, S., Bedard-Chagnon, J., & Martel, L. (2022, April 27). A portrait of Canada's growing population aged 85 and older from the 2021 census. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/98-200-X/2021004/98-200-X2021004-eng.cfm>. Accessed 26 July 2022
- Heuveline, P., & Timberlake, J. M. (2004). The role of cohabitation in family formation: The United States in comparative perspective. *Journal of marriage and the family*, 66(5), 1214–1230. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-2445.2004.00088.x>
- Human Fertility Database. (2023). Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research (Germany) and Vienna Institute of Demography (Austria). www.humanfertility.org. Accessed 10 October 2023
- Kerr, D., Moyser, M., & Beaujot, R. (2006). Marriage and cohabitation: Demographic and socioeconomic differences in Quebec and Canada. *Canadian Studies in Population [ARCHIVES]*, 33(1), 83–117. <https://doi.org/10.25336/P6ZS5H>
- Koski, A., & Clark, S. (2021). Child marriage in Canada. *Population and Development Review*, 47(1), 57–78. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padr.12369>
- Laplante, B. (2014). Normative groups: The rise of the formation of the first union through cohabitation in Quebec, a comparative approach. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 33(2), 257–285. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-013-9279-4>
- Laplante, B., & Fostik, A. L. (2016). Cohabitation and marriage in Canada. The geography, law and politics of competing views on gender equality. In Albert Esteve & Ron J Lesthaeghe (Eds.), *Cohabitation and Marriage in the Americas: Geo-Historical Legacies and New Trends* (pp. 59–100). Switzerland: Springer.
- Le Bourdais, C., & Lapierre-Adamcyk, E. L. (2004). Changes in conjugal life in Canada: Is cohabitation progressively replacing marriage? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66, 929–942.
- Lesthaeghe, R. (2020). The second demographic transition, 1986–2020: Sub-replacement fertility and rising cohabitation—a global update. *Genus*, 76(1), 10. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41118-020-00077-4>
- Lesthaeghe, R., & Neidert, L. (2006). The second demographic transition in the United States: Exception or textbook example? *Population and Development Review*, 32(4), 669–698. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2006.00146.x>
- Malenfant, E., & Belanger, A. (2006). *The fertility of visible minority women in Canada*. In: A. Bélanger (ed.). *Report on the demographic situation in Canada. Statistics Canada Cat. No. 91-209-XIE. Pp. 79–95.* (No. 91–209) (pp. 79–95). Statistics Canada.
- Margolis, R., Chai, X., Verdery, A. M., & Newmyer, L. (2022). The physical, mental, and social health of middle-aged and older adults without close kin in Canada. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 77(7), 1350–1360. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbab222>
- Margolis, R., Choi, Y., Hou, F., & Haan, M. (2019). Capturing trends in Canadian divorce in an era without vital statistics. *Demographic Research*, 41(52), 1453–1478. <https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2019.41.52>
- Margolis, R., & Wright, L. (2017). Older adults with three generations of kin: Prevalence, correlates, and transfers. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 72(6), 1067–1072. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbv158>
- McLanahan, S. (2004). Diverging destinies: How children are faring under the second demographic transition. *Demography*, 41(4), 607–627. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1515222>

- Ménard, F., Lathe, H., Martel, L., & Hallman, S. (2017, August 2). Census in brief: Portrait of children's family life in Canada in 2016. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016006/98-200-x2016006-eng.cfm>. Accessed 24 August 2021
- Panico, L., Bartley, M., Kelly, Y. J., McMunn, A., & Sacker, A. (2019). Family structure trajectories and early child health in the UK: Pathways to health. *Social Science & Medicine*, 232, 220–229. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.05.006>
- Patterson, S. E., Margolis, R., & Verdery, A. M. (2020). Family embeddedness and older adult mortality in the United States. *Population studies*, 74(3), 415–435. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2020.1817529>
- Perelli-Harris, B., & Lyons-Amos, M. (2016). Partnership patterns in the United States and across Europe: The role of education and country context. *Social Forces*, 95(1), 251–281.
- Pietromonaco, P. R., & Overall, N. C. (2022). Implications of social isolation, separation, and loss during the COVID-19 pandemic for couples' relationships. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 43, 189–194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.07.014>
- Rindfuss, R. R., Choe, M. K., & Brauner-Otto, S. R. (2016). The emergence of two distinct fertility regimes in economically advanced countries. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 35(3), 287–304. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-016-9387-z>
- Siddiqi, A., Kawachi, I., Keating, D. P., & Hertzman, C. (2013). A comparative study of population health in the United States and Canada during the neoliberal era, 1980–2008. *International Journal of Health Services*, 43(2), 193–216. <https://doi.org/10.2190/HS.43.2.b>
- Statistics Canada. (2012). *Aboriginal women in Canada: A statistical profile from the 2006 census: r2-162/2006e-pdf - government of Canada publications - canada.ca*. <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.695664/publication.html>. Accessed 14 October 2023
- Statistics Canada. (2014). *The daily — Study: Emerging trends in living arrangements and conjugal unions for current and future seniors, 1981 to 2011*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/140224/dq140224a-eng.htm>. Accessed 28 January 2022
- Statistics Canada. (2017). *The daily — Immigration and ethnocultural diversity: Key results from the 2016 Census*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/171025/dq171025b-eng.htm?indid=14428-1&indgeo=0>. Accessed 26 July 2022
- Statistics Canada. (2019a). *The daily — Family matters: Being separated or divorced and aged 55 or older*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/190612/dq190612c-eng.htm>. Accessed 28 January 2022
- Statistics Canada. (2019b). *The daily — Family matters: Being common law, married, separated or divorced in Canada*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/190501/dq190501b-eng.htm>. Accessed 28 January 2022
- Statistics Canada. (2021a). *Immigrants to Canada: Income trajectories and regions of settlement, 1987 to 2017*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2021024-eng.htm>. Accessed 25 August 2021
- Statistics Canada. (2021b). *Family and household characteristics of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Canada*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-28-0001/2018001/article/00021-eng.htm>. Accessed 15 October 2023

