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CANADA'S LONE-PARENT FAMILIES

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1981 Census of Canada

CANADA'S LONE-PARENT FAMILIES

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1981 Census of Canada, it was reported that close to 87% of all persons in private households in Canada were living in census families.

As defined in the Canadian census since 1941, a census family refers to a husband-wife family, that is, a husband and a wife (with or without never-married children regardless of age), or to a lone-parent family, that is, a lone parent of any legal marital status with one or more children who have never married, regardless of age, living in the same dwelling. (See Notes section for treatment of common-law situations.)

Canadian census statistics are also prepared according to the economic family concept which "...refers to a group of two or more persons who live in the same dwelling and are related to each other by blood, marriage or adoption." (See Notes section for the relationship with census families.)

The general review of Canada's lone-parent families presented here is based mainly on statistics prepared according to the census family concept, except for one section of the part on family income, where a summary treatment of the incidence of low income is based on data for economic families.

This report opens with a brief overview of some of the main growth trends in lone-parent families over the 50 years from 1931 to 1981. The importance of the long-term marital status, sex and age (that is, demographic) changes in this country's lone parents are described and explained. The distribution of lone-parent families by province in 1981 is

displayed. Recent decreases in the family population relative to the total population, and the way this is reflected in the husband-wife and lone-parent family populations of parents and children are noted and examined. Some of the basic household living arrangement, income and housing characteristics of lone-parent families as reported in the most recent census statistics are highlighted. In conclusion, the implications of these changes, and characteristics of Canada's lone-parent families are briefly noted. Finally, a Notes section gives some additional information on the concepts used.

MAIN TRENDS IN THE GROWTH OF HUSBAND-WIFE AND LONE-PARENT FAMILIES, 1931-1981

There were more husband-wife and lone-parent families reported in Canada's 1981 Census than ever before during the preceding 50-year period. From 1931 to 1981, there was a consistent increase in the number of all families, husband-wife families, and lone-parent families, with only one exception (see Table 1).

On the other hand, over the same period, the percentages of husband-wife and lone-parent families followed a somewhat different pattern of change: from 1931 to 1966, husband-wife families increased and lone-parent families decreased. This was partly due to improvements in life expectancy, which bettered the chances of mothers surviving childbirth, and of parents surviving together until the "empty-nest" stage. Also, after the Second World War, for a

Table 1

Husband-wife and Lone-parent Families, Number and Percentage of Total Families, Canada, 1931-1981

		Total families	Husband- wife families	Lone-parent families
1931	No.	2,149,048	1,857,105	291,943
	%	100.0	86.4	13.6
1941	No.	2,509,664	2,202,707	306,957
	%	100.0	87.8	12.2
1951	No.	3,287,384	2,961,685	325,699
	%	100.0	90.1	9.9
1956	No.	3,711,500	3,393,061	318,439
	%	100.0	91.4	8.6
1961	No.	4,147,444	3,800,026	347,418
	%	100.0	91.6	8.4
1966	No.	4,526,266	4,154,381	371,885
	%	100.0	91.8	8.2
1971	No.	5,070,680	4,591,940	478,740
	%	100.0	90.6	9.4
1976	No.	5,727,895	5,168,560	559,335
	%	100.0	90.2	9.8
1981	No.	6,324,975	5,610,970	714,010
	%	100.0	88.7	11.3

Source: 1931-1981 Censuses of Canada.

variety of social, economic and cultural reasons, Canadians were marrying more frequently and at younger ages than before, and they were having more children sooner after marriage than their parents did. In addition, although they were divorcing more, they were remarrying more.

In other words, from 1931 to 1966, the growth rate of husband-wife families was more pronounced than that of lone-parent families. However, since 1966, despite consistent and considerable additions to the number of all families, lone-parent families experienced a higher growth rate (as measured in terms of percentage increase) than husband-wife families. From 1966 to 1971, for the first time since 1931, the percentage increase in lone-parent families exceeded that for husband-wife families. This higher growth rate continued to accelerate after 1971. Over the decade 1971-1981, the increase of over 49% in lone-parent families was more than twice the 22% increase in husband-wife families. The larger part of this pronounced increase in lone-parent families occurred during 1976-1981.

In 1981, therefore, husband-wife families at well over 5.6 million constituted 88.7% of Canada's total families, and lone-parent families at 714,010 rose to a high of 11.3%. The latter percentage is still below the corresponding figures for lone-parent families in 1931 and 1941. However, a rough forecast based on the 1971-1981 rate of increase of lone-parent families that assumes continuation of current demographic and social trends suggests that by 1986 we may reach (perhaps even surpass) the 1931 and 1941 levels of lone-parent families at somewhere between 12% and 14%.

Recent Decreases in the Family Population Relative to the Total Population and How this Is Reflected in the Husband-wife and Lone-parent Family Populations of Parents and Children

As might be expected from the trends described so far, the total family population (see Notes section for definition) increased over the 1931 to 1981 period. However, relative to the total population in private households in Canada, the family population increased only from 1931 to 1966, after which it showed a decrease at each census date to 1981.

The family population as a percentage of the total population increased in all census years from 1951 to 1966 due to the post-Second World War increases in marriages and births, and to all the other social, economic and demographic factors that led to the growth in the number of all families. The subsequent drop in the relative size of the family population after 1966 was primarily the outcome of the decline in the child population because of a marked reduction in fertility, i.e. in births. The latter became evident in Canada in the late 1950s, and the drop in births to Canadian women continued to accelerate from then on. Also a factor in the declining family population was the growth in the non-family population in the mid-1950s and subsequent decades, undoubtedly aided by the increase in separation and divorce during the last half of the 1960s, especially after the passing of Canada's more liberal Divorce Law in 1968. Then, during the 1970s, further postponement of marriage and of childbearing also led to the decline in the family population as a percentage of the total population.

Declines in the child population, the delays in marriage and childbearing, increases in the non-family population -- all these trends gathered momentum during the 1970s.

From 1971 to 1981, the number of persons living in all families in Canadian private households increased, but the lone-parent family population increased at a faster rate than the husband-wife family population. Therefore, the population in husband-wife families declined as a percentage of all family persons in private households in Canada, and the lone-parent family population increased relative to all Canadians living in families.

In 1981, at the all-Canada level, the population of lone parents and their children, at a little under 2 million, constituted, at 9.4%, a higher proportion of Canada's total family population than in 1976 and 1971. In the case of the population in husband-wife families, the reverse was true: the percentage declined from an estimated 92.8% of the total family population in 1971, to 91.9% in 1976, and dropped further to 90.6% in 1981. Similar trends for the same census years were reported in all provinces and territories.

A noteworthy feature of these trends is the fact that the changes in the husband-wife family population were the outcome of two simultaneous but opposing movements: a pronounced and consistent increase in the number and proportion of spouses and parents on the one hand, and a marked decrease in the number and proportion of children on the other hand. In sharp contrast, there were pronounced increases in the numbers and percentages of parents and children in lone-parent families, over the decade 1971-1981.

HOW CANADA'S LONE-PARENT FAMILIES ARE DISTRIBUTED BY PROVINCE

The considerable increase in total lone-parent families over 1976-1981 for Canada as a whole was the result of the combined increases in such families in all provinces and territories. High percentage increase rates over 1976-1981 were reflected in higher proportions of lone-parent families in 1981 as compared with 1976, everywhere in Canada (see Chart 1).

In all provinces and territories, the growth rate of lone-parent families over the most recent five-year intercensal period substantially exceeded that for husband-wife families. At the Canada level, and in some provinces, the growth rates were somewhat higher for male lone-parent than for female lone-parent families (see Table 2).

