

Canadian Megatrends

The rise of the dual-earner family with children



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- | | |
|----------------|--|
| . | 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 ($p < 0.05$) |

Published by authority of the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada

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CANADIAN MEGATRENDS

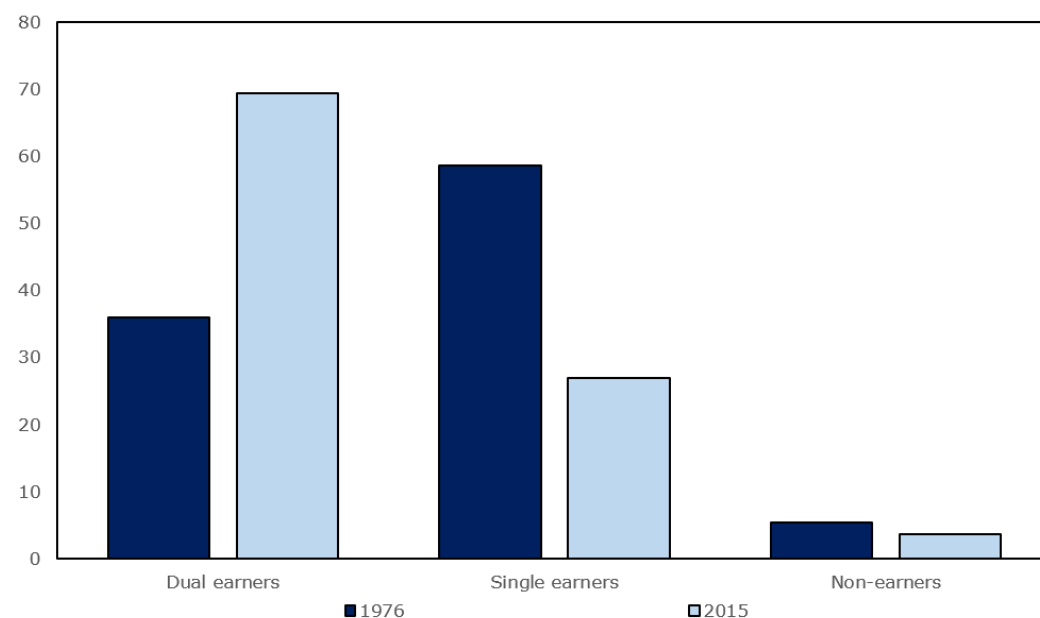
It takes two.

More and more Canadian families with children are finding that two incomes are better than one, as an increasing number of women have opted to join the workforce.

The number of Canadian families with two employed parents has almost doubled in the last 40 years—from 1.0 million to 1.9 million families, from 1976 to 2015. Over that period, the proportion of families where just one parent earned a paycheque fell by more than half, dropping from 59% to 27%. In turn, the proportion of dual-income families has nearly doubled, from 36% to 69%.

Chart 1
Employment status of couple families with at least one child aged under 16

percent



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 1976 and 2015.

Women join the labour force

Much of the impetus behind the change was spurred by the increasing participation of women in the workforce. From 1976 to 2015, women's employment rate increased from 47% to 69%. The increase in female employment rates has led to notable changes in the employment structure of families, particularly throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

The increase has been driven mainly by changes in cultural attitudes, an increase in women's education levels and general labour market conditions. Other factors, such as flexible 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 rates of women.

