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Prevalence of low income among persons in one-parent families headed by an immigrant parent: An intersectional analysis

by Tia Carpino

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Prevalence of low income among persons in one-parent families headed by an immigrant parent: An intersectional analysis

by Tia Carpino

Highlights

- In 2021, most parents in one-parent families (OPFs) with children aged 17 years and younger were women. This was true for both immigrant and non-immigrant non-Indigenous parents in OPFs, although women's representation among parents in OPFs was greater among immigrant parents (82.5%) than among non-immigrant parents (75.5%)
- According to the 2021 Census, the prevalence of low income in 2020 was almost four times higher among persons in OPFs (26.0%) than among persons in couple families with children (6.7%). The prevalence of low income was even higher among persons in OPFs headed by a woman (27.4%), compared with persons in OPFs headed by a man (21.1%). In addition to the parent's gender, the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs varied by the immigrant status of the parent. Persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman (26.5%) were most likely to be in low income, followed by persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman (24.1%), immigrant man (21.4%) and non-immigrant man (18.5%).
- In addition to the gender and immigrant status of the parent, the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs varied by other characteristics of the parent, such as period of immigration, admission category, racialized group, age group, marital status and educational attainment, as well as characteristics of the family and household.
 - ▶ For example, the gender gap in the prevalence of low income observed among persons in OPFs headed by a recent immigrant parent was greater than the gender gap observed among persons in OPFs headed by an established immigrant parent. Further, persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman aged 15 to 24 years were about three times more likely to be in low income than their counterparts in OPFs headed by an immigrant man in the same age group.
 - ▶ Persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman were not always more likely to be in low income than persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman. For example, about one-third of persons in OPFs headed by a woman with young children in the family were in low income, irrespective of the woman's immigrant status.
 - ▶ Persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman aged 25 to 64 years with a bachelor's degree or higher were more than twice as likely to be in low income than persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman in the same age group with the same credential.

Introduction

The portrait of families in Canada has evolved over the past decades. In the 1960s, the vast majority of children lived with married parents, while very few lived in one-parent families (OPFs)^{1,2} (Galbraith, 2015). However, the share of children in OPFs increased in the later decades of the 20th century and into the new millennium, following a number of societal changes after the baby boom, such as the introduction of the *Divorce Act*, as well as an increase in women's educational attainment and labour force participation (Galbraith, 2015). For example, 6.4% of children aged 24 years and younger lived in OPFs in 1961, whereas the same was true for more than one-fifth (21.5%) of children in 2011 (Galbraith, 2015).

Inequalities exist with respect to the economic well-being of persons in OPFs, compared with persons in couple families with children. Research has shown that persons in OPFs are more likely to live in low income than persons in couple families with children (Galarneau, 2005; Milan, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2017). Persons in OPFs also remain in low income for longer periods and are less likely to exit low income than persons in couple families with children (Drolet & Morissette, 1999; Statistics Canada, 2021). In addition to the gaps in low-income rates observed between persons in OPFs and persons in couple families with children, gaps also exist among persons in OPFs. Specifically, persons in OPFs headed by a woman are more likely to be in low income than persons in OPFs headed by a man (Galarneau, 2005; Milan, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2017).

The higher prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs is not without consequence. Indeed, income is associated with the ability to access the basic necessities of living. Income is also a key social determinant of health, with lower income associated with poor physical and mental health, both among youth and adults (Garriguet, 2021; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018), as well as lower life expectancy and fewer years in good health (Bushnik et al., 2020). Research has also demonstrated the intergenerational effects of growing up in a lower-income family. For example, compared with persons who grow up in families with higher income, persons who grow up in lower-income families are less likely to attend university (Frenette, 2007) or have a university degree (Statistics Canada, 2020). They also have lower family income and are more likely to report being in poor or fair health as adults (Statistics Canada, 2020).

