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by Max Stick, Allison Leanage and Rubab Arim

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Research article

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Abstract

This study explores a socioeconomic profile of working-age immigrants (aged 25 to 64) in same-sex couples from 2000 to 2020 using the Longitudinal Immigration Database. The study addresses three research questions: (1) how has the number of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples shifted since the nationwide legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada in 2005, (2) what is the geographic distribution of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples and (3) how does the economic profile (employment incidence and median employment income) of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples compare with that of working-age immigrants in opposite-sex couples? Results revealed that the number of male and female working-age immigrants in same-sex couples increased in Canada from 2000 to 2020. Previously, most working-age immigrants in same-sex couples tended to reside in the Toronto, Vancouver and Montréal census metropolitan areas (CMAs), but in recent years, there has been a greater dispersal towards smaller CMAs and rural areas in Canada. Finally, across most years, male and female working-age immigrants in same-sex couples had higher rates of employment incidence and median employment incomes than their counterparts in opposite-sex couples. This pattern of results largely remained the same after considering group differences in several sociodemographic characteristics. However, male working-age immigrants in same-sex couples had lower employment income than their counterparts with similar sociodemographic characteristics in opposite-sex couples.

Keywords: immigrants, same-sex couples, employment, income

Authors

Max Stick, Allison Leanage and Rubab Arim are with the Social Analysis and Modelling Division, Analytical Studies and Modelling Branch, at Statistics Canada.

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Introduction

Approximately one in four individuals in Canada is currently or has been a landed immigrant or permanent resident. From 2016 to 2021, about 1.3 million new immigrants arrived and accounted for 80% of the growth in the labour force (Statistics Canada, 2022b). Canada's Immigration Levels Plan for 2023 to 2025 aims to admit immigrants to help strengthen Canada's economy by continuing to fill labour market shortages and to build stronger communities (Government of Canada, 2023). Immigration is expected to remain at high levels in the years to come.

Alongside increases in immigrants, there has been a rise in same-sex couples within Canada. In 2003, Ontario and British Columbia were the first two provinces to legalize same-sex marriage,[1] followed by Quebec in early 2004 (Eichler, 2021). By July 2005, same-sex marriage was legal nationwide (see the 2005 *Civil Marriage Act*). From 2006 to 2016, the number of same-sex couples (60.7%) increased faster than that of opposite-sex couples (9.6%) (Statistics Canada, 2017). Moreover, in 2016, 72,880 same-sex couples were living in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017), while recent findings from the 2021 Census indicated that there were 117,640 same-sex couples (Statistics Canada, 2022a). The nationwide legalization of same-sex marriage, alongside the increase in same-sex couples, may partly result in an increasing number of immigrants reporting a same-sex partner.

Several researchers have previously used the sex composition of couples to determine "inferred sexual orientation" (see Yang et al., 2024). This study uses the information on the sex composition of couples without inferring sexual orientation given the relevant internationally recognized standards (Statistics Canada, 2023). Notably, bisexual people can be in an opposite-sex couple. For example, according to a study conducted in the United States, the majority of partnered bisexual people were in a different-gender union, with 7.2% of those married and 18.6% of those cohabiting being in a same-gender union (Hsieh & Liu, 2019). The inability of a measure based on the sex composition of couples to capture data on bisexual people is particularly significant considering past research showing consistent findings where bisexual people experience poorer outcomes in a number of areas, including the labour market and income (Statistics Canada, 2022c) and health (Tjepkema, 2008). However, when data on sexual orientation are unavailable, there is still value in looking at an analysis of outcomes by the sex composition of couples, as they constitute different groups in the population. Further, while the sex composition of couples is not used as a proxy for sexual orientation in this study, the two measures may overlap to a certain degree. Data from the previous research show that the majority of partnered gay and lesbian people were in a same-gender couple, and very few partnered heterosexual people were in a same-gender couple (Hsieh & Liu, 2019).

A growing body of research has explored labour market outcomes based on the sex composition of couples (Klawitter, 2015; Waite & Denier, 2019; Waite et al., 2019). A previous meta-analysis has suggested that earnings or income within the labour market differ based on the sex composition of couples (Klawitter, 2015), and thus, the sex composition of couples can be considered a dimension of labour market stratification (Waite & Denier, 2015). Using the 2006 Census, Waite and Denier (2015)[2] found a hierarchy in earnings nested within sex, where males earn more than females in Canada. Males in opposite-sex couples earned more than males in same-sex couples, followed by females in same-sex couples. Females in opposite-sex couples earned the least (Waite & Denier, 2015; Denier & Waite, 2017).

1. In this study, the term "same-sex marriage" is used for two reasons: (1) to be consistent with the terminology in the *Civil Marriage Act*, which states " … the right to equality without discrimination requires that couples of the same sex and couples of the opposite sex have equal access to marriage for civil purposes" (Minister of Justice, 2005), and (2) to be consistent with the information in the Longitudinal Immigration Database that is used in the analysis and with the "opposite- or same-sex status of couple family" standard.
2. This study excluded members of racialized groups, immigrants and Indigenous people from the sample to limit the other factors that may contribute to wage disadvantages.

More specifically, males in same-sex couples earned about 5% less than males in opposite-sex couples (Waite & Denier, 2015), while females in same-sex couples earned about 8% (Waite & Denier, 2015) to 16% (Mueller, 2014) more than females in opposite-sex couples. However, these previous studies did not consider the immigrant status of people. Yet, the intersection between immigrant status and same-sex status of a couple family is necessary to explore given that immigrants make up almost one-quarter of the population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022b), and, despite increases in their earnings from 2000 to 2015, immigrants continue to have lower earnings than their Canadian-born counterparts (Crossman et al., 2021).

This study examines a socioeconomic profile of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples from 2000 to 2020 and explores whether working-age immigrants in same-sex couples and their counterparts in opposite-sex couples have similar or different economic outcomes. The study addresses three research questions: (1) how has the number of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples shifted since the nationwide legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada in 2005, (2) what is the geographic distribution in Canada of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples and (3) how does the economic profile (employment incidence[3] and median employment income) of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples compare with that of working-age immigrants in opposite-sex couples? Overall, this study aims to inform Canada's 2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan to support data and evidenced-based policy making.

The next section discusses the methods used in this study, including the sources of data, and is followed by the presentation of the results. This study concludes with a summary of the findings, its limitations and directions for future research.

Data and methods

This study uses the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB). The IMDB combines landing records (from 1980 to the present) and annual tax records (1982 to the present) from the T1 Family File (T1FF) (Statistics Canada, 2022d) of immigrants in Canada. Landing records contain information such as sex,[4] age at arrival, country of origin, highest educational attainment, admission category and knowledge of official languages.