- Statistics Canada. (2022a). *The daily — Canada tops G7 growth despite COVID*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220209/dq220209a-eng.htm>. Accessed 9 October 2023
- Statistics Canada. (2022b). *Focus on geography series, 2021 Census - Canada*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/page.cfm?lang=E&topic=9&dguid=2021A000011124>. Accessed 8 October 2023
- Statistics Canada. (2022c). *The daily — A fifty-year look at divorces in Canada, 1970 to 2020*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220309/dq220309a-eng.htm>. Accessed 7 October 2023
- Statistics Canada. (2022d). *The daily — Home alone: More persons living solo than ever before, but roomies the fastest growing household type*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220713/dq220713a-eng.htm>. Accessed 5 June 2023
- Statistics Canada. (2022e). *The daily — Indigenous population continues to grow and is much younger than the non-Indigenous population, although the pace of growth has slowed*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220921/dq220921a-eng.htm>. Accessed 11 March 2023
- Statistics Canada. (2022f). *The daily — More than half of women provide care to children and care-dependent adults in Canada, 2022*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221108/dq221108b-eng.htm>. Accessed 7 October 2023
- Statistics Canada. (2023a). *Immigrant status and period of immigration by gender and age: Census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tb11/en/tv.action?pid=9810034702>. Accessed 8 October 2023
- Statistics Canada. (2023b). Table 13-10-0418-01 Crude birth rate, age-specific fertility rates and total fertility rate (live births). <https://doi.org/10.25318/1310041801-eng>
- Statistics Canada. (2023c). Table 13-10-0417-01 Mean age of mother at time of delivery (live births). <https://doi.org/10.25318/1310041701-eng>.
- Statistics Canada. (2023d). *To have kids or not to have kids: That is the question!* <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2023006-eng.htm>. Accessed 7 October 2023
- Statistics Canada, S. C. (2019c). *Family matters: Being married or common-law in Canada*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2019031-eng.htm>. Accessed 30 January 2022
- Statistics Canada, S. C. (2022g). *“I don’t”: Historic decline in new marriages during the first year of the pandemic*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221114/dq221114b-eng.htm>. Accessed 22 January 2023
- Statistics Canada, S. C. (2022h). *The daily — State of the union: Canada leads the G7 with nearly one-quarter of couples living common law, driven by Quebec*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220713/dq220713b-eng.htm>. Accessed 26 July 2022
- Strohschein, L. (2005). Parental divorce and child mental health trajectories. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(5), 1286–1300. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2005.00217.x>
- Strohschein, L. (2012). Parental divorce and child mental health: Accounting for predisruption differences. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 53(6), 489–502. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2012.682903>

- Thomson, E., & McLanahan, S. S. (2012). Reflections on “family structure and child well-being: Economic resources vs. parental socialization.” *Social Forces*, *91*(1), 45–53.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sos119>
- Trovato, F. (2010). Fertility in Alberta in a context of rapid economic growth, 1997-2007. *Canadian Studies in Population*, *37*(3–4), 497–524. <https://doi.org/10.25336/P6660X>
- Trovato, F. (2020). The immigrant mortality advantage in Canada, 2001 and 2011. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, *21*(2), 351–379. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-019-00655-2>
- Waite, S., Denier, N., & Pajovic, V. (2021). Who’s hitched? Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual partnering in Canada. *Canadian Studies in Population*, *48*(4), 403–439.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s42650-021-00059-7>
- Wright, L. (2018). Union transitions and fertility within first premarital cohabitations in Canada: Diverging patterns by education? *Demography*, *56*(1), 151–167.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-018-0741-0>