Little research has examined whether the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs differs as a function of not only the gender of the parent, but other characteristics of the parent, including their immigrant status. Research that has examined the prevalence of low income among the total population shows that immigrants (particularly immigrant women) are more likely to be in low income than their non-immigrant counterparts (Hudon, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2022). Research also suggests that immigrants are more likely to be in chronic low income than the Canadian-born population, with immigrant parents in OPFs particularly likely to be in chronic low income (Picot & Lu, 2017).

This study, which uses data from the 2021 Census, employs a gender-based, intersectional approach to examine the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant parent. Other characteristics of the parent (e.g., admission category, period of immigration) and their family and household (e.g., number of children, household type) are also examined to ensure the diverse experiences of persons in OPFs are reflected. It should be noted that, in this study, the unit of analysis for all analyses related to low income is persons in OPFs, rather than the family.

1. Before the 2021 Census, "one-parent families" were referred to as "lone-parent families." For more information, please refer to the *Families, Households and Marital Status Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021*.
2. In the census, two definitions of families exist: the census family and the economic family. In this article, the census family is used. For brevity, "one-parent families" (or OPFs) is used in place of "one-parent census families" throughout the rest of this article. For more information, please refer to the "Data source, methods and definitions" section or the *Families, Households and Marital Status Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021*.

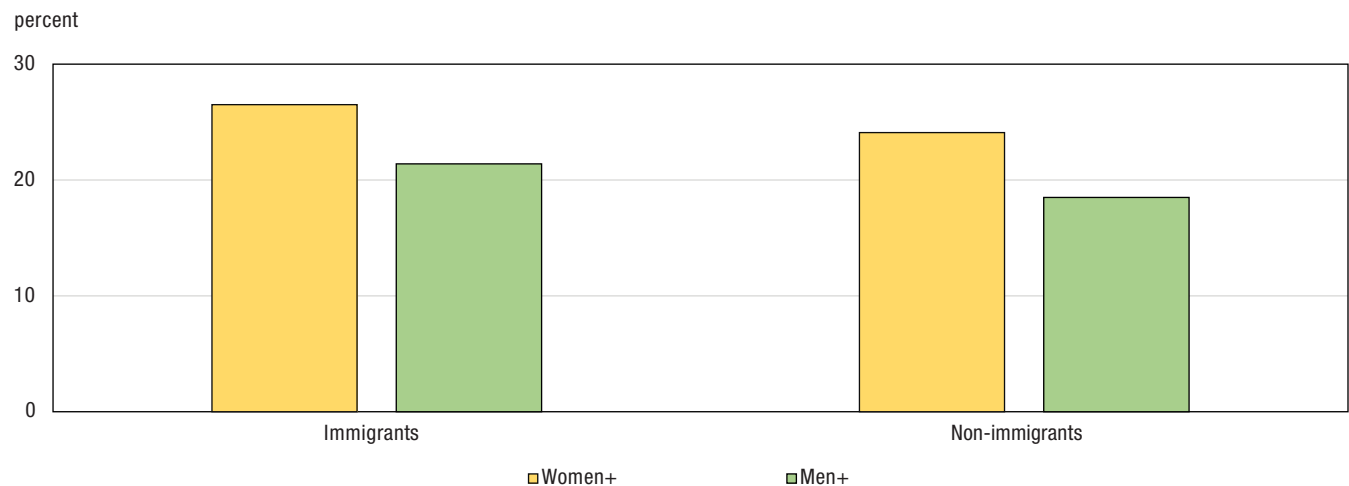
The prevalence of low income is higher among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman

In 2021, the majority (77.8%) of parents in OPFs with children aged 17 years and younger³ were women.⁴ The overrepresentation of women among parents in OPFs held true among both immigrant and non-immigrant non-Indigenous parents,⁵ although it was more pronounced among the former. Specifically, more than four in five immigrant parents in OPFs were women (82.5%), whereas the same was true for three-quarters (75.5%) of non-immigrant parents in OPFs.