Before 2019, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) collected information only on sex, which refers to whether a person is male or female, in immigration application forms. The gender identifier was introduced in immigration forms in 2019, providing a third non-binary gender option and using the "X" identifier for another gender. These changes are consistent with the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's Policy Direction to Modernize the Government of Canada's Sex and Gender Information Practices, which was adopted in 2018. As the IMDB does not cover the information on gender historically, the terminology of sex (male and female) was used throughout this study to stay consistent with the data source over time.

Statistics Canada's IMDB includes administrative immigration data collected by IRCC for all immigrants and non-permanent residents since 1980. Outcomes for this population are available from tax files since

3. The Longitudinal Immigration Database does not include information on the full-time or part-time employment status of individuals, making it impossible to determine the extent to which differences in employment income between groups may be related to hours worked. For the purposes of this study, employment incidence was based on employment income (annual earnings of $500 or more) and was used to shed light on differences in general economic well-being at the individual level. A detailed employment profile is beyond the scope of this study.
4. The IMDB does not differentiate between the sex at birth and the gender identity of a person. As a result, the study sample may include cisgender and transgender individuals.

1982. The analytical sample was restricted to immigrants aged 25 to 64 who landed from 1980 to 2020 and filed taxes in any year from 2000 to 2020 and excluded individuals who were mainly students (aged 15 to 24) or retirees (aged 65 and older) (see Qiu & Schellenberg [2022] for an example). Hereinafter, the sample will be referred to as working-age immigrants. According to the IMDB technical report, "of the immigrants who landed in any year from 1980 to 2020, 85.3% were linked to at least one T1FF record" (Statistics Canada, 2022d, p. 37). Percentages were higher for immigrants who landed aged 25 to 64. More specifically, 92.5% of immigrants aged 25 to 34 had a linkage to T1FF records, followed by 92.6% of immigrants aged 35 to 49 and 87.9% of immigrants aged 50 to 64, compared with 57.6% of those aged 0 to 14 and 76.0% of those aged 65 and older (Statistics Canada, 2022d). Tax records contain information such as annual income, marital status and location of residence. To capture whether immigrants were in a same-sex or an opposite-sex couple, this study used the T1FF family flag same-sex variable,[5] which was available from 2000 to 2020.[6] As the same-sex identifier is only included in the T1FF, the sample is restricted to immigrants who filed taxes.

Descriptive statistics were used to examine the size and socioeconomic profile of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples by year and sex. In selected analyses, comparison tests were conducted to examine between- or within-sex differences of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples. The findings provide information on the trends and the diversity of the working-age immigrant population in same-sex couples over the past 20 years by exploring the growth in the size of this population (research question 1), the location of residence—where they live by province and whether they live in a census metropolitan area (CMA) (research question 2)—and their employment incidence[7] and median employment income (research question 3).

Socioeconomic characteristics, such as age, education, entry class, top five countries (as of 2020) where immigrants were from and knowledge of official languages, and median employment incomes for working-age immigrants in same-sex and opposite-sex couples were also examined. A final set of analyses focused on differences in employment incidence and employment income after controlling for differences in socioeconomic characteristics.

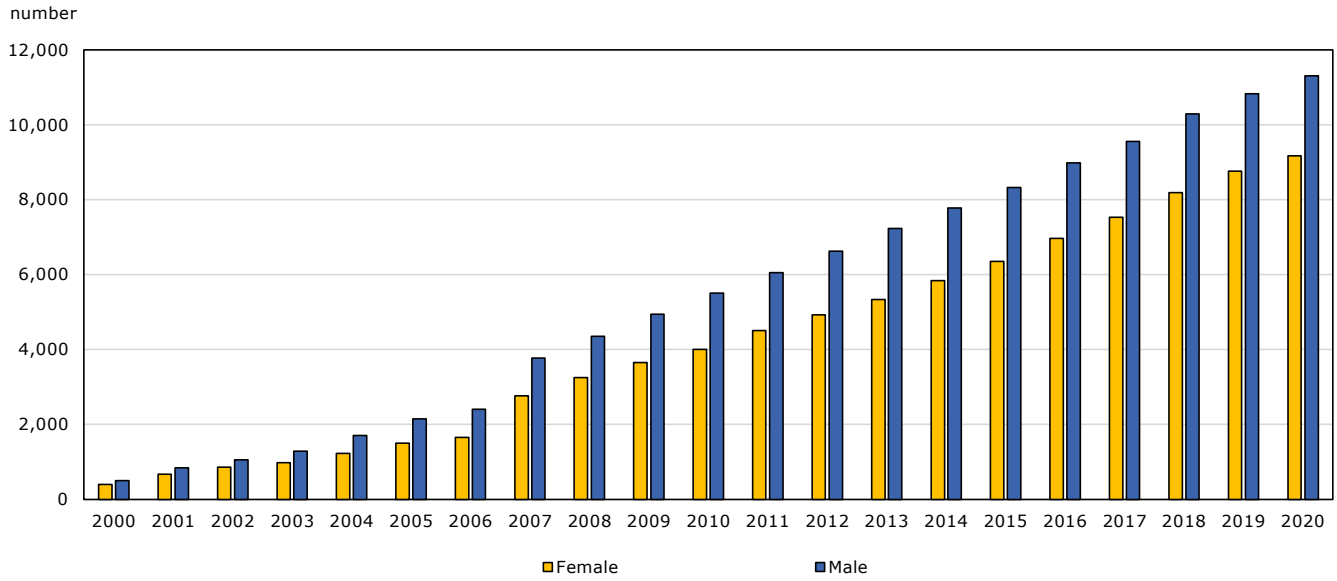
Results

Chart 1 shows the number of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples who filed taxes in Canada from 2000 to 2020 by sex. Over the 20-year period, the number of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples increased from approximately 900 in 2000 to 20,470 by 2020. Disaggregated data by sex showed that the number of male working-age immigrants in same-sex couples was slightly higher than that of

5. While the T1FF processing imputes opposite-sex couples who did not identify each other on their tax forms but lived together, this is not done for same-sex couples. Same-sex partners need to report each other to be part of a same-sex couple. In 2020, overall, less than 1% of all T1FF records (children and adults) had their sex information imputed. Among couple families, about 1.4% of adults had their sex information imputed.
6. As a robustness check, a sensitivity analysis was conducted with the 2016 and 2021 census data. Although not directly comparable because of differences in data sources (i.e., survey versus administrative data) and the introduction of the gender concept in the 2021 Census, the results revealed a largely similar pattern between males and females in same- and opposite-sex couples for employment incidence and employment income, except for one noted difference for employment incidence between males and females in same-sex couples. For example, in the 2016 IMDB data, 82.5% of males and 80.5% of females in same-sex couples had an employment incidence, while in the 2016 Census data, the figures were higher, at 83.2% for males and 86.1% for females, suggesting an opposite trend. These differences highlight the importance of replication studies and acknowledging data limitations.
7. This study could not compare whether immigrants were employed or not employed as measured, for example, in the Labour Force Survey. Furthermore, the use of the same-sex variable on the T1FF restricts the sample to those who filed income taxes.

their female counterparts in earlier years (e.g., 400 females versus 500 males in 2000). By 2020, there were 9,170 females compared with 11,300 males, representing a similar ratio as in 2000.

