

2011 Census Highlights: Families, Households, and Marital Status

Proportion of common-law, same-sex, and lone-parent families increasing; married-couple families decreasing

The number of married-couple families accounted for 67 percent of all census families in Canada in 2011, down from 71 percent in 2001. The proportion of common-law families increased from 14 to 17 percent, while the share of lone-parent families rose marginally from 15.7 to 16.3 percent.

The 2011 census counted 64,575 same-sex couple families in 2011, up 42 percent from five years earlier. Of these, 21,015 were same-sex married couples and 43,560 were same-sex common-law couples. Same-sex couples accounted for 0.8 percent of all couples in 2011.

Why? Attitudes toward marriage are changing within Canada's population, and people are committing to relationships with one another outside of the traditional marriage framework. With respect to same-sex couples, an increasing awareness and acceptance of same-sex relationships among the broader Canadian population, and the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2005, has coincided with a period of rapid growth in these the number of people reporting these types of relationships. *Note however, that to some degree this increase is due simply to a greater acceptance of same-sex marriages and individuals feeling more comfortable indicating this family type on their Census forms.*

Proportion of kids living at home finally levels-off

The tendency among young adults (those between the ages of 20 and 29) to live with their parents appears to have levelled off. Of the 4,318,400 young adults in this age group, 42 percent lived in the parental home in 2011. This proportion was relatively unchanged from 2006, although it was well above the share of 32 percent in 1991 and 27 percent in 1981.

Why? Kids remain at home or return to the parental home due to a great diversity of factors, from financial reasons to full refrigerators and flat screen tvs. The longer-term growth in the propensity to remain in the familial home (or return to it) has largely driven by a growing proportion of kids pursuing post-secondary education. This fact can also be linked to postponement of family formation, lower fertility rates, and a smaller proportion of couples living together with children.

People increasingly living alone and without children

The number of one-person households increased by ten percent between 2006 and 2011 to just over 3,673,300, or 28 percent of all households. For the first time, the 2006 Census reported that there were more households with couples living without children (29.0 percent) than those with children (28.5 percent). By 2011 this gap widened with 29.5 percent of households being couples without children and 26.5 percent couples with children.

Why? With respect to living alone, the increasingly equal representation of males and females in the workforce may be making it financially feasible for a larger share of the population of working-age to live on their own and not as part of couple. The increasing proportion of couple households

without children may be due to a combination of declining overall fertility rates and a narrower distribution of children across all households.

The size of the Canadian family is declining

Canadian families have become smaller over time. The average number of children per family decreased from 2.7 in 1961 to 1.9 in 2011. Over the same period, the average number of people per family declined from 3.9 to 2.9.

Why? Fertility rates have been declining since the mid-1960s, as people have been generally having fewer kids. This trend has in large part been driven by increasing post-secondary and labour force participation for the female population. The most significant changes were seen in through the 1960s and 1970s, with more recent changes in fertility rates being much more moderate than what they were historically.

Multiple-family households prominent in some fast-growing communities

The share of multiple-family households has increased marginally since 2001 and is most prevalent in fast-growing municipalities such as Surrey.

Why? The prominence of multiple-family households is higher in communities with a higher proportion of the immigrant population, with attitudes towards communal living in countries that account for a high proportion of Canada's immigrants (India, China) differing from those in Canada's native-born population.

It is interesting to note that these households may not want to remain as multiple-family households forever, as the second generation of kids may move choose to move into single family households of their own.

Seniors increasingly living as couples

Of the nearly five million seniors aged 65 and over in 2011, most (92 percent) lived in private households, including 56 percent who were couples, 25 percent who lived alone and 11 percent who had other arrangements (such as living with relatives). The remaining eight percent lived in collective accommodation such as nursing homes or residences for senior citizens.

A decade earlier, in 2001, fewer seniors were living as part of a couple (54 percent) while more were living alone (28 percent). Living alone for this segment of the population declined primarily for senior women, with the largest decrease in share among women aged 80 to 84. Within this age group, 40 percent of women lived alone in 2011, down from 46 percent in 2001.

Why? More seniors are living together due to increasing disability-free life expectancies, and the continued convergence of male and female life expectancies.

To the extent that trends in life expectancies continue in the coming years, we should expect a greater proportion of the older segment of the population to remain in private accommodation later into life, with a growing proportion of them living as couples as the gap between male and female life expectancies continues to narrow.