

Employment patterns of families with children, 1976 to 2014 ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Full report in PDF ^[2]

Attachment	Size
 Employment patterns of families with children, 1976 to 2014-CA.pdf ^[3]	640.64 KB

Introduction

Over the past few decades, women's labour force participation has been increasing and so has men's involvement in child care. The increase in labour market participation of women has been mainly driven by changes in cultural attitudes, improved female education levels and general labour market conditions. However, other factors such as flexibility of work arrangements (for example, part-time work) and family support (child care subsidies, child benefits and paid parental leave) have also contributed to changes in the labour force participation of women.

The increased labour force participation of women has led to changes in the employment structure of families, particularly during the 1980s and 1990s. For example, in Canada, the percentage of dual-earner families (with children under 16) rose significantly between 1976 and 1997. Over the same period, the percentage of lone-parent families doubled, and the proportion of families in which the wife was the sole earner grew. These changes have contributed to a steep decline in the percentage of families in which the husband was the sole earner.

These changes in the structure of family employment, especially the increase in dual-earner couples and lone parents, have had a number of consequences. For example, parents face greater challenges balancing work and family responsibilities, and, in order to meet these challenges, some decide to pay for child care and other household services while others alter their work arrangements-sometimes by having one parent working and another staying at home.

The main objective of this article is to provide an update of the employment patterns of families with children based on Labour Force Survey (LFS) data over the period from 1976 to 2014 (see Data sources, methods and definitions). This paper also highlights provincial differences, and provides information on the working patterns of lone parents with children. In this paper, families with children are defined as economic families with at least one child under the age of 16 living with one parent or both parents. In 2014, these families represented 19% of all family units in Canada, including 15% couples and 4% lone parents (Table 1). In 1976, the proportion of family units with children aged less than 16 amounted to 31% (28% couples and 3% lone parents).

The first part of this article examines changes in the employment structure of families with children between 1976 and 2014. The full-time / part-time working patterns of dual-earner couples are also examined for the period. In addition, this paper examines differences in the profiles of stay-at-home parents, single-earner and dual-earner couples, and lone parents. Readers should note, however, that this study does not attempt to explain factors contributing to changes in household labour supply over time or those associated with the distribution of paid work among couples or the effects of young children on female labour supply. Rather, it provides an overview of some historical and recent trends on the employment structure of Canadian families, and provides additional information on the characteristics of working families. Work refers to paid work throughout this paper.

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