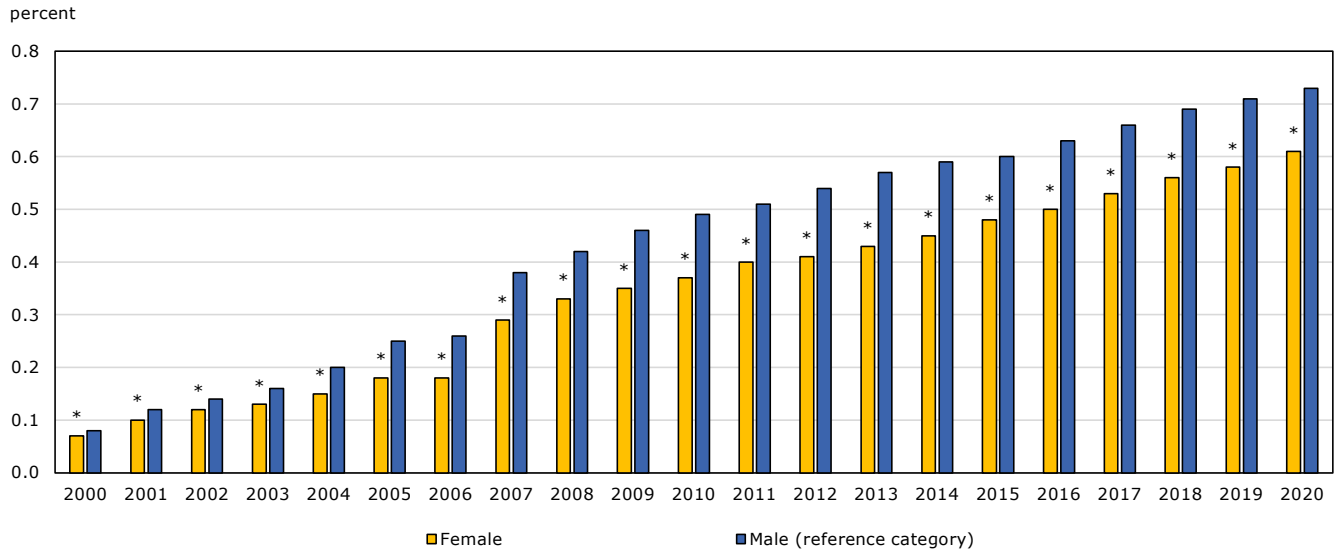
Chart 1
Number of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples, by year and sex



Source: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2000 to 2020.

Chart 2 presents the proportion of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples from 2000 to 2020 among all married or common-law working-age immigrants. In 2000, 0.1% of working-age immigrants reported being in same-sex couples, steadily increasing over time. By 2020, about 0.7% of all working-age immigrants were in same-sex married or common-law couples. Overall, the percentage of male and female working-age immigrants in same-sex couples increased over time, and there were consistently more males than females in this population group.

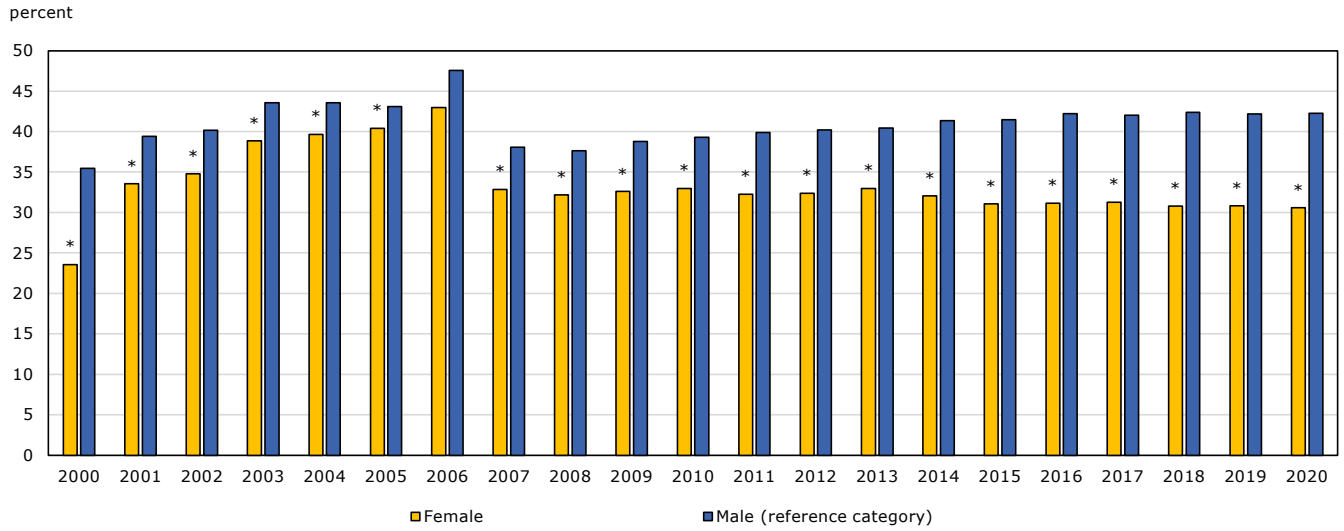
Chart 2
Percentage of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples, by year and sex



* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)
Source: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2000 to 2020.

The proportions of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples with a non-immigrant partner are presented in Chart 3. The percentage of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples with a non-immigrant partner increased from 23.6% in 2000 to 43.0% in 2006 for females and from 35.5% to 47.6% for males. However, after 2006, the percentage of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples with a non-immigrant partner declined and remained steady for males (about 40%) and females (about 30%) in the remaining years. Comparison tests revealed that significantly more male working-age immigrants, compared with female working-age immigrants, reported being in same-sex couples with a non-immigrant partner (except in 2006). While the lowest difference between male and female working-age immigrants who reported being in same-sex couples with a non-immigrant partner was 2.7 percentage points in 2005, the highest difference (about 12 percentage points) was observed in 2020. Overall, more male than female working-age immigrants in same-sex couples had non-immigrant partners from 2000 to 2020.

Chart 3
Percentage of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples with a non-immigrant partner, by year and sex



* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)
Source: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2000 to 2020.

Table 1 presents the distribution of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples by province and territory and location of residence. Location of residence was categorized as Toronto, Vancouver, Montréal (the three largest CMAs), medium CMAs (population greater than 500,000), small CMAs (population from 100,000 to 500,000), small urban areas (census agglomerations [CAs]) and rural areas (outside a CMA or CA.)[8,9] Some CMA or CA boundaries changed across the study period. To address this issue, this study uses consistent 2016 CMA and CA boundaries. Ontario had the largest proportion (about 40%) of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples, followed by British Columbia, Quebec, the Prairies, Atlantic Canada and the territories. However, over the years, the proportions of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples in Ontario and British Columbia have slightly decreased, while the proportions of those residing in Atlantic Canada and the Prairies have increased. For example, in 2000, 28.4% of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples lived in British Columbia, and this percentage steadily declined over time, dropping to 22.1% by 2020. In contrast, the share of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples living in the Prairies doubled, rising from 7.3% in 2000 to 14.5% by 2020.