In 2020,⁶ 8.2% of persons in all census families in Canada were in low income.⁷ Among persons in families with children aged 17 years and younger, persons in OPFs⁸ (26.0%) were almost four times more likely to be in low income than persons in couple families (6.7%). Persons in OPFs headed by a woman (27.4%) were more likely to be in low income than persons in OPFs headed by a man (21.1%).

In addition to the gender of the parent, the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs varied according to the parent's immigrant status. Persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman were most likely to be in low income (26.5%), followed by persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman (24.1%), immigrant man (21.4%) and non-immigrant man (18.5%; Chart 1).

Chart 1
Prevalence of low income (LIM-AT) among persons in OPFs with children aged 17 years and younger, by gender and immigrant status of parent, 2020



Note: The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary persons, while the category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Even among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant, there were notable variations in the prevalence of low income according to other characteristics (e.g., period of immigration, age, educational attainment) of the parent, as well as characteristics of the family (e.g., presence of young children in the family). Indeed, aggregate statistics on the low-income status of persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant mask the distinct experiences of these families.

- Throughout the rest of this article, all analyses pertaining to parents in OPFs are restricted to parents with children aged 17 years and younger (children aged 18 years and older may also be present). Parents in OPFs with children aged 18 years and older only are excluded from this study.
- This category includes women, as well as some non-binary persons. Readers may refer to the "Note to readers" for more information.
- Indigenous parents are excluded from the comparison group (i.e., non-immigrant parents). Throughout the rest of this article, "non-immigrant non-Indigenous parents" are referred to as "non-immigrant parents" for brevity. Readers may refer to the "Data source, methods and definitions" section for more information.
- For the 2021 Census, the reference period for data on low income is the calendar year 2020.
- It is important to note that low income and poverty are two related but distinct concepts. There are different measures of low income (such as the low-income measures (LIMs), the low-income cut-offs (LICOs), and the Market Basket Measure (MBM)). In this article, low income is measured with the low-income measure, after tax (LIM-AT). Of note, Canada's Official Poverty Line is the MBM. Readers may refer to the "Data source, methods and definitions" section for more information.
- Throughout the rest of this article, all analyses pertaining to persons in OPFs are restricted to persons in OPFs with children aged 17 years and younger (children aged 18 years and older may also be present). Persons in OPFs with children aged 18 years and older only are excluded from this study.

Therefore, the remainder of this article examines how the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs varies as a function of the intersection of these characteristics.

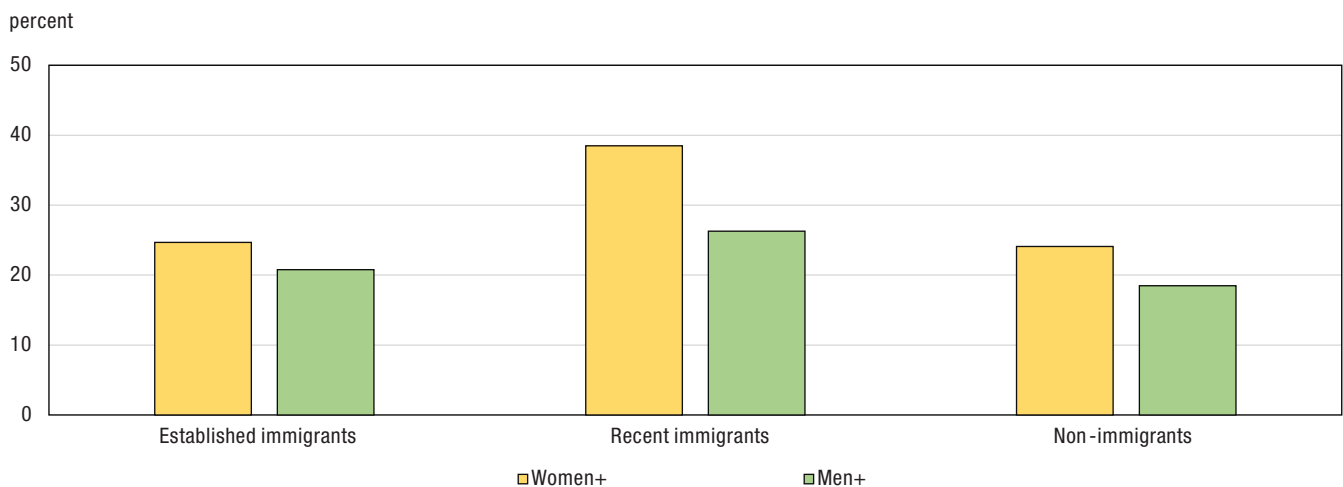
Close to two-fifths of persons in OPFs headed by a recent immigrant woman are in low income

