

Families Count

PROFILING CANADA'S FAMILIES

This major new publication from the Vanier Institute documents the dramatic changes in family life that have taken place in the course of just two or three generations. Our family lives are diverse and dynamic. It highlights the economic and care-giving challenges and opportunities facing us now, and in the years ahead, and the implications of these trends for the health and prosperity of our families, communities, and nation.

The Top line:

- Two basic resources all families require are time and money, and for a growing number of families, these basics are in short supply.
- Family and child poverty remain persistent social problems, while enormous inequalities of wealth and income continue to separate rich and poor. Particularly vulnerable are Canada's Aboriginal families, new immigrants and families that rely on a single earner. Food banks have become familiar community institutions.
- Stress and illness associated with work-life conflict are common experiences, most notably among employed mothers with pre-school age children.
- With the expansion of the global economy, higher education has become a near-prerequisite to a reasonable wage, yet many families are unable to adequately save for their children's education.
- In the wake of the baby boom years, the long-term decline in fertility rate has created, and will continue to create, enormous challenges in the caring capacity of families as parents age and fewer children, often separated by distance, are available for support.

How families are adapting to change:

- The labour market demand for workers with higher levels of education is having an enormous impact – our children are staying in school longer, leaving home later, and commonly returning to the parental home. While giving many young people a leg up, this trend has created new challenges, particularly related to the costs of raising children and financing post-secondary education
- Most women and men expect to have jobs and careers – and most know that getting a good job is not a given. Combined with the high cost of living, most families require two earners to achieve an average standard of living. Next to health considerations, finances and work-life balance have become top considerations about if and when to have a child.
- Within a generation, the availability and use of credit has fundamentally altered the ways in which families purchase goods and services, and manage household finances. Household debt is at record

levels, and savings at record lows. That picture is set against an increasing wealth inequality. Economic security is an elusive goal for many.

- For those with jobs, hours are longer and clearly that reduces available family time and ramps up the stress of providing care for children, partners and family members.
- The face of care giving is slowly changing. Men are participating more in child and elder care, but women are still doing the lion's share. A growing number of families are facing the challenges of caring for elders and/or persons with disabilities with greater distances separating caregivers from the recipients. More families are rebalancing roles and responsibilities to meet these varied needs and obligations.

Families Count contains hundreds of facts about family life in Canada, among them:

Men

- Are working longer hours per day, up to 8.8 in 2005 from 8.2 hours in 1986
- Spending less time with family, now 3.4 hours a day in 2005 down from 4.2 in 1986
- Young men more likely than young women to be living with parents, 60% living at home between the ages of 20-24; and 26% living at home between the ages of 25-29, nearly double the rate in 1981
- Still leaving most of the household work to women but spending more time on child care

Women

- Are now primary income earners in 28% of two earner couples in 07' up from 12% in 1976
- Are now primary income earners in 28% of single earner couples in 07' up from 5% in 1976
- Women in lone parent families now considerably older and better educated
- Spousal violence represents 12% of violent crimes, and women are victims in 83% of instances

New Canadians

- Foreign-born population rose 13.6% between 2001-2006, an increase 4 times greater than the growth of the Canadian born population
- Poverty rates among new Canadians rising, and now 3 times greater than among Canadian born

Aboriginal

- Median age of 27 in 2006 versus 40 among non-aboriginal Canadians
- Among off-reserve aboriginals, 3 times more likely than non-aboriginals to experience food insecurity

Seniors

- 5% of men and women between 65-74 providing over 15 hours per week of child care
- Numbers growing and will, in ten years, exceed population of Canadians under the age of 15
- Poverty rates in elderly families falling dramatically, to just 1.5% in 2007

Children

- Percentage of young Canadians (under 15) falling to half the peak during the boomer era, now just 17% of total population
- More children living in 'out-of-home' care, nearly 1% of all children, or 67,000 children in 2007
- Fewer living with married parents, now 66% in 2006 down from 81% in 1986
- Increasing numbers of kids living in blended stepfamilies – about one in two of the half million Canadian stepfamilies
- Girls more likely than boys to participate in the teenage labour market (54% to 51% in 2009)

Family Structure

- 'Married with children' families now 39% in 2006 versus 55% in 1981
- Family size stable at 3.1 people since the 1980s
- 84% of two parent families had two or more earners
- 32% of two parent families had both parents working full time in 2005

Marriage

- Older brides and grooms for first marriage – now 30.5 years of age for grooms and 28.5 for brides
- Over half of first unions are now common law for Canadians between 20-29
- 40% of first marriages end in divorce
- Twenty years after divorce, 69% of women and 82% of men are remarried
- 2006 Census was the first to report same sex marriage data – 16.5% of same sex couples were married in that Census year

Poor

- Poverty rates for families have declined, but among working age singles – still very high at
- 30-35%
- In 2007, 13 % of households were in poverty
- In March 2009, 800,000 Canadians turned to food banks

Time and Stress

- Increasing labour market participation for women, longer work hours for men and women decreases 'free' time
- 4.7 million Canadians provided care to a senior in 2006
- Canadians more likely to volunteer, but for fewer hours
- Stress peaks for those aged 35-44, 30% of whom report 'quite a lot' of stress each day

Supporting Families: What's at Stake

"What families do" is of tremendous consequence, not only in the lives of individual family members, but for the vitality and health of the communities in which we live, the safety and effectiveness of the schools in which we learn, and the productivity and success of the organizations and businesses in which we labour. It is in our interest as a nation to ensure that families have access to the supports and resources they need to carry out their vital roles, and to meet their obligations of care.

A society that supports families includes:

- Public policies and programs that support the work of families. This is a broad category. Examples at the community level include anything from a recreation program to a Neighbourhood Watch to a food co-operative. At another level, governments provide resources through measures such as income security programs, tax exemptions, and subsidies for recreation and child care.
- Employers who recognize the important contribution they can make in assisting their employees to balance the often-conflicting demands of work and family and enhance the quality of work/family life.
- Assistance to vulnerable families or vulnerable family members. This kind of targeted support includes everything from service clubs helping people with disabilities to special government income support programs. Examples include transportation or housing subsidies, clothing and food banks, support groups for those suffering from chronic illnesses, and child development and after-school programs
- Resources to strengthen the capacity of families and family members to care and provide for each other. Education and health promotion are good examples. If new parents can acquire positive parenting techniques, for instance, with the help of parent resource centres, a night school class, or an employee assistance program, it may mediate child development concerns in both the short and long term. Empowering families to prevent problems can be a cost-effective and popular form of support.

Families Count is available online: www.vifamily.ca