8. This paper followed the classification of the location of residence in the study by Kaida et al., (2020), as they accounted for the boundary changes of CMAs and CAs over time by constructing consistent boundaries using the IMDB.
9. Analyses used the longitudinal conversion file created by the Social Analysis and Modelling Division, Statistics Canada.

When location of residence was considered, a similar pattern was observed. The highest proportions of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples were living in Toronto (about 30%), followed by Vancouver (about 20%). Throughout the years, the proportions of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples living in Toronto and Vancouver steadily declined while increasing in medium and small CMAs and other areas. For instance, in 2000, 25.8% of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples were living in Vancouver; however, by 2020, this percentage declined 9 percentage points to 16.8%. Meanwhile, in 2000, 1.9% of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples were residing in other areas (e.g., small urban areas); by 2020, this figure more than doubled to 5.4%. Overall, a relatively high proportion of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples lived in Ontario and British Columbia, including their respective CMAs. However, over time, this proportion steadily declined, indicating a shift towards other geographical areas.

Table 1
Proportion of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples, by province or territory and location of residence

	Year																				
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
	percentage																				
Province or territory																					
Atlantic Canada	1.9	2.3	2.3	2.0	2.2	2.3	2.2	2.0	2.2	2.3	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.3	2.5	2.4	2.6	2.7	2.9
Quebec	19.2	18.3	17.8	18.6	19.5	20.4	22.0	18.3	18.2	18.5	19.1	19.5	20.3	20.7	20.4	19.9	20.1	19.7	19.7	19.0	18.8
Ontario	42.4	44.5	44.9	44.7	44.6	44.5	43.2	46.7	45.9	45.7	45.0	44.4	43.5	42.3	41.8	41.3	41.0	41.0	41.0	41.2	41.2
Prairies	7.3	6.6	6.3	6.2	6.6	6.4	7.1	8.7	9.1	9.2	9.6	10.3	10.9	11.8	12.4	13.2	13.7	14.3	14.7	14.7	14.5
British Columbia	28.4	27.9	28.2	27.5	25.9	24.8	24.7	23.4	23.7	23.4	23.0	22.7	22.4	22.2	22.0	21.9	21.7	21.8	21.4	21.7	22.1
Territories	0.8	0.5	0.5	1.1	1.2	1.7	0.9	1.0	0.8	0.9	1.0	1.0	0.7	0.8	1.3	1.3	1.0	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.6
Location of residence (2016 boundaries)																					
Montréal CMA	16.4	14.9	14.5	15.0	15.9	16.9	18.6	15.6	15.5	15.4	16.0	16.1	16.6	17.0	16.8	16.4	16.7	16.2	16.1	15.4	15.1
Toronto CMA	33.2	35.5	35.7	33.6	33.8	33.0	32.4	36.4	35.1	34.7	33.9	33.4	32.6	31.4	31.4	31.1	30.6	30.0	30.1	29.9	29.1
Vancouver CMA	25.8	24.1	23.7	23.0	21.2	19.9	19.6	18.6	18.7	18.4	18.1	17.9	17.5	17.4	17.2	17.2	16.9	16.9	16.5	16.5	16.8
Medium CMA	14.0	12.2	11.7	12.7	12.5	12.4	12.8	13.0	13.0	13.3	13.5	14.1	14.6	15.2	15.5	16.3	16.5	16.9	17.3	17.5	17.7
Small CMA	5.9	7.7	8.2	8.5	9.3	9.7	8.6	8.9	9.3	9.4	9.6	9.4	9.2	9.3	9.0	9.1	9.3	9.6	9.8	10.3	10.6
Small urban area	1.9	2.4	3.0	3.3	3.2	3.7	3.5	3.1	4.0	4.1	4.4	4.3	4.5	4.8	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.3	5.4	5.5	5.4
Rural area	2.9	3.3	3.2	4.0	4.3	4.3	4.6	4.4	4.4	4.7	4.6	4.8	5.0	4.9	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.9	5.0	5.4

Note: CMA stands for census metropolitan area.
Source: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2000 to 2020.

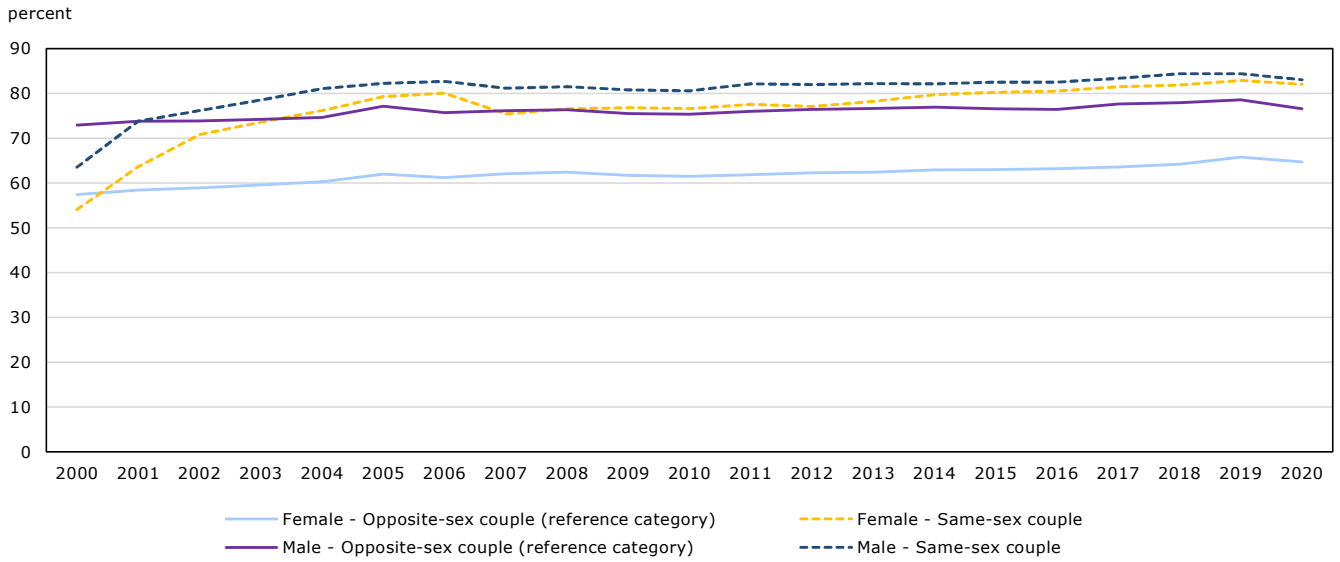
Charts 4 and 5 present the economic characteristics of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples, compared with those of their counterparts in opposite-sex couples. Chart 4 shows the annual employment incidence—tax filers who reported over $500[10] in employment income in a given tax year (in 2020 constant dollars)—of immigrants in same- and opposite-sex couples by sex. Regardless of sex or couple status, employment incidence increased from 2000 to 2020, except in 2020, when there was a slight decrease from 2019. Across this period, male working-age immigrants in same-sex couples had a higher employment incidence than their female counterparts. Notably, the gap was largest in 2000 (about 9 percentage points) and 2001 (about 10 percentage points), and lowest in 2020 (about 1 percentage point). Likewise, as expected, males in opposite-sex couples consistently had a higher employment incidence than females in opposite-sex couples from 2000 to 2020.