Chart 1

Lone-parent Families as a Percentage of All Families, Canada, Provinces and Territories, 1976 and 1981

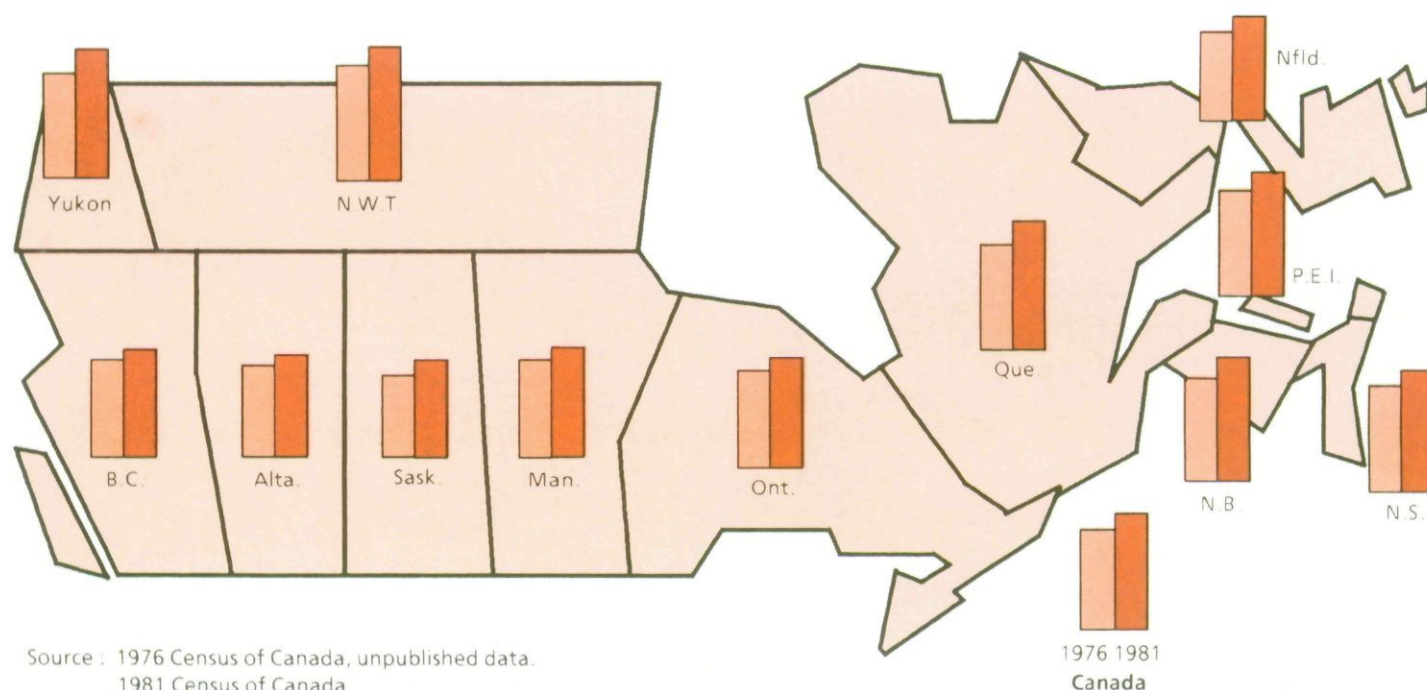


Table 2

Numerical and Percentage Change, 1976-1981, Total, Husband-wife and Male and Female Lone-parent Families, Canada, Provinces and Territories

	1976	1981	Numerical change	Percentage change
Canada				
Total families	5,727,895	6,324,975	597,080	10.4
Husband-wife	5,168,560	5,610,970	442,410	8.6
Lone-parent	559,330	714,005	154,675	27.6
Male lone-parent	94,990	124,180	29,190	30.7
Female lone-parent	464,340	589,830	125,490	27.0
Newfoundland				
Total families	124,655	135,150	10,495	8.4
Husband-wife	113,855	121,670	7,815	6.9
Lone-parent	10,800	13,480	2,680	24.8
Male lone-parent	2,195	2,720	525	23.9
Female lone-parent	8,600	10,760	2,160	25.1
Prince Edward Island				
Total families	27,560	30,220	2,660	9.6
Husband-wife	24,685	26,560	1,875	7.6
Lone-parent	2,875	3,660	785	27.3
Male lone-parent	505	610	105	20.8
Female lone-parent	2,375	3,050	675	28.4
Nova Scotia				
Total families	200,480	216,200	15,720	7.8
Husband-wife	179,010	190,045	11,035	6.2
Lone-parent	21,470	26,155	4,685	21.8
Male lone-parent	3,875	4,590	715	18.4
Female lone-parent	17,595	21,570	3,975	22.6
New Brunswick				
Total families	162,030	176,565	14,535	9.0
Husband-wife	145,875	155,090	9,215	6.3
Lone-parent	16,160	21,480	5,320	32.9
Male lone-parent	3,005	3,740	735	24.5
Female lone-parent	13,150	17,730	4,580	34.8
Quebec				
Total families	1,540,400	1,671,540	131,140	8.5
Husband-wife	1,381,505	1,463,100	81,595	5.9
Lone-parent	158,900	208,430	49,530	31.2
Male lone-parent	26,330	35,115	8,785	33.4
Female lone-parent	132,565	173,315	40,750	30.7
Ontario				
Total families	2,104,545	2,278,975	174,430	8.3
Husband-wife	1,902,090	2,028,690	126,600	6.7
Lone-parent	202,450	250,285	47,835	23.6
Male lone-parent	34,000	43,075	9,075	26.7
Female lone-parent	168,450	207,210	38,760	23.0

Table 2

Numerical and Percentage Change, 1976-1981, Total, Husband-wife and Male and Female Lone-parent Families, Canada, Provinces and Territories - Concluded

	1976	1981	Numerical change	Percentage change
Manitoba				
Total families	251,975	262,185	10,210	4.0
Husband-wife	227,240	232,920	5,680	2.5
Lone-parent	24,735	29,270	4,535	18.3
Male lone-parent	4,070	5,105	1,035	25.4
Female lone-parent	20,665	24,170	3,505	17.0
Saskatchewan				
Total families	225,685	245,670	19,985	8.9
Husband-wife	206,585	222,025	15,440	7.5
Lone-parent	19,105	23,645	4,540	23.8
Male lone-parent	3,550	4,290	740	20.8
Female lone-parent	15,550	19,350	3,800	24.4
Alberta				
Total families	448,770	565,635	116,865	26.0
Husband-wife	407,570	508,715	101,145	24.8
Lone-parent	41,200	56,920	15,720	38.2
Male lone-parent	6,645	10,225	3,580	53.9
Female lone-parent	34,555	46,690	12,135	35.1
British Columbia				
Total families	628,445	727,675	99,230	15.8
Husband-wife	568,250	648,965	80,715	14.2
Lone-parent	60,200	78,715	18,515	30.8
Male lone-parent	10,415	14,150	3,735	35.9
Female lone-parent	49,785	64,560	14,775	29.7
Yukon				
Total families	4,930	5,675	745	15.1
Husband-wife	4,430	4,970	540	12.2
Lone-parent	500	705	205	41.0
Male lone-parent	130	185	55	42.3
Female lone-parent	370	520	150	40.5
Northwest Territories				
Total families	8,420	9,480	1,060	12.6
Husband-wife	7,465	8,220	755	10.1
Lone-parent	955	1,265	310	32.5
Male lone-parent	270	360	90	33.3
Female lone-parent	685	900	215	31.4

Source: 1976 Census of Canada, unpublished data.
1981 Census of Canada.

