

Reference Guide

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Census year, 2011

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The following symbols are used in Statistics Canada publications:

.	not available for any reference period
..	not available for a specific reference period
...	not applicable
0	true zero or a value rounded to zero
0 ^s	value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
^p	preliminary
^r	revised
x	suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the <i>Statistics Act</i>
^E	use with caution
^F	too unreliable to be published
*	significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

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Definitions and concepts

The Families topic includes concepts such as [marital status](#), family structure and living arrangements, that is, whether individuals live alone or with other related or unrelated persons. Family-related characteristics and concepts can apply to families, individuals (those in families or not), or households. Detailed definitions may be found in the *2011 Census Dictionary*, Catalogue no. 98-301-X.

Two definitions of families exist, and they complement each other: [census family](#) and [economic family](#). The census family is the narrower concept, defined by couples living together, with or without children, and lone parents living with their children. The economic family is broader, and refers to two or more persons living together who are related to each other by blood, marriage, common-law union, adoption or a foster relationship. All people in a census family are part of one economic family. If there are additional relatives living with them, those people are also in the economic family. The additional relatives, if two or more, may also be in a census family among themselves, provided they are a couple with or without children or a lone parent with children.

Tabulations of families are based on either the [census family structure](#) or [economic family structure](#). Tabulations of family characteristics for individuals use the concepts of [census family status](#), [economic family status](#), or [household living arrangements](#) (an extension of census family status).

As of 2001, common-law couple families could be either opposite-sex or same-sex. As of 2006, married couple families could be either opposite-sex or same-sex.

As of 2011, couple families with children could be either intact families or stepfamilies. In an **intact family**, all children are the biological and/or adopted children of both married spouses or of both common-law partners. In a **stepfamily**, the children include at least one biological or adopted child of only one married spouse or common-law partner whose birth or adoption preceded the current relationship. Stepfamilies may also be categorized as **simple stepfamilies**, in which all children are biological or adopted children of one and only one married spouse or common-law partner whose birth or adoption preceded the current relationship, or **complex stepfamilies**, comprised of three possibilities:

- (1) families with child(ren) from one married spouse or common-law partner **and** at least one other biological or adopted child of the couple; or
- (2) families with child(ren) from each married spouse or common-law partner **and** no other children; or
- (3) families with child(ren) from each married spouse or common-law partner **and** at least one other biological or adopted child of the couple.

For more information on the new standards related to stepfamilies, see Stepfamily status of couple family with children:

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/concepts/definitions/family-famille-01-eng.htm>

and Relationship structure of stepfamily:

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/concepts/definitions/family-famille-02-eng.htm>.

Note that parent-child relationships, key to identifying the family status and family structure, are not restricted to sons and daughters below a certain age unless an age limit is explicitly stated. When the family status or structure includes an age limit for children, such as children aged 24 and under, the sons and daughters aged 25 and over become persons not in census families and other relatives in economic families. This in turn affects the number of persons in families and possibly, the number of families. If, however, families are categorized as (1) those with at least one child aged 24 and under or (2) families without children as well as all children aged 25 and over, as is the case in the 2011 Census Analytical Document *Portrait of Families and Living Arrangements in Canada*, Catalogue no. 98-312-X, then the overall number of families will remain the same.

Careful consideration must be accorded to the concept of 'children.' In general, the term 'children' may be used in various analytical products to refer to a dependent population, such as children aged 14 and under or aged 24 and under. Specific definitions of 'children' do exist, however, and the particular usage should be clear from the context of the analysis. For example, 'children' in census families refer to blood, step- or adopted sons and daughters (regardless of age) who are living in the same dwelling as their parent(s), as well as to grandchildren in households where there are no parents present. Sons and daughters who are living with their married spouse or common-law partner, or with one or more of their own sons and/or daughters, are not considered to be members of the census family of their parent(s), even if they are living in the same dwelling. In addition, sons and daughters who do not live in the same dwelling as their parent(s) are not considered members of the census family of their parent(s). In the 2011 Census, 99.2% of the population aged 14 and under living in private households were 'children' in census families, while the remaining 0.8% lived in other arrangements.

Concepts such as **'foster children,'** who are considered as 'other relatives' in an economic family, comprise part of the population in private households, but are not considered as 'children' in census families.

In addition, the term 'children' may be used in other contexts, such as young adults who live in the parental home, which is based on the economic family status definition of child, i.e., the son or daughter of the economic family reference person. These adult children may be in the parental home accompanied by a married spouse or common-law partner.

One family-related concept at the household level is [household type](#).

Classifications

The relationship between households, economic families and census families is illustrated in [Figure 18: Economic and census family membership and family status](#) from the *2011 Census Dictionary*, Catalogue no. 98-301-X.

Census questions

Family data for private households are obtained from the combination of questions 2 (sex), 3 (date of birth), 4 (marital status), 5 (common-law status) and 6 (relationship to Person 1). The questions appear on page 4 of the [2A questionnaire](#).