Chart 4 also allows a within-sex comparison of employment incidence between same- and opposite-sex couples across the years. There was a higher employment incidence among female working-age immigrants in same-sex couples, compared with their counterparts in opposite-sex couples, across all years (except in 2000), with a continuously increasing gap across the years. For example, in 2001, 63.6% of female working-age immigrants in same-sex couples had an employment incidence, compared with 58.5% of females in opposite-sex couples (a gap of 5.2 percentage points). In 2020, the figures were 82.0% and 64.7%, respectively (a gap of 17.3 percentage points).

10. This definition of employment incidence is consistent with previous research (Hou et al., 2020; Hou & Picot, 2022).

A similar pattern with a much smaller gap was observed among male working-age immigrants across all years (except in 2000 and 2001). In 2002, 76.2% of male working-age immigrants in same-sex couples had an employment incidence, compared with 73.9% of males in opposite-sex couples (a gap of 2.3 percentage points). In 2020, the gap between these two groups was about 6.5 percentage points. Taken together, working-age immigrants in same-sex couples generally had a higher employment incidence, compared with their counterparts in opposite-sex couples, regardless of their sex. However, the gap was more pronounced for females than for males.

Chart 4
Employment incidence of working-age immigrants in same-sex and opposite-sex couples, by year and sex



Source: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2000 to 2020.

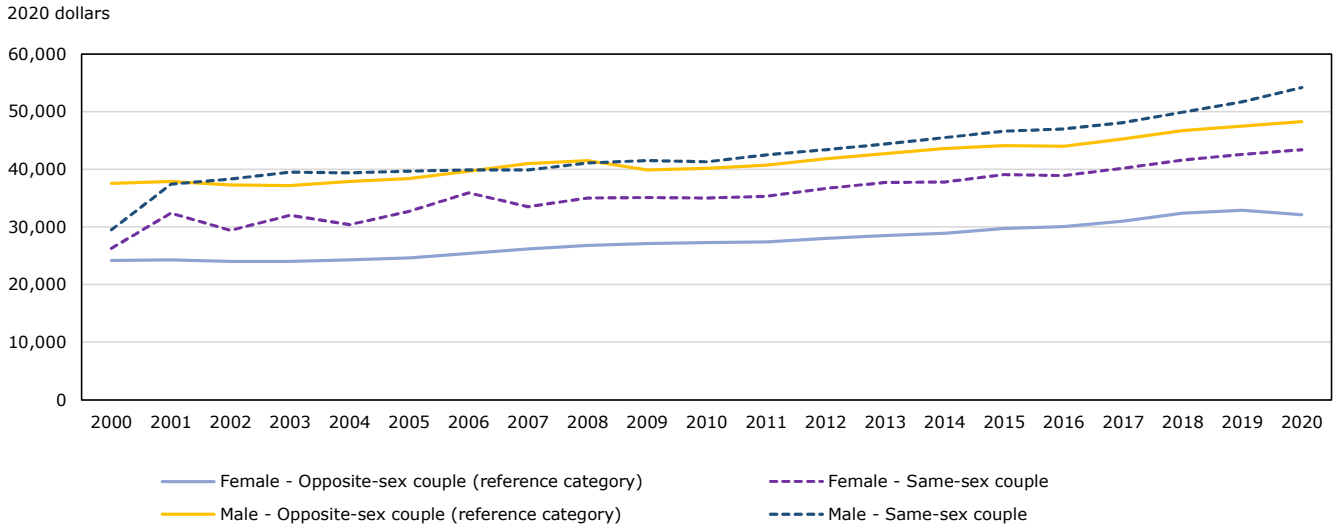
Chart 5 shows the median employment income (in 2020 constant dollars) of working-age immigrants in same-sex and opposite-sex couples by year and sex. Regardless of the sex composition of the couple, male working-age immigrants had higher median employment income across all years, compared with female working-age immigrants. For example, in 2020, the median employment income among female working-age immigrants was about $32,100 in opposite-sex couples and $43,400 in same-sex couples. In contrast, the figures were higher, at $48,300 and $54,200, respectively, among male working-age immigrants.

Across all years (except in 2000), female working-age immigrants in same-sex couples consistently had higher median incomes than their counterparts in opposite-sex couples. For example, in 2006, while the median employment income among female immigrants in same-sex couples was $35,900, it was $25,400 among their counterparts in opposite-sex couples, indicating an income gap of $10,500. In contrast, for males, differences between those in same-sex couples and opposite-sex couples were inconsistent. Only after 2011 did male working-age immigrants in same-sex couples consistently have higher median employment incomes than their counterparts in opposite-sex couples. The largest median employment income gap was observed in 2020, when male working-age immigrants in same-sex couples had a median employment income of $54,200, while their counterparts in opposite-sex couples had a $48,300 median employment income (a $5,900 difference).

Overall, working-age immigrants in same-sex couples had higher median employment income than their counterparts in opposite-sex couples. However, this difference was more prominent and consistent

across all years (except in 2000) among females, while differences among males were consistently observed after 2011.

Chart 5
Median employment income of working-age immigrants in same-sex and opposite-sex couples, by year and sex



Source: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2000 to 2020.

As shown in Appendix A, the sociodemographic characteristics of working-age immigrants in same-sex and opposite-sex couples varied. When compared with immigrants in opposite-sex couples, immigrants in same-sex couples were slightly younger across all years, except in 2000. The gap was largest in 2019 and 2020, when it was 4.7 years. Immigrants in same-sex couples had higher levels of education than those in opposite-sex couples.[11] For example, a greater share of immigrants in same-sex couples had a graduate degree across all years, with the smallest gap in 2020 (about 4 percentage points) and the largest gap in 2001 and 2004 (about 10 percentage points). Immigrants in same-sex couples were also more likely to enter through the Provincial Nominee Program across all years. However, except from 2001 to 2006, immigrants in same-sex couples were less likely to enter through the Federal Skilled Worker Program or the Canadian Experience Class. Same-sex immigrants had a lower proportion of refugees across all years and were more likely to know an official language across all years, except in 2000. In 2020, the top countries of origin for same-sex immigrants were the United States, France, the United Kingdom, China and the Philippines, whereas the top countries for opposite-sex immigrants were India, China, the Philippines, the United Kingdom and Pakistan.

