

Study: Living arrangements of children in Canada, 1901 to 2011

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Author: Bohnert, Nora; Milan, Anne & Lathe, Heather
Source: Statistics Canada
Format: Report
Publication Date: 29 Apr 2014

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Summary:

Between 1901 and 2011, the family circumstances and living arrangements of Canadian children changed in many ways, according to historical information from the censuses of population.

At the same time, the Canadian families of the past had a degree of diversity that sometimes is reflected in the living arrangements of today's families, even if the context was largely different.

In 1931, for example, 12% of children lived in lone-parent families. Most of these children lived with a widowed lone parent, meaning that a relatively large share of children at that time had experienced the death of a parent.

In contrast, the years 1946 to 1965 (the baby boom) were characterized by higher fertility rates and a larger share of children living in married-couple families. In 1961, 6% of children lived in lone-parent families, the lowest proportion observed over the period 1931 to 2011.

In the post baby-boom years, fertility and family size declined, and the proportion of children living in lone-parent families rose from 6% in 1961 to 15% in 1991. Unlike earlier decades, separation or divorce rather than being widowed, were the main reasons for lone parenthood.

In the 21st century, the proportion of children living with lone parents continued to increase, rising to 22% in 2011. Another 14% of children lived with common-law parents and 65% lived with married parents.

The 2011 Census was also the first to provide information about stepfamilies in Canada. Stepfamilies are defined as couple families with children in which at least one child is the biological or adopted child of only one married spouse or common-law partner.

In 2011, 11% of all Canadian children aged 24 and under, or about 1 million children, were in stepfamilies.

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