Among immigrant parents in OPFs, 13.8% of mothers and 10.7% of fathers were recent immigrants.^{9,10} The proportion of recent immigrant parents in OPFs who were women (85.9%) was greater than the proportion observed among established immigrant¹¹ parents in OPFs (82.0%).

The gender gap in the prevalence of low income observed among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant parent was larger among persons in OPFs headed by a recent immigrant parent, compared with persons in OPFs headed by an established immigrant parent. Specifically, almost two-fifths (38.5%) of persons in OPFs headed by a recent immigrant woman were in low income in 2020, compared with over one-quarter (26.3%) of persons in OPFs headed by a recent immigrant man, yielding a gap of 12.2 percentage points—a gap that was about three times larger than that observed among persons in OPFs headed by an established immigrant parent (3.9 percentage points; Chart 2).

Chart 2

Prevalence of low income (LIM-AT) among persons in OPFs with children aged 17 years and younger, by gender, immigrant status and period of immigration of parent, 2020



Note: The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary persons, while the category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

The prevalence of low income was notably higher among persons in OPFs headed by a recent immigrant woman (38.5%), compared with persons in OPFs headed by an established immigrant woman (24.7%). This gap was also observed among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant man, albeit to a lesser extent. It is worth highlighting that the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs headed by an established immigrant woman was comparable to that among persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman (24.1%).¹² This suggests that the gap in the prevalence of low income observed between persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman and persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman is largely driven by persons in OPFs headed by a recent immigrant woman.

9. "Recent immigrant" refers to those who have been admitted to the country permanently in the five years preceding a census. In the 2021 Census, this period is January 1, 2016, to May 11, 2021.

10. In comparison, 13.7% of all immigrant women and 14.0% of all immigrant men aged 15 years and older in Canada were recent immigrants.

11. "Established immigrant" refers to those who first obtained landed immigrant or permanent resident status before 2016.

12. This pattern was also observed among persons in OPFs headed by a man.

The prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs headed by an economic immigrant parent is comparable to that among persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant parent