Given these sociodemographic differences, a set of ordinary least squares models[12] was conducted to examine the extent to which compositional differences in these population groups were associated with differences in employment incidence (Appendix B) and employment income (Appendix C).[13]

11. Across the study period, the highest share of imputed education values was 5.3% for immigrants in same-sex couples and 3.5% for immigrants in opposite-sex couples.
12. Because the data were pooled across the years, the most recent employment incidence and income were analyzed.
13. Marginal probability effects from logit regression models were also estimated and yielded nearly identical results. These results are not included in this paper; however, they are available from the authors upon request. Given that the ordinary least squares models achieved the same results as the marginal effects from logit and probit models, the ordinary least squares models were presented for simplicity.

Results showed that after considering the effects of age, education, entry class, country of origin and knowledge of official languages, the gap in employment incidence between same-sex and opposite-sex couples was reduced by 86% for males and 42% for females but remained significant. These findings suggested that male and female immigrants in same-sex couples had a higher employment incidence than those in opposite-sex couples even after considering their sociodemographic characteristics.

Similar to employment incidence, when accounting for those sociodemographic characteristics, the gap in employment income between female immigrants in same- and opposite-sex couples was reduced by 23%. However, the results for males showed a reverse pattern. After the effects of sociodemographic characteristics were considered, male immigrants in same-sex couples had lower employment income than their counterparts in opposite-sex couples. While these results revealed the importance of accounting for compositional differences in analysis, they also indicated that male immigrants in same-sex couples had sociodemographic characteristics that led to higher employment income, compared with male immigrants in opposite-sex couples. For example, as shown in Appendix A, immigrants in same-sex couples were more likely to have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with immigrants in opposite-sex couples.

Conclusion

Research examining the sociodemographic and economic characteristics of immigrants in same-sex couples in Canada is relatively new and growing. The previous research conducted on same-sex couples and immigrants in same-sex couples in Canada has been largely limited to cross-sectional data that provide temporal information or has relied on a single year of Canadian census data. A major strength of this study is the use of the IMDB, a longitudinal administrative data source that includes all landing records and tax records on employment incidence and income for each year. As such, the IMDB provides a robust data source to explore the socioeconomic characteristics of immigrants in same-sex couples in Canada over time.

Consistent with previous research (Statistics Canada, 2022b), this study finds an increasing trend in the number of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples in the past two decades, from approximately 900 in 2000 to 20,040 by 2020. Further disaggregation by sex indicated that there were more male (about 55% to 60%) than female (about 40% to 45%) working-age immigrants in same-sex couples across the 20-year period. These findings are consistent with a previous report (Statistics Canada, 2017) indicating that, in Canada's 2001 Census, 55.5% of same-sex couples were male and 44.5% were female. By 2016, there were slightly more male (51.9%) than female (48.1%) same-sex couples, a difference that has steadily narrowed with each census (Statistics Canada, 2017).

This study further sheds light on the proportion of immigrants in same-sex couples with a non-immigrant partner. Consistent with previous work (Statistics Canada, 2017), same-sex couples represented 0.9% of all couples in Canada in later years. Furthermore, more male than female working-age immigrants reported having a same-sex partner who was a non-immigrant (e.g., 42.3% versus 30.6% in 2020).

Regarding the location of residence, immigrants in same-sex couples were mostly living in Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec, and, more specifically, the CMAs of Toronto, Vancouver and Montréal. This finding was expected, as these three provinces were the first to legalize same-sex marriage before the nationwide legalization of same-sex marriage in 2005. Additionally, these results were consistent with previous research showing that over 90% of recent immigrants in 2021 lived in one of Canada's 41 CMAs, and over the past 50 years, Toronto, Vancouver and Montréal were the top CMAs to welcome the most immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2022b).

Examining the economic outcomes of immigrants in same-sex couples in Canada is necessary as positive economic outcomes have been linked to having a better quality of life (Bor et al., 2017; Eikemo et al., 2008; Hu et al., 2016; Mackenbach, et al., 2008; Zhang & Xiang, 2019). This study found that male working-age immigrants (over 70%), regardless of their opposite- or same-sex status of couple family, had a higher employment incidence compared with female immigrants (over 50%), in all years. Female immigrants in same-sex couples had a higher employment incidence than females in opposite-sex couples (e.g., 82.0% versus 64.7% in 2020). This pattern was also observed among males, where those in same-sex couples had a higher employment incidence than males in opposite-sex couples (e.g., 83.0%versus 76.5% in 2020). Notably, these within-sex differences were larger for females than they were for males, suggesting that female working-age immigrants in same-sex couples may have a greater advantage in employment incidence over their counterparts in opposite-sex couples.

This study also showed that female working-age immigrants in same-sex couples earned significantly more than their counterparts in opposite-sex couples across all years (except in 2000). Furthermore, male working-age immigrants in same-sex couples earned $29,500 in 2000, while their counterparts in opposite-sex couples earned $37,600 in 2000. In later years (after 2011), male working-age immigrants in same-sex couples reported significantly higher median employment income than those in opposite-sex couples (e.g., $54,200 versus $48,300 in 2020), and the income gap seemed to grow throughout the years (about a $6,000 difference by 2020). Overall, this study demonstrated that using multi-year administrative data can show trends in economic outcomes that may be overlooked when examining data that are limited to a single year.

Another important consideration in this study was exploring the observed differences in labour market outcomes after accounting for compositional differences. The findings revealed that after considering several sociodemographic characteristics, the pattern of results largely remained the same, except for differences in employment income between male working-age immigrants in same- and opposite-sex couples. Specifically, a reverse pattern was observed. Male immigrants in same-sex couples had lower employment income than their opposite-sex counterparts. Taken together, the results highlighted the importance of considering compositional differences in analysis for a more appropriate interpretation of findings.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, this study could not examine the sexual orientation of immigrants because data on sexual orientation are not available in the IMDB (or in the census). However, recent research has shown that data on the sex composition of couples is relevant to study given the potential overlap with sexual orientation (see Yang et al., 2024).

Second, this study considered only those who were married or in common-law relationships, as the IMDB does not have a variable that considers immigrants in other types of relationships, such as individuals not living in common-law. Third, the type of employment status was not available in the IMDB file, and this study could not differentiate between full-time and part-time, or full-year and partial-year, employment status. Despite these limitations, this study was the first to explore the sociodemographic and economic characteristics of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples over time by using longitudinal administrative data sources to provide a depiction of the employment incidence and income of working-age immigrants in the past two decades. Future research could further explore factors that may contribute to income disparities among working-age immigrants in same-sex couples across different populations (e.g., Black and Latin American populations), occupations and industry groups.