These provincial growth rates in lone-parent families reflect not only differences in the age composition of provincial populations, and differing regional and provincial patterns of marriage, separation, divorce, remarriage, longevity, etc., but also to a certain undetermined degree, recent internal migration patterns. That is to say, lone-parent families, or separated and divorced persons may have moved from less "well-off" regions, to seek work and make a living in more "prosperous" provinces (as for example, those who in recent years migrated from the Atlantic region to Alberta and British Columbia) and thus may have contributed in some measure to the lower rates of separation, divorce and lone parenthood in their provinces of origin, and to the higher rates in their provinces of destination.

In 1981, the largest concentrations of lone-parent families were to be found, of course, in the most populous provinces, that is, in Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta, in that order. It is also noteworthy that since the late 1960s these provinces have reported and continue to experience the highest divorce rates as compared, for example, with Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Saskatchewan. In the Atlantic region, Nova Scotia has been an exception in recent years, with a relatively high divorce rate, and a lower proportion of persons living in families as compared with Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick.

HOW THE MARITAL STATUS, SEX AND AGE OF CANADA'S LONE PARENTS HAVE CHANGED

Importance of Divorce Increasing

In the earlier part of this century, when traditional marriage vows were exchanged and Canadians promised to stay together, "...in sickness and in health...", and "...till death do us part...", this is actually what happened!

In 1931, approximately 70% to 75% of lone-parent families were those with a widowed parent. In 1941, about 73% of all lone parents reported their marital status as widowed because of the additional effects of mortality associated with the Second World War.

Continuing improvements in life expectancy of Canadians brought about a decline in the proportion of widowed lone parents by more than half that in 1951, so that in 1981 they constituted just slightly less than one-third of total lone parents (see Chart 2).

Over the same 30-year period, there were increases in the percentages of lone parents who reported they were divorced and never married, while the percentage of those who said that they were separated remained fairly stable.

The increase in the divorced was particularly sharp after 1966, since Canada's new, more liberal Divorce Act passed in 1968 permitted easier and faster divorce for petitioners (see Chart 3).

However, despite the increased frequency of separation, divorce and remarriage, family re-formation does not invariably follow family dissolution. This is because separation preceding divorce (especially if used as grounds for divorce) may be lengthy. Divorce may not be

followed immediately by remarriage. Furthermore, not all of those divorcing eventually remarry. The probability of remarriage varies with the age, sex, and presence and number of dependent children living with a divorced parent. (These are some of the reasons why lone mothers who usually obtain custody of children remarry less quickly and less frequently than their divorced spouses.)

Therefore, separation and divorce have contributed substantially to the recent marked growth of lone-parent families, especially those in the care of lone mothers.

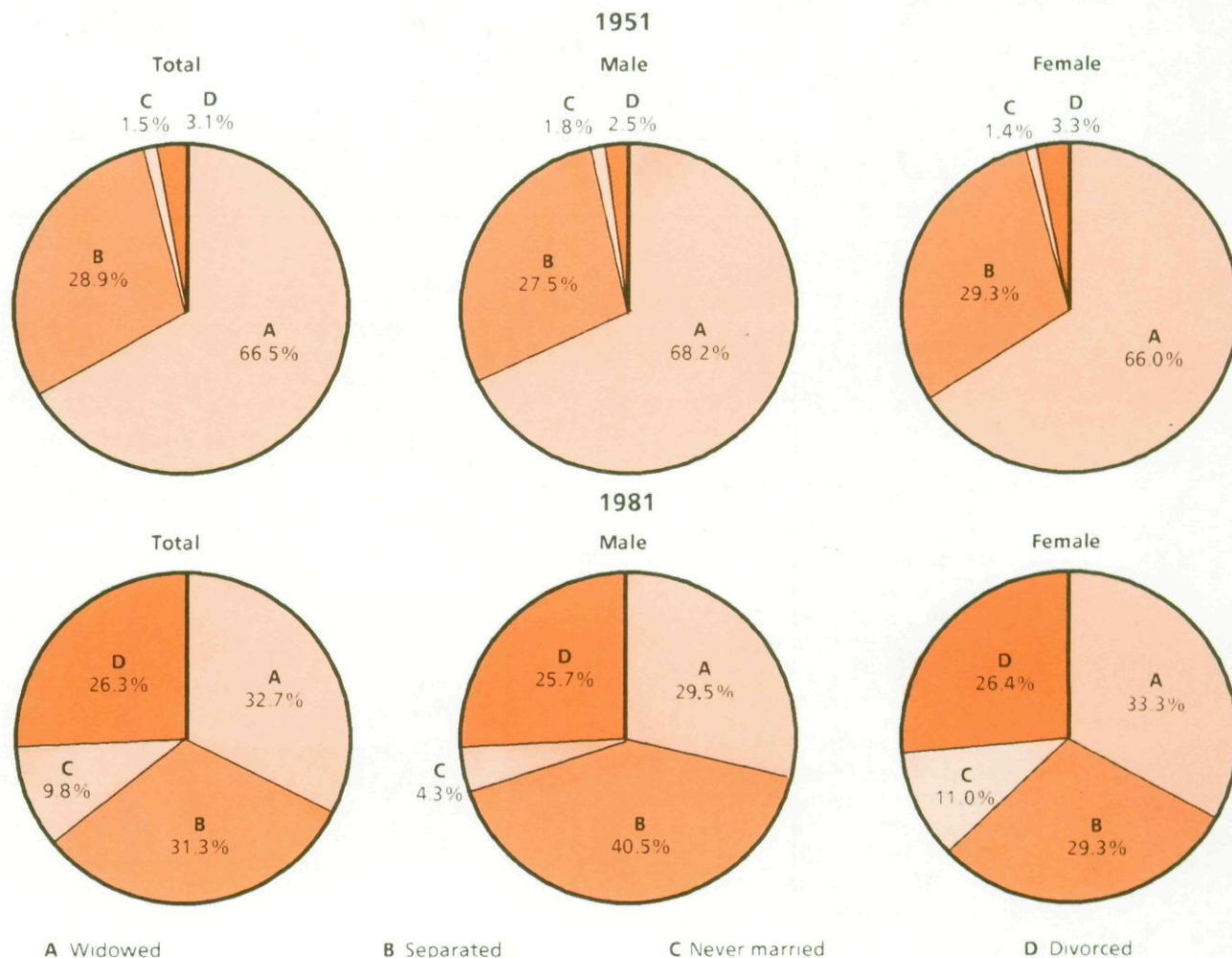
Although proportions of all lone parents who reported they were separated have not changed dramatically over the 30 years from 1951 to 1981, remaining fairly stable at about 29%-31%, the reasons for reporting separated marital status in 1981 were clearly more varied and very likely quite different from the reasons for reporting separated in earlier census years, particularly for men. (See Notes section for more details.)

To a lesser degree, but important nevertheless, was the marked increase, especially over 1971-1981, in never-married lone parents: their share of total lone parents rose to nearly 10% in 1981.