The responses to all these questions are processed together to ensure consistency. In addition, the demographic characteristics of all persons living in the same household are processed together, to ensure consistent relationships between household members.

One of the most significant content changes to Question 6: Relationship to Person 1 for the 2011 Census has been the addition of new response categories that allow for data to be collected on step-children. These three new response categories are: Son or daughter of both Persons 1 and 2; Son or daughter of Person 1 only; and Son or daughter of Person 2 only. These three response categories replace the single category from 2006 for Son or daughter of Person 1.

Separate response categories were also added in 2011 for same-sex married spouses and for foster children.

Historical comparability

Significant changes were made to the definition of a census family in the 2001 Census, particularly for children in census families. Refer to [More information on Census family](#) for the details. (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/english/census01/Products/Reference/dict/fam003.htm>)

These changes resulted in 1.4% more census families in 2001, including 9.6% more lone-parent families, than would have been the case if the definitions had remained constant. Therefore, they could affect the analysis of trends covering the 1996 to 2001 period. Historical comparisons for families, particularly for lone-parent families, must be interpreted with caution as a result of these conceptual changes.

For further details on the historical comparability of all Families concepts and variables, see the *2011 Census Dictionary*, Catalogue no. 98-301-X.

Data quality

For more information on the data quality verification in place for the 2011 Census, see the *Overview of the Census*, Catalogue no. 98-302-X.

Imputation for non-response and inconsistent responses

During automated data processing, the quality of the data on age, sex, marital status and family relationships is maximized by checking the logical consistency of the different characteristics. Then, any inconsistent or missing responses are replaced with acceptable values. This is done by identifying households in the same geographical area that have similar, but complete and consistent characteristics and then copying their values to fill in the missing or erroneous data among the 'failed edit' households.

Some changes were made to the edit and imputation methods for the 2011 Census regarding demographic and family characteristics, due to the introduction of the new 'child' categories. Information on edit and imputation is available in *Age, Sex, Marital Status and Common-law Status: 2001 Census Technical Report*, Catalogue no. 92-380-X. The [Appendix B](#) of the report lists the edit rules that apply to demographic and family characteristics. The same edit rules apply to 2006 and 2011 with only minor updates.

In the 2011 Census, the imputation rates of the variables 'age' and 'sex' were 1.4% and 1.0% respectively, without taking into account total non-response households. The age confirmation question in the Internet version of the questionnaire has a positive impact on data quality.

Imputation was applied to 2.4% of all persons for Question 6, Relationship to Person 1. Two-thirds of these imputed values were due to inconsistent reported relationships compared to the age, sex, or marital status of the person or to the relationships reported for other members in the household. This does not reflect all inconsistencies however; the age, sex, legal marital status or common-law status was at times imputed instead of the relationship to Person 1.

Total non-response by households to the census questionnaire in 2011 was 2.6%. Imputation was carried out for these non-responses as well. Total imputation rates for age, sex and relationship to Person 1 were therefore between 3.6% and 5.0%.

Imputation rates for legal marital status and common-law status tend to be higher, but these include invalid or missing responses for persons aged 14 and under, for whom values of 'never married' and 'not in a common-law relationship' are uniformly applied. Also, non-response to the common-law question tends to be high because it overlaps conceptually with the legal marital status question, which precedes it.

Comparison with other data sources

As with every census, the quality of the 2011 Census information released in May 2012 (age and sex) and September 2012 (families, households and marital status) was evaluated internally prior to publication. The data were compared, to the extent possible, with alternative data sources. In the case of data by age, sex and legal marital status, the main source for comparison was the post-censal estimates produced by Demography Division, which are based on administrative records of births, deaths, migration and marriage. For data on families and households, the main sources of comparison were the Survey of Household Spending, the General Social Survey (family cycle), and the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics.

Note to readers

The 2011 Census of Population introduced for the first time a specific response on household relationships to determine the number of same-sex married couples. Analysis of the data on same-sex married couples has shown that there may be an overestimation of this family type. In total, there were 64,575 same-sex couples in Canada in 2011, of which 21,015 were married. The range of overestimation of same-sex married couples at the national level is between 0 and 4,500. These data should be used with caution. This does not affect the quality of other data from this release.

Data and other products

Marital status data, as well as age and sex data, are available for the total population, including persons in both institutional and non-institutional collective dwellings. All children aged 14 and under are treated as never legally married; therefore, data on marital status are sometimes shown only for the adult population (15 years and over).

Family characteristics are shown for the population in private households. Consequently, any tables which contain at least one family characteristic will be restricted to private households regardless of whether some variables, such as marital status, age and sex, are available for the total population.

For the first time since 1991, 2011 family data will be disseminated based on 100% census data, instead of a sample (20%) as was done from 1996 to 2006.

For information and access to 2011 Census data, please refer to the [2011 Census](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/index-eng.cfm) web module (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/index-eng.cfm>).

For information and access to 2006 Census data, please refer to the [2006 Census](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/index-eng.cfm) web module (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/index-eng.cfm>).