Appendix A

Demographic composition of working-age immigrants in same-sex and opposite-sex couples

	Year																				
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
	percentage																				
Same-sex couples																					
Age (mean)	46.8	43.5	43.4	43.0	42.0	41.9	42.0	43.8	44.0	44.1	44.2	44.4	44.6	44.7	44.7	44.8	44.9	45.0	45.1	45.1	45.8
Education																					
Less than high school	43.7	28.6	26.8	23.0	21.1	19.7	17.4	22.3	21.1	20.2	19.4	19.3	19.1	18.8	18.9	19.2	19.2	19.9	21.2	21.7	22.1
High school or trade	19.7	20.2	20.1	19.8	18.9	18.9	18.2	17.1	16.9	16.9	16.7	16.3	16.2	15.9	16.0	15.8	15.6	15.7	15.3	14.9	14.5
Some postsecondary	8.9	10.1	10.6	11.6	12.2	12.4	13.1	12.3	12.5	12.9	12.9	12.9	12.7	12.7	12.1	12.0	11.6	11.3	10.9	10.5	10.5
Bachelor's degree	16.3	23.5	25.3	27.6	29.0	30.3	31.9	31.6	32.6	32.6	33.4	33.5	34.0	34.1	34.7	35.1	35.7	35.5	35.4	35.9	36.0
Graduate degree	11.5	17.6	17.2	18.0	18.8	18.7	19.4	16.6	16.9	17.4	17.6	18.0	18.1	18.5	18.2	18.0	17.9	17.5	17.3	17.1	16.9
Entry class																					
Provincial Nominee Program	8.9	9.0	8.9	10.2	11.5	11.7	12.4	10.7	11.4	12.3	13.4	14.3	15.0	16.9	17.1	18.4	19.1	19.2	19.4	19.6	19.9
Federal Skilled Worker Program or Canadian Experience Class	36.8	51.0	50.6	50.2	46.9	44.6	42.8	39.2	38.5	37.2	36.4	35.5	35.0	33.5	32.8	31.8	30.8	30.2	29.8	29.3	29.7
Other economic	9.7	8.3	7.7	7.1	6.1	4.9	4.8	5.7	5.7	5.6	5.7	5.5	5.1	5.1	5.3	5.6	5.6	5.7	5.7	5.8	5.9
Family	30.0	20.7	22.4	23.0	26.4	28.8	31.3	35.0	35.5	36.2	36.6	36.9	37.0	37.1	37.2	36.8	37.5	38.0	38.3	38.8	38.2
Refugee	10.5	8.4	7.9	6.6	6.6	7.9	6.9	7.7	7.2	7.3	6.7	6.7	6.8	6.4	6.7	6.4	6.2	6.2	6.0	5.8	5.7
Other	4.1	2.6	2.5	2.9	2.4	2.1	1.9	1.8	1.6	1.5	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.0	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.8
Country of origin (top 2020 countries)																					
United States	9.7	16.9	17.4	18.2	19.7	19.9	21.9	18.2	19.1	19.3	19.5	18.7	18.4	18.1	17.4	16.6	16.0	15.7	15.4	15.0	14.7
France	7.5	7.9	7.4	8.0	8.4	8.3	8.7	6.5	6.1	6.4	6.7	7.2	7.4	8.1	7.7	7.8	8.2	7.7	7.8	7.4	7.4
United Kingdom	10.6	11.1	10.6	10.7	10.0	9.4	9.1	8.8	8.5	8.5	8.3	8.1	7.8	7.7	7.5	7.3	7.1	7.0	6.8	6.7	6.7
China	14.4	13.0	11.4	10.6	9.2	8.4	7.3	5.6	5.5	5.2	4.9	5.0	5.2	5.3	5.8	5.8	6.3	6.3	6.7	7.0	7.3
Philippines	3.0	4.5	5.1	5.1	5.4	5.6	6.7	7.9	8.3	8.3	8.9	9.5	9.4	10.1	11.0	12.4	13.0	13.5	14.1	14.7	14.8
Knowledge of official languages																					
Other language	37.5	26.2	24.2	20.6	17.7	14.9	12.0	16.5	15.1	14.1	13.1	12.4	12.3	12.0	12.0	11.7	11.5	11.7	11.3	10.5	10.3
English or French	62.5	73.8	75.8	79.4	82.3	85.1	88.0	83.5	85.0	85.9	87.0	87.7	87.7	88.0	88.0	88.3	88.5	88.3	88.7	89.5	89.7
	2020 dollars																				
Median employment income	28,300	35,200	34,900	36,000	36,000	36,700	38,400	37,200	38,500	39,000	38,400	39,200	40,500	41,300	41,900	42,500	43,200	44,300	45,500	47,200	48,800

Source: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2000 to 2020.

Appendix A

Demographic composition of working-age immigrants in same-sex and opposite-sex couples (continued)

	Year																				
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
	percentage																				
Opposite-sex couples																					
Age (mean)	44.6	44.8	45.0	45.3	45.6	45.9	46.1	46.4	46.7	47.0	47.2	47.5	47.8	48.1	48.3	48.5	48.8	49.1	49.4	49.8	50.4
Education																					
Less than high school	40.3	38.7	37.3	36.2	35.0	34.1	33.0	32.3	31.6	31.1	30.4	29.8	29.3	29.0	28.8	28.7	28.9	29.4	29.9	30.3	30.5
High school or trade	20.3	19.6	19.1	18.7	18.4	17.9	17.6	17.3	17.0	16.8	16.5	16.3	16.1	15.9	15.8	15.6	15.4	15.4	15.1	15.0	14.9
Some postsecondary	9.2	9.4	9.5	9.7	9.9	10.1	10.3	10.5	10.8	10.9	11.0	11.1	11.1	11.1	11.0	10.8	10.6	10.5	10.3	10.1	10.1
Bachelor's degree	23.1	24.6	25.9	26.8	27.7	28.5	29.1	29.6	30.0	30.4	30.8	31.2	31.5	31.7	31.9	32.1	32.1	32.0	31.9	31.8	31.7
Graduate degree	7.3	7.8	8.2	8.6	9.0	9.4	10.0	10.3	10.6	10.8	11.3	11.6	12.0	12.3	12.6	12.8	12.9	12.8	12.8	12.8	12.8
Entry class																					
Provincial Nominee Program	2.6	3.1	3.8	4.4	5.2	6.1	7.0	8.1	9.3	10.5	11.6	12.7	13.9	14.9	16.0	16.7	17.2	17.8	18.3	18.6	18.8
Federal Skilled Worker Program or Canadian Experience Class	39.6	40.5	41.1	41.1	41.2	41.0	41.0	40.4	39.7	39.0	38.5	38.0	37.5	37.0	36.4	35.8	35.2	34.5	34.2	34.1	34.2
Other economic	9.7	9.2	8.8	8.5	8.2	8.0	7.8	7.8	7.8	7.8	7.7	7.7	7.6	7.4	7.4	7.4	7.2	7.1	7.0	6.8	6.8
Family	31.0	30.3	29.9	29.8	29.6	29.5	29.3	29.1	28.9	28.8	28.5	28.3	28.0	28.0	27.9	27.9	27.9	28.0	28.0	28.0	27.8
Refugee	15.4	15.0	14.7	14.4	14.1	13.8	13.4	13.1	12.8	12.5	12.2	12.0	11.7	11.4	11.2	11.0	11.3	11.4	11.4	11.3	11.3
Other	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.7	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2
Country of origin (top 2020 countries)																					
India	8.7	9.1	9.5	9.7	9.9	10.2	10.5	10.6	10.7	10.8	11.0	11.2	11.4	11.7	11.9	12.3	12.6	13.0	13.7	14.4	14.7
China	8.8	9.6	10.1	10.5	10.8	11.2	11.4	11.3	11.3	11.3	11.3	11.3	11.5	11.5	11.5	11.4	11.3	11.2	11.1	11.0	10.9
Philippines	6.3	6.3	6.4	6.5	6.6	6.9	7.0	7.4	8.0	8.4	8.9	9.2	9.5	9.7	9.9	10.3	10.3	10.4	10.4	10.4	10.4
United Kingdom	11.2	10.6	10.0	9.6	9.2	8.8	8.4	8.1	7.8	7.6	7.3	7.0	6.8	6.6	6.3	6.1	5.9	5.7	5.6	5.4	5.3
Pakistan	2.8	3.1	3.4	3.5	3.7	3.7	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.6	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7
Knowledge of official languages																					
Other language	35.7	35.6	35.3	35.0	34.3	33.8	32.7	31.7	30.7	29.8	29.0	28.2	27.6	27.2	26.6	26.0	25.7	25.2	24.5	23.9	23.5
English or French	64.3	64.4	64.7	65.0	65.7	66.2	67.3	68.3	69.3	70.2	71.1	71.8	72.4	72.8	73.4	74.0	74.4	74.8	75.5	76.1	76.5
	2020 dollars																				
Median employment income	30,900	31,100	30,700	30,700	31,200	31,500	32,600	33,700	34,300	33,700	33,900	34,200	35,000	35,700	36,300	37,000	37,200	38,100	39,500	40,100	40,400