The more "liberated" life-styles and living arrangements that emerged during the 1960s in Canada, such as never-married mothers choosing to keep and rear their children, have persisted. Furthermore, the relevant vital statistics (see Notes section for more information) reveal that these days never-married lone parents are not simply unmarried "teen-age" mothers. Despite improvements in contraceptive technology, a certain

Chart 2

Percentage Distribution by Marital Status of Total, Male and Female Lone Parents, Canada, 1951 and 1981



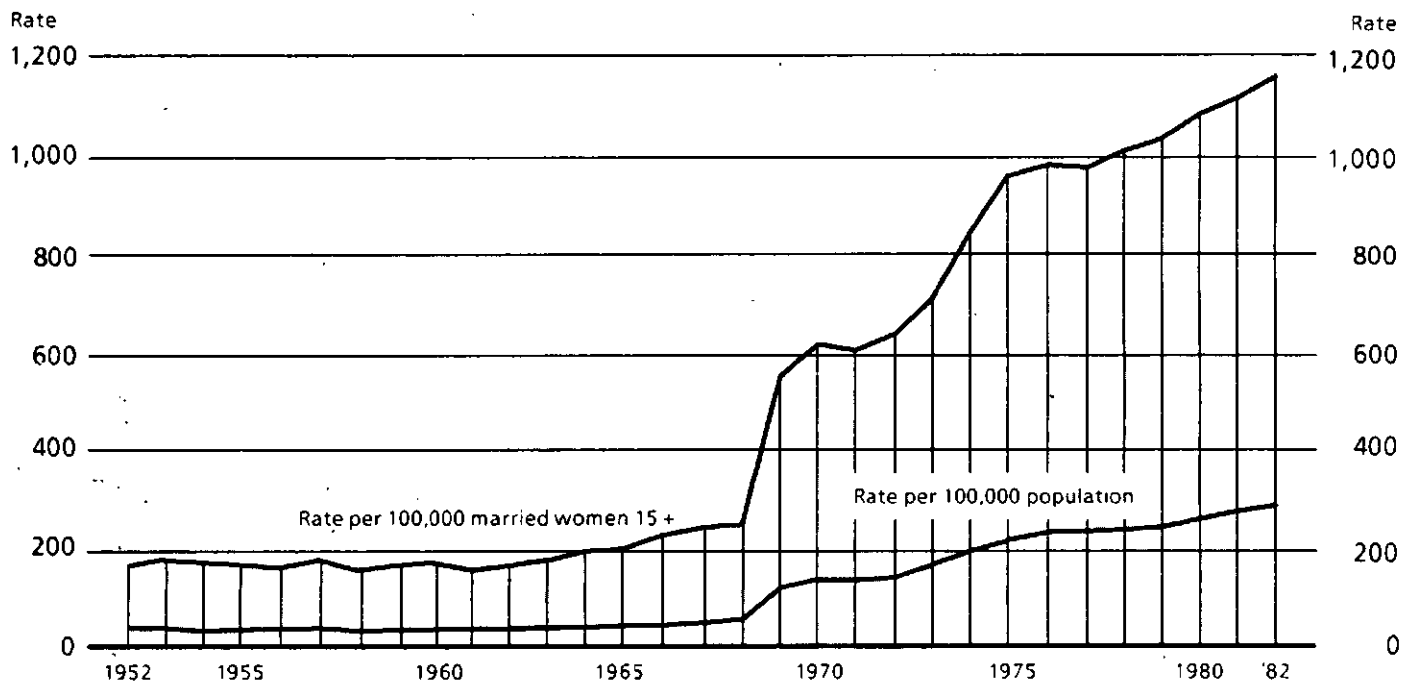
Source : 1951 and 1981 Censuses of Canada.

number of babies are still born out of wedlock. However, the number put up for adoption has been steadily declining in the largest provinces. This is undoubtedly because never-married women in the ages 20-24, 25-29 and 30-34 are not only bearing children, but apparently are voluntarily choosing to rear them outside of wedlock.

To sum up, as reported in the 1981 Census, all separated, divorced and never-married parents, at close to 68% of all lone parents for Canada as a whole, have more than "replaced" the widowed lone parents who were 66.5% of the total in 1951, but who have since declined to less than half this figure.

Chart 3

**Crude Divorce Rates per 100,000 Population and
Rates per 100,000 Married Women 15 Years and Over, Canada, 1952-1982**



Source : Vital Statistics, Volume II, "Marriages and Divorces, 1982", Catalogue No. 84-205.

More Younger Lone Mothers

Families in the charge of lone mothers have always made up the largest part of all lone-parent families in both numerical and percentage terms. In 1981, continuing a past trend, lone mothers at close to 590,000 made up 82.6% of all lone parents as compared with the approximately 124,000 lone fathers, who constituted 17.4% of the total.

In numerical terms, female lone-parent families increased from 1956. However, as a percentage of all families, they have risen only since 1966 (after a period of relative stability) with increases to 7.5% in 1971, then to 8.1% in 1976, and finally to 9.3% in 1981. This is in contrast to families with male lone parents which fluctuated at a low of from 2% in 1971 to 1.7% in 1976, and then up again to 2% of all families in 1981.

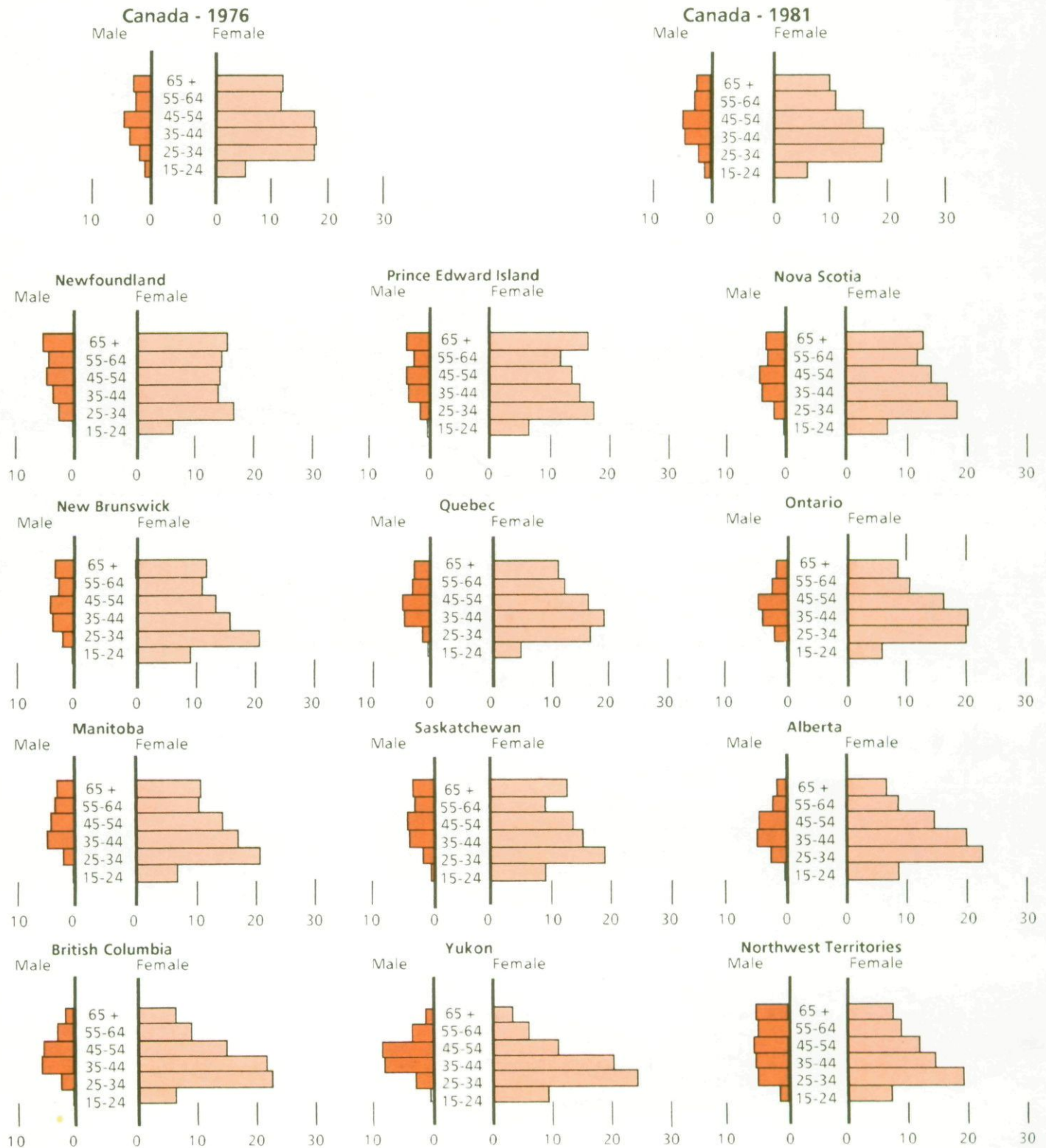
An important aspect of the growing numbers of all lone-parent families is the

considerable contribution being made by separated, divorced and never-married lone mothers who are more and more in the younger ages. This means that increasingly such lone mothers are solely responsible for supporting, nurturing, rearing, socializing and educating dependent children in their formative years.