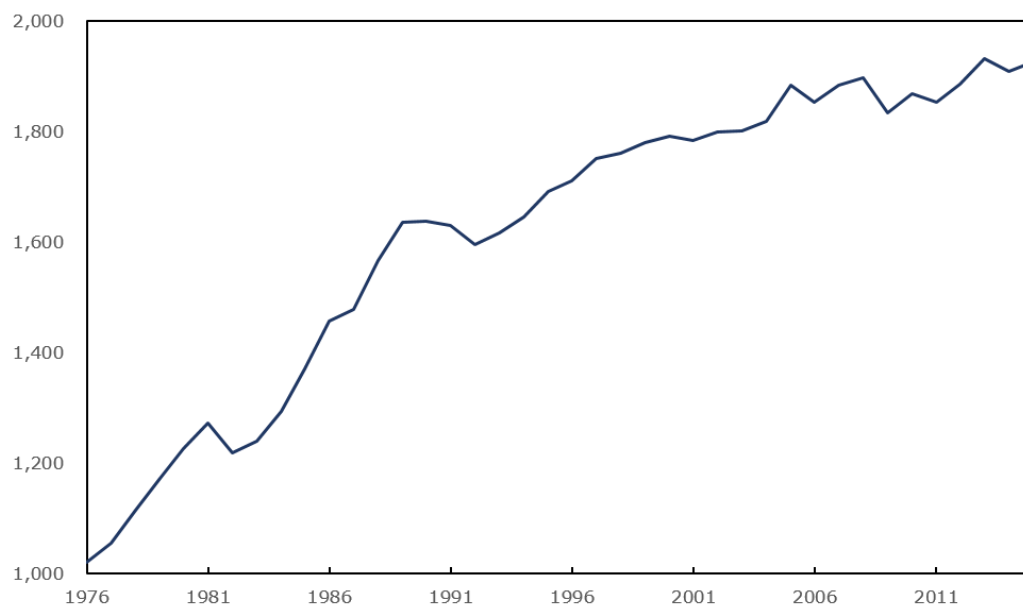
Uneven growth in the number of dual-earner families

Although the number of dual-earner families increased almost every year, some years witnessed a decline, mostly as a result of economic stagnation. From 1976 to 1989, the number of dual-earner couples increased by 60%. This was followed by a period of slower growth from 1989 to 2005, when the number of families with two working parents increased by 15%. The period from 2005 to 2015 had the slowest growth, where the number of dual-earner families increased by only 2%.

Periods of economic slowdown led to reductions in the number of dual-earner couples. From 1981 to 1982, when the unemployment rate increased from 7.6% to 11.0%, the number of dual-earner couples declined by 4%. Similar trends were also seen from 1990 to 1992, and in 2008 and 2009.

Chart 2
Number of dual-earner couples with at least one child aged under 16, 1976 to 2015

thousands



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 1976 to 2015.

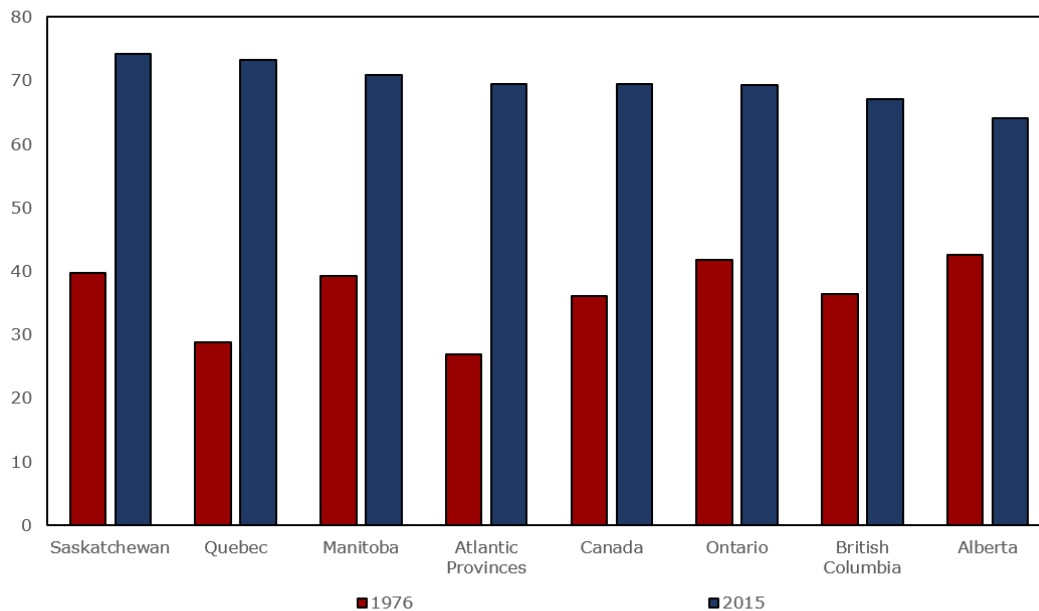
Differences across the provinces

Across the country, there are differences in the proportion of dual-earner families. In 1976, Alberta had the highest proportion of dual-earner couples (43% of couple families with children) followed by Ontario (42%). The Atlantic Provinces and Quebec had the lowest proportions (27% and 29%, respectively).