Source: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2000 to 2020.

Appendix B

Predicting employment incidence (most recent incidence) of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples by sex

	Male				Female			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	regression coefficient	standard error	regression coefficient	standard error	regression coefficient	standard error	regression coefficient	standard error
Intercept	0.702 *	0.004	1.330 *	0.002	0.597 *	0.000	1.026 *	0.002
Status of couple family								
Opposite-sex couple (reference category)	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Same-sex couple	0.120 *	0.004	0.017 *	0.003	0.216 *	0.004	0.125 *	0.004
Education								
Less than high school (reference category)	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
High school or trade	...	...	0.041 *	0.001	...	...	0.069 *	0.001
Some postsecondary	...	...	0.047 *	0.001	...	...	0.092 *	0.001
Bachelor's degree	...	...	0.041 *	0.001	...	...	0.088 *	0.001
Graduate degree	...	...	0.023 *	0.001	...	...	0.093 *	0.001
Knowledge of official languages								
Other language	...	...	-0.051 *	0.001	...	...	-0.069 *	0.001
English or French (reference category)	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Region								
Europe	...	...	0.063 *	0.001	...	...	0.068 *	0.002
Africa and Middle East	...	...	0.034 *	0.001	...	...	-0.021 *	0.002
South Asia	...	...	0.073 *	0.001	...	...	0.028 *	0.002
East Asia			-0.031 *	0.001			-0.002 *	0.002
Other Asia and Oceania	...	...	0.156 *	0.001	...	...	0.186 *	0.002
South and Central America	...	...	0.111 *	0.002	...	...	0.126 *	0.002
United States and other (reference category)	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Entry class								
Provincial Nominee Program (reference category)	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Federal Skilled Worker Program or Canadian Experience Class	...	...	-0.024 *	0.001	...	...	-0.016 *	0.001
Other economic	...	...	-0.130 *	0.001	...	...	-0.043 *	0.001
Family	...	...	-0.056 *	0.001	...	...	-0.080 *	0.001
Refugee	...	...	-0.028 *	0.001	...	...	-0.058 *	0.001
Other	...	...	-0.053 *	0.002	...	...	-0.086 *	0.003
Age								
Age	...	...	-0.013 *	0.000	...	...	-0.010 *	0.002

... not applicable

* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2000 to 2020.

Appendix C

Predicting employment income (most recent income) of working-age immigrants in same-sex couples by sex

	Male				Female			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	regression coefficient	standard error	regression coefficient	standard error	regression coefficient	standard error	regression coefficient	standard error
Intercept	52,876.81 *	65.15	65,819.32 *	460.57	33,127.47 *	30.91	26,644.46 *	225.57
Status of couple family								
Opposite-sex couple (reference category)	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Same-sex couple	3,334.11 *	693.04	-2,662.52 *	674.75	12,512.15 *	340.98	9,678.50 *	328.41
Education								
Less than high school (reference category)	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
High school or trade	...	...	-553.48 *	199.00	...	...	1,175.64 *	98.01
Some postsecondary	...	...	111.12	237.75	...	...	2,237.79 *	106.77
Bachelor's degree	...	...	9,399.74 *	172.50	...	...	7,224.06 *	79.49
Graduate degree	...	...	20,154.26 *	215.77	...	...	13,089.54 *	106.04
Knowledge of official languages								
Other language	...	...	-11,060.63 *	183.17	...	...	-7,211.83 *	81.08
English or French (reference category)	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Region								
Europe	...	...	-17,760.09 *	341.30	...	...	-8,152.26 *	165.79
Africa and Middle East	...	...	-37,547.28 *	339.11	...	...	-16,602.87 *	167.99
South Asia	...	...	-39,080.78 *	338.78	...	...	-19,270.09 *	166.99
East Asia			-43,403.79 *	366.48			-16,037.05 *	171.19
Other Asia and Oceania	...	...	-34,423.07 *	359.32	...	...	-13,363.06 *	169.85
South and Central America	...	...	-31,309.92 *	363.24	...	...	-12,654.86 *	175.13
United States and other (reference category)	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Entry class								
Provincial Nominee Program (reference category)	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Federal Skilled Worker Program or Canadian Experience Class	...	...	13,963.48 *	179.21	...	...	8,564.47 *	88.32
Other economic	...	...	-11,986.90 *	349.08	...	...	-2,275.81 *	130.59
Family	...	...	-6,788.94 *	195.52	...	...	-2,799.75 *	89.52
Refugee	...	...	-11,406.46 *	243.64	...	...	-2,253.90 *	130.65
Other	...	...	-12,190.44 *	574.20	...	...	-5,908.12 *	289.12
Age								
Age	...	...	294.80 *	6.20	...	...	340.82 *	3.07

... not applicable

* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2000 to 2020.

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