Factors contributing to the more pronounced increase in lone mothers in the younger ages include: (a) the decline, relatively speaking, in elderly lone parents, especially widows, because more are now living alone; (b) the increase in separation and divorce among the young, and the greater propensity for men of all ages to remarry than women; (c) the continuing pattern for mothers to obtain custody of children when a marriage is informally or legally dissolved; and (d) the marked rise since the 1960s in never-married parenthood which is, for the most part, a female phenomenon.

Chart 4

Percentage Distributions of Lone Parents by Age and Sex, Canada, 1976 and 1981, Provinces and Territories, 1981 (See Notes section for explanation.)



Source : 1976 and 1981 Censuses of Canada, unpublished data.

Table 3

Children 0-24 Years in All Census Families, in Husband-wife Families, and in Lone-parent Families by Sex and Marital Status of Lone Parent, Canada, 1976 and 1981

	1976		1981	
	Number	Percentage distribution	Number	Percentage distribution
All children 0-24 years	8,520,715	100.0	8,252,405	100.0
Children 0-24 years in husband-wife families	7,621,820	89.5	7,196,855	87.2
Children 0-24 years in lone-parent families	898,895	10.5	1,055,550	12.8
Male parent	148,115	1.7	180,750	2.2
Separated	66,045	0.8	84,685	1.0
Widowed	46,015	0.5	41,180	0.5
Divorced	29,250	0.3	47,385	0.6
Single (never-married)	6,805	0.1	7,500	0.1
Female parent	750,780	8.8	874,800	10.6
Separated	281,000	3.3	314,130	3.8
Widowed	230,595	2.7	203,780	2.5
Divorced	190,485	2.2	268,455	3.3
Single (never-married)	48,700	0.6	88,430	1.1

Source: 1976 and 1981 Censuses of Canada, unpublished data.

At the all-Canada level, the continuing increase of young female lone parents is evident in the percentage distributions of lone parents by age and sex for 1976 and 1981 (see Chart 4). Also, interprovincial variations in the age and sex composition of male and female lone parents are clearly revealed in the provincial charts for 1981.

Changing Pattern of Lone-parent Families With Children Under 25 Years at Home, 1931- 1981

On the whole, continuing improvements in longevity since the early decades of this century, and the post-Second World War increases in marriage and early childbearing had the effect of increasing, to about 1966, the numbers and percentages of children living with two parents. On the other hand, it has become more probable, since 1966, that children in their formative years will be living in families with a lone parent, and

a growing proportion of them with a fairly young mother whose marriage has been dissolved by separation or divorce rather than by death, or who became a never-married parent, voluntarily rearing a child out of wedlock.

Therefore, in 1981, for the first time in 50 years, the proportion of children under 25 years of age reported to be living with lone parents rose over the 11.9% recorded in 1931. The number of children under 25 years living with lone parents, at well over 1 million, constituted 12.8% of the approximately 8,252,400 sons and daughters in these ages reported to be living in all families in 1981. This was a noteworthy increase even from 1976, when, by comparison, about 899,000 children under 25 years in lone-parent families represented 10.5% of all children in these ages (see Table 3).

In addition, from 1956 to 1981, in a period of just 25 years, there was a doubling to 10.6% of the proportion of all children 0-24 years living with a lone mother, which had been 4.9% and 5% in 1951 and 1956 respectively. Among the provinces, Newfoundland was the only one in 1981 where less than 10% of children under 25 years were living with a lone parent: 2% with a father, and 7.3% with a mother. By contrast in British Columbia, 13.8% of all children were living with a lone parent in 1981: 2.4% with a father, and 11.4% with a mother.

In Canada and in most provinces, from 1976 to 1981, increases in the numbers of sons and daughters under 25 years of age living in lone-parent families were mainly due to more of them living with divorced parents, particularly divorced mothers, continuing a trend that had been visible from 1971. The percentage of children living with divorced mothers more than doubled over 1971-1981, and although children living with divorced fathers also showed a rise in the same period, their number and relative share remained rather low.

The increases over 1976-1981 in the numbers and proportions of children living with separated and never-married mothers were also noteworthy.

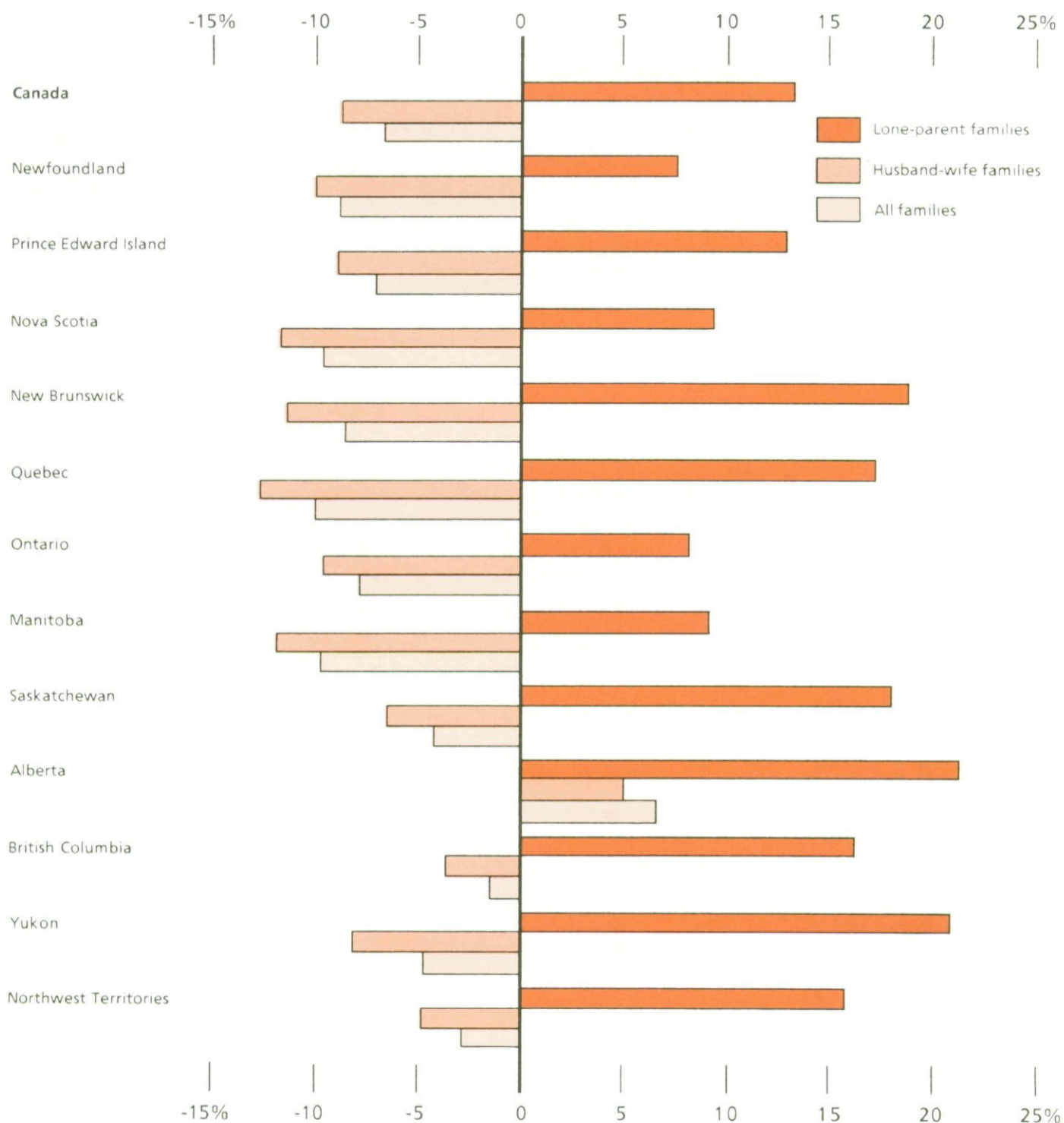
Growing Numbers of Parents and Children, Especially Dependent Children Under 18 Years of Age, Are Living in Lone-parent Families, Canada and Provinces, 1981