From 1976 to 2015, the proportion of dual-earner couples increased in all provinces, but not equally. The smallest increase was in Alberta, and the largest increases in Quebec and in the Atlantic Provinces. By 2015, Alberta had the lowest proportion of dual-earner couples (64%), while Saskatchewan (74%) and Quebec (73%) had the highest proportions.

Chart 3
Dual-earner couples as a proportion of couple families with at least one child aged under 16, by region

percent



Note: The Atlantic Provinces were grouped together because of their sample size.

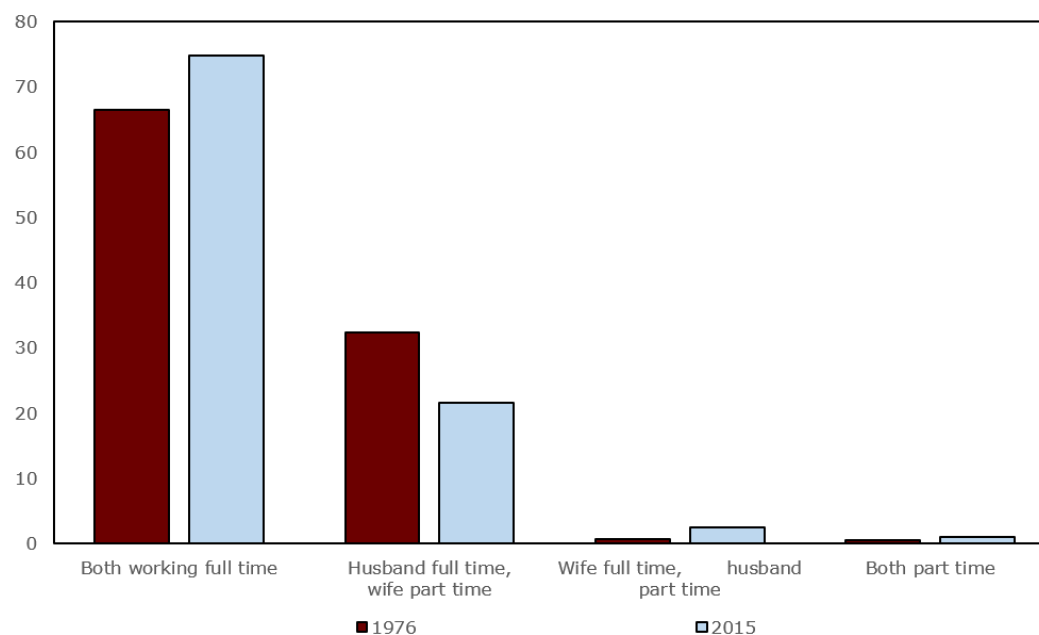
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 1976 and 2015.

More parents working full time

In 1976, it was the norm in dual-earner families for both spouses to work full time (66%), and this proportion has gone up in the decades since. By 2015, 75% of dual-earner couples with children had two full-time working parents. There was also a shift among dual-earner couples with one spouse working part-time. Families with a full-time working husband and a part-time working wife declined from 32% to 22% as a proportion of all dual-earner couples, from 1976 to 2015. This suggests that during this time, women not only increased their labour market participation, but also their work intensity.

Chart 4
Work intensity of dual-earner couple families with at least one child aged under 16

percent



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 1976 and 2015.

Definitions

Dual-earner family: a husband–wife family, with at least one child under 16 at home, who reported that both spouses were employed during the survey reference week, either part time or full time.

Single-earner family: a husband–wife family, with at least one child under 16 at home, who reported that only one spouse was employed during the survey reference week, either part time or full time, while the other was unemployed or not in the labour force.

Employment rate: the number of persons employed in a group (e.g., age, sex, marital status, family type) expressed as a percentage of the population for that group.

Full-time work: refers to those who work at least 30 hours per week in their main job;

Part-time work: refers to those who work less than 30 hours per week.

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