Over the decade 1971-1981, in husband-wife families, there was a decrease in the number and proportion of sons and daughters of all ages, of those under 25 years, and of those in the so-called "dependent ages", that is, under 18 years. Alberta was the sole exception. On the other hand, in lone-parent families, in the case of sons and daughters under 18 years, exactly the opposite happened. In both numerical and percentage terms there was not only an increase in lone parents, but also an increase in children under 18 years living with lone parents, in Canada and in every province (see Chart 5).

The recent growth in lone-parent families and in the numbers of children under 18 in such families signifies a rise in possibly stressful family situations. More dependent children in lone-parent families may lack the kind of parental time and attention that parents ideally wish to accord children, and that children ideally expect to have from their parents.

Chart 5

Percentage Change in Number of Dependent Children 0-17 Years in Husband-wife and Lone-parent Families, 1976-1981, Canada, Provinces and Territories



Source : 1976 and 1981 Censuses of Canada, unpublished data

FAMILY INCOME OF *LONE-PARENT FAMILIES,* *CANADA, 1970-1980*

Family income determines, in large part, the resources available to parents and children for housing, day care, health care, education, recreation and similar basic requisites for a decent and good life. Hence the concern in regard to the income situation of male and female lone-parent families, particularly those that are the responsibility of lone mothers with children in the younger ages.

It is instructive to compare the changes over 1970-1980 in the average real family income reported for husband-wife, male lone-parent, and female lone-parent families. (See Notes section for further information.) It has been shown in another report in this series that over this 10-year period the average family income of husband-wife families increased by 30%, and that of male lone-parent families increased by 35%, in contrast to the considerably lower increase of 18% in the average family income of female lone-parent families over the same 10-year period. (See "Changes in Income in Canada: 1970-1980".) In the latter study, the 1981 Census data on family income also show clearly that the income of families in the charge of lone mothers is more markedly concentrated at the lower income levels than that of male lone-parent families and husband-wife families.

Furthermore, the most recent census income data reveal that in 1980 the percentage of families with "low income" (for explanation, see Notes section) was higher everywhere in Canada for female lone-parent families

than for families with a male lone parent, or for those with two parents present. The frequency of "low income" was highest for lone mothers who had children under 16 years of age at home. Even in the case of families with no children under 16 years, the incidence of "low income" was considerably higher for lone mothers than for lone fathers or for families with both spouses present, at the Canada and all provincial levels.

The frequency of low income for lone-parent families and for lone mothers was more pronounced in the Atlantic region and Quebec than in the rest of Canada, and was highest for lone mothers in the 15-24- and 25-34-year age groups throughout Canada, and especially in the Atlantic provinces and Quebec.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF LONE-PARENT FAMILIES, 1951-1981

Before and during the Second World War, it was customary for families and individuals on their own to share dwellings or to "double up", most likely because of a scarcity of finances and appropriate housing. However, after the Second World War, a beneficial economic climate made it increasingly possible for families and individuals on their own to occupy an owned or rented dwelling unit and to maintain it, without having to share its space and cost with others.

In other words from the mid-1940s to about the mid-1970s, when many Canadians enjoyed the benefits of a buoyant and prosperous economy, the continuing economic growth, availability of jobs, and rising levels of income made it more and more possible for families and individuals on their own to live "privately". Couples without children, couples and lone parents with children, and individuals on their own were increasingly able to occupy owned or rented dwellings without other families or additional persons sharing the dwelling. The Canadian housing industry catered to, encouraged, even promoted such living arrangements, by building and marketing appropriate housing units in the form of smaller houses and apartments.

We know that this was the case because in the census data from 1951 to 1976, at both the all-Canada and provincial levels, there was a consistent increase in numerical and percentage terms in "maintaining" or primary families, and corresponding decreases in "not maintaining" or secondary families. (For explanation of these terms, see Notes section.)

When allowances are made for the changes incorporated in the 1981 Census definitions, it is clear that the tendency of families and individuals to share dwellings has remained pretty much the same as in 1976, and the trend towards the "undoubling" of families and persons has apparently stabilized. (See Notes section for further information.)

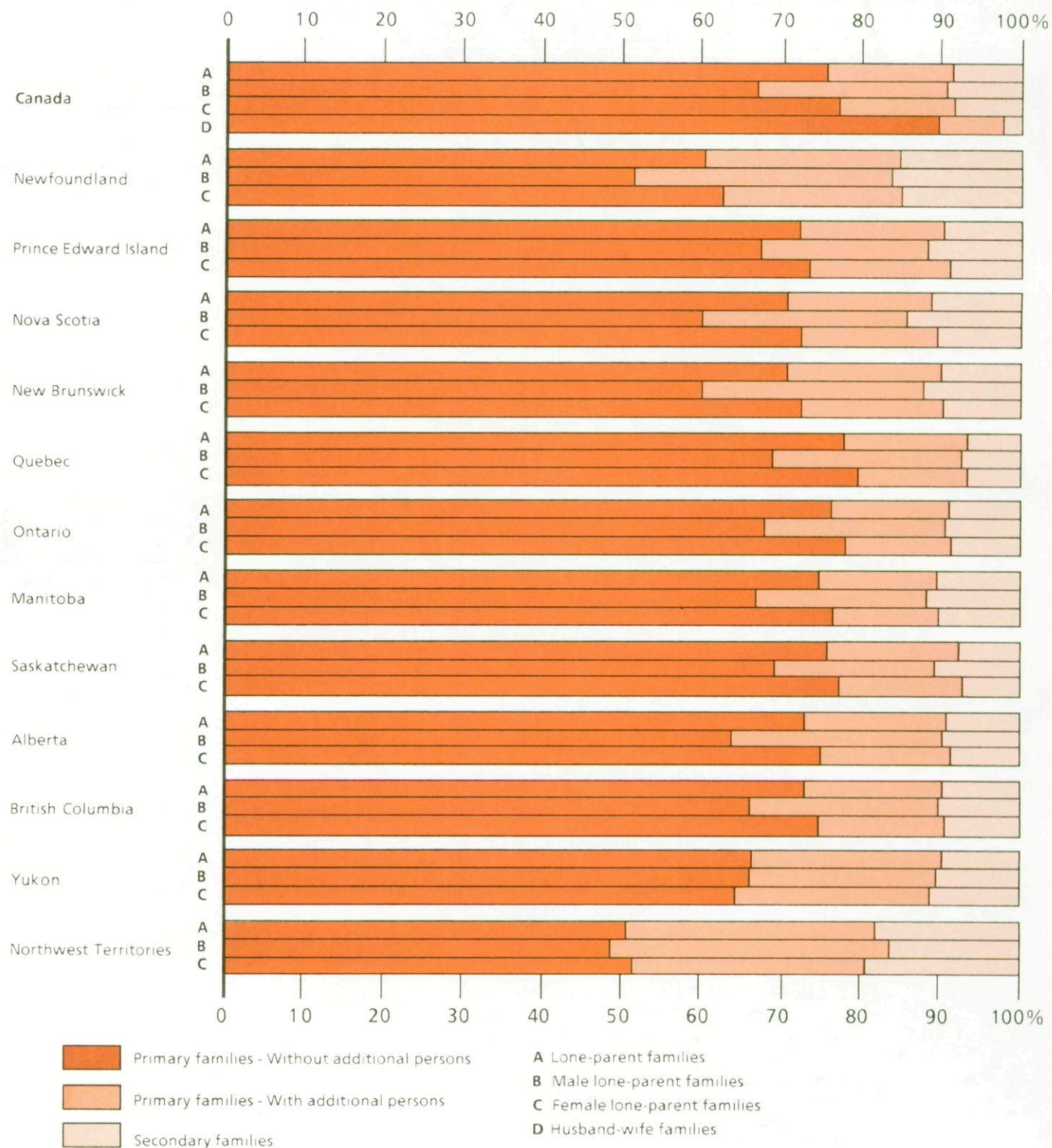
Undoubtedly this can be traced to the slowing down of Canada's economic growth, and the accompanying financial and housing crises already visible and making themselves felt, and therefore reported, at the time of the 1981 Census enumeration. Very likely families were not able to buy or rent homes or dwelling units as readily as in the 1960s and the early and mid-1970s, and were therefore "doubling up", i.e. sharing housing, to just about the same degree as in 1976. The trend of steady rise in "maintaining" families, reported for the period of 1951 to 1976, seems to have been arrested, at least for the time being.

Over the 25 years from 1951 to 1976, lone-parent families were less likely than husband-wife families to be "maintaining" or primary families and more likely to be "not maintaining" or secondary families. Nevertheless, male and female lone-parent families also experienced the "undoubling" trend, with declining percentages, up to 1976 for those who shared dwellings with other families or additional non-family persons.

Thus, in 1981, husband-wife families at over 5.5 million were almost 98% "maintaining" families, and only 2.3%, secondary families. At the same time, over 90% of all lone-parent families were of the "maintaining" or primary type and only 8.3% of lone mothers and 9.4% of

Chart 6

Percentage Distribution by Family Type and Living Arrangements of Male and Female Lone-parent Families, Canada, Provinces and Territories, 1981



Source : 1981 Census of Canada, unpublished data

lone fathers reported sharing a dwelling with others who were the household "maintainers". In other words, family households are made up for the most part of small nuclear family units, i.e. husband-wife families with (on the average) two children, and lone-parent families with (on the average) one child, and without additional families or other persons present.

Many Lone-parent Families Are "Maintaining" Families Living Without Others

It is possible, using the 1981 Census statistics, to examine and show the degree to which primary census families "double up" or live together with other non-family additional persons in the same household (see Chart 6).

In 1981, in Canada and in just about all the provinces, well over 70% of lone-parent families were primary families living without additional persons in the same household. The exceptions were Newfoundland, with about 60%, the Yukon with 66%, and the Northwest Territories with close to 51%.

Furthermore, a comparison of the living arrangements of male and female primary lone-parent families indicates that at the Canada level and in all provinces except the Yukon, female lone parents of primary families were much more likely to be living without additional persons than their male counterparts.

Indeed, for Canada as a whole, and in Quebec, Ontario and the three Prairie provinces, 75% or more of lone mothers were "maintainers" living without other persons as part of their households. In Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, the corresponding figures were well over 70%.

In Newfoundland and in the Yukon, about 63% and 64% respectively of female lone parents and their children were in primary families and living without additional persons, while in the Northwest Territories only slightly more than half did so.

On the whole, large numbers of male and female lone-parent families these days do not have the "advantage" of related or unrelated persons sharing the same dwelling and household expenses, or perhaps just "helping out" with the care and rearing of children in the dependent ages. Sons and daughters in their formative years require attention, or just someone to be there, while the lone parent, away from home earning a living, requires the assurance that children are in good hands.

HOUSING OF LONE-PARENT FAMILIES

As pointed out in an overview of occupancy patterns of Canada's housing stock, the 1981 Census makes available for the first time a variety of housing data for a diverse range of families by structure and type, including lone-parent families in charge of lone mothers and lone fathers. The article, "Housing Highlights" in the Canadian Statistical Review (September 1983) shows that as regards tenure, condition of dwelling, and ability to afford and to pay shelter costs, lone-parent families as compared with husband-wife families with and without children are in a position of disadvantage. Indeed, it would seem that female lone-parent families are the most disadvantaged insofar as housing their families is concerned. For example, as compared with husband-wife families with children, both male and female lone-parent families have lower rates of home ownership. Also, both male and female lone-parent families suffer the poorest housing conditions, with 30% of their dwellings needing some form of repair. Furthermore, of all female lone parents (who, as we have seen, report the lowest income), 26% in 1981 reported spending more than 35% of their income on shelter, and 16.5% spent over 50% of their total income on housing.

It is noteworthy, too, that of all female lone-parent families, those who were renters had only slightly more than half the average income of those who were owners. In addition, just under one-half of these female lone-parent renting families spent 35% or more of their income on shelter. In fact, close to 33% spent 50% or more on housing costs. (See Notes section for more detail.)

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Over the 50 years from 1931 to 1981, there have been continuing increases with only one exception, in the number of total, husband-wife and lone-parent families. Over the same period the pattern in percentage terms has been somewhat different. From 1931 to 1966, lone-parent families made up a declining share of all families. However, after 1966, a number of important changes resulted in a gradually increasing proportion of lone-parent families that rose to 11.3% of all families in Canadian private households in 1981. There were also increases over 1971-1981 in the number of persons in lone-parent families, which rose to 9.4% of Canada's private household family population, and in children under 25 years living with a lone mother or lone father who in 1981 were 12.8% of all never-married sons and daughters in these ages living with their parents in private households in Canada.

Obviously, lone-parent families and their members still constitute fairly small proportions of all of Canada's families and of their total family and child populations, as defined in the Canadian census. However, their continued, recently accelerated, and anticipated future increase in both numerical and percentage terms is cause for concern for a number of reasons:

As we have seen, the vast majority of lone parents are increasingly separated, divorced and never-married mothers in the younger ages with dependent children in their formative years at home. And it is precisely these lone mothers in sole charge of young children, as compared with male lone parents and parents in husband-wife families, who command the lowest

average family income, have the highest frequency of low income, and must spend more of their total family income on shelter than is considered "comfortable" or acceptable.

In other words, interest in, and concern about anticipated increases in lone-parent families stem from their often "less-than-adequate" material resources.

There is further cause for concern related closely to the changes in the marital status, age and sex composition of lone parents as described in this brief overview. In particular, the drastic decline of death as a cause of lone parenthood, and the increased importance of separation, divorce, remarriage, and never-married lone parenthood have important repercussions for both parents and children in lone-parent families, and for the larger community in which they live.

It has been maintained that separation, divorce and remarriage of a parent may be less of a loss for a child, in an economic and social sense, than the permanent loss of a parent through death. Although it is not possible to determine precisely whether this is so, certain evidence is noted here as "food for thought" (see "Divorce: Law and the Family in Canada" by D.C. McKie, B. Prentice and P. Reed).

Regarding economic support: legal or other (informal) arrangements arrived at by those separating and divorcing to provide spouse or child support are frequently not honoured, and in many cases remarriage and the assumption of new familial responsibilities by an ex-spouse may prohibit the promised support payments.

Furthermore, in the social and human (or psychological) sphere the legal initiatives to dissolve marriages and families in the courts and to determine child custody and child support are known to take a severe toll emotionally of the parents and children involved.

There are also the additional psychological and human challenges to parents and children who remain in lone-parent families, or who become members of "re-constituted" or "blended" families. In both cases they must cope with the complexities of establishing relationships with "new" family networks, that is, with siblings, step-parents, grandparents and even other relatives "acquired" through remarriage of one or both parents.

In the case of the never-married mostly female lone parents rearing children outside of wedlock, their recent increases are of concern since their families experience the same disadvantages as the families of separated, divorced and widowed lone mothers. But in addition, the children in such families may have more limited opportunities for education and personal development than other children, because parents of such families are frequently economically and socially disadvantaged.

One American writer strikes a positive note which should also be sounded here. He maintains that some of the aspects of lone parenthood and of those who remarry after divorce are only "problems" now because there has been insufficient time for those increasingly involved, to generate new ways of addressing and resolving their problems with "workable" solutions in the form of new modes of behaviour, etc. But he is optimistic that this will come. (See "Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage" by A.J. Cherlin.)

In the meantime, appropriate and practical planning and policy initiatives must be mounted at all community levels -- municipal, provincial and federal, to encourage and assist this country's growing numbers of lone parents and their sons and daughters, who, at certain difficult stages in their lives may find themselves in stressful situations, and having to make do with less than the minimum adequate human and material resources. Such support will make Canada's lone-parent families more resilient in coping with the many demands of everyday living.

NOTES

Treatment of Common-law Situations

Persons living in a common-law type of marital arrangement, that is cohabiting, are considered as now married in the Canadian census family statistics regardless of their legal marital status. Accordingly, they are included as husband-wife families in both the census family and the economic family data. In 1981, the number of husband-wife families included over 300,000 cohabiting couples.

Relationship of Census and Economic Families

The census family definition requires that family members have a husband-wife or parent-child (a never-married child) relationship. However, by definition, the economic family may include a larger group of persons than the census family, as in the case of a married couple who have the widowed mother of one of the spouses residing with them in the same dwelling.

The Canadian census tabulates data for economic families for a number of reasons. The economic family concept coincides with the definition of the family used in the U.S. census, and makes possible U.S.-Canadian comparisons. Furthermore, consumer, welfare and dependency studies require information on families considered as economic units, as in the case of the example cited of the married couple who have the widowed mother of one of the spouses living with them.

Total Family Population

The total family population includes the number of persons in husband-wife

families, that is, all spouses without children plus all husbands and wives who are parents and their never-married sons and daughters. Included also are the total number of persons in lone-parent families, that is, all lone parents and their never-married sons and daughters living with them at home, when enumerated. (In this report, total families, total persons in families, etc., refer to those in private households in Canada only.)

"Separated" Marital Status

In earlier decades the separated (then called "spouse absent") lone parents were probably largely created by economic circumstances. This was very likely so in 1931, when (mostly) husbands and fathers had to go far afield, often for long periods of time, to seek work and wages. But with the 1968 Divorce Act, separation can now serve as grounds for divorce. Or legal separation without proceeding to divorce can ensure support or visiting rights from a spouse.

Vital Statistics

The vital statistics on births, marriages, divorces and deaths published by Statistics Canada are available for each year, and are therefore "flow" data as compared with the census statistics which are "stock" data giving a "snapshot" or "still" picture of, for example, the number of lone-parent families at one point in time.

Percentage Distributions of Lone Parents by Age and Sex

The distributions in Chart 4 are constructed in such a way that the length of every bar represents the percentage that every sex and age group constitutes of total lone parents. All the bars

together, then, represent total lone parents in a given census year, and therefore add up to 100%.

The preponderance of lone mothers in the distribution of all lone parents is clearly revealed in the profile of all of the Canada and provincial distributions in Chart 4, which show much longer bars in every age group, and particularly in the younger age groups for female than for male lone parents.

Census Income Data

In the decennial census years, income information is collected for the preceding year. For example, the income data collected and compiled in 1971 and 1981 are for 1970 and 1980. It may be noted that this 1981 Census income information can be compiled on the basis of the census family and the economic family definitions.

Low Income

The incidence of "low income" is the proportion of families below the "low income cut-offs" which are established by taking into account family income, family size and area of residence. For details, see "Economic Families in Private Households - Income and Selected Characteristics", 1981 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-937.

Primary and Secondary Families

From 1951 to 1976, the Canadian census collected and compiled statistics for families by type, that is, for families "maintaining" own household or primary families, and for families "not maintaining" own household or secondary families. It was generally assumed in the censuses before 1981 that the person identified as the "household head" was also the person who "maintained" the household financially. Therefore, the family of the "household head" was the primary family, and all other families were classified as secondary families.

As of the 1981 Census, the concept of "household head" is no longer used this way. Instead, a new question was added to the 1981 Census questionnaire to identify the person responsible for paying the rent, the mortgage, the taxes

or the electricity. Therefore, in 1981, a primary family is one in which the person responsible for household payments is a member; a secondary family is one that does not include as a member, the person responsible for household payments.

Changes in Primary and Secondary Families

Although the 1981 concepts differ from those used in 1976, it is possible to determine, on the basis of 1981 data prepared according to 1976 definitions, that the general trend in Canada of the "undoubling" of families and of non-family persons from family households has not changed significantly over 1976-1981.

Shelter Costs

"While experts may disagree on exactly what proportion of income spent on shelter puts a family at economic risk, there is general agreement that expenditures in excess of 35% can be stressful." See "1981 Census of Population (Part 4): Housing Highlights", in the Canadian Statistical Review, September 1983, by G.E. Priest.

Canada has taken a census of population every ten years from 1851 and every five years from 1956. The last census was taken on June 3, 1981. The census data constitute the most important single source of information on the population of Canada by many geographic areas from the national and provincial levels down to smaller groups such as cities, towns and municipalities. These data include: information on the number of people who live in Canada; their characteristics such as age, sex, marital status, language, educational level and occupation; number and types of families; and types of dwellings. Census information is used for a variety of purposes by private individuals, governments at all levels, educational institutions, business people and other organizations.

As part of a program to supplement 1981 Census statistical reports, a special series of popular studies has been undertaken on selected topics of public interest. Each study is a description of major trends and patterns. The data used are from the 1981 Census and other relevant sources. This series is designed for use at the high school and community college levels. However, it could also be of interest to the general public.

CANADA'S LONE-PARENT FAMILIES is one of the reports in this series. It brings together under one cover highlights of information about lone parents and their children. Other studies in the series are being published at about the same time or within the next few months.

The manuscript for this study was prepared in the Social Statistics Field by Sylvia T. Wargon.

Census Operations Division, in cooperation with Production and Support Services Division, coordinated the design, composition and printing.