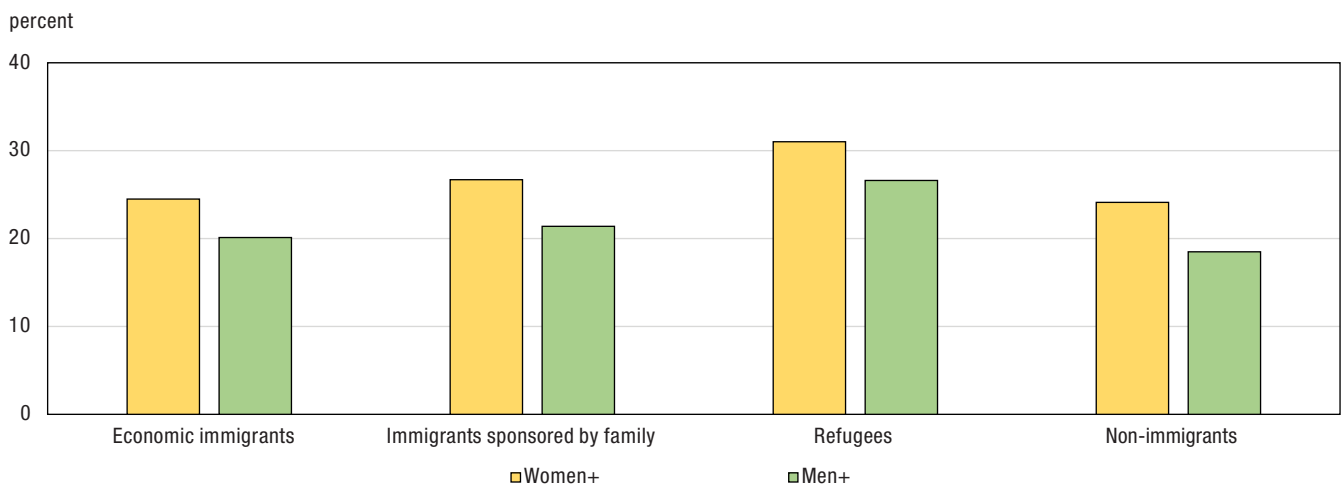
In Canada, the three main admission categories under which an immigrant is granted the right to live in Canada permanently for the first time by immigration authorities are economic immigrants, immigrants sponsored by family and refugees.

In 2021, 38.4% of immigrant mothers and 44.2% of immigrant fathers in OPFs admitted since 1980^{13,14} were admitted under the economic category. Another 37.1% of immigrant mothers and 33.3% of immigrant fathers in OPFs were sponsored by family. More than one-fifth of immigrant mothers (21.9%) and fathers (20.5%) in OPFs were refugees. Compared with all immigrant women and men aged 15 years and older, lower shares of immigrant mothers and fathers in OPFs were admitted under the economic category, whereas higher shares were sponsored by family or admitted as refugees.

Aligned with the pattern observed among the total population, wherein the low-income rate is higher among refugees than among economic immigrants, persons in OPFs headed by a parent admitted as a refugee were more likely to be in low income than persons in OPFs headed by a parent who was an economic immigrant (Chart 3). Across all admission categories, the prevalence of low income was higher for persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman, compared with persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant man. However, the gap was slightly narrower among persons in OPFs headed by a parent who was an economic immigrant (4.4 percentage points) or a refugee (4.4 percentage points) than among persons in OPFs headed by a parent who was sponsored by family (5.3 percentage points).

Chart 3

Prevalence of low income (LIM-AT) among persons in OPFs with children aged 17 years and younger, by gender, immigrant status and admission category of parent, 2020



Note: The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary persons, while the category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

13. In the 2021 Census of Population, data on admission category are available for immigrants who were admitted to Canada between January 1, 1980, and May 11, 2021.

14. Admission category and one-parent status may relate to different reference periods. For example, a person could be admitted to Canada as a refugee as a child, and at the time of the 2021 Census, this person could be a parent in an OPF.

The prevalence of low income was higher among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman who was admitted as a refugee (31.0%) and among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman who was sponsored by family (26.7%), compared with persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman (24.1%). However, this was not the case for persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman admitted under the economic category (24.5%), for whom the prevalence of low income was comparable to that among their counterparts in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman. This pattern was also observed among persons in OPFs headed by a man.

The prevalence of low income is highest among persons in OPFs headed by a Chinese or Arab immigrant parent, but the gender gap in the prevalence of low income is largest among those headed by a South Asian immigrant parent

In 2021, more than four in five immigrant mothers (82.5%) and about three-quarters of immigrant fathers (74.1%) in OPFs belonged to the racialized population, higher than the proportions of all immigrant women (69.2%) and men (68.0%) aged 15 years and older who belonged to the racialized population. Black women and men were overrepresented among immigrant mothers (26.7%) and fathers (18.9%) in OPFs, relative to their representation among all immigrant women (9.1%) and men (8.9%) in the total population.

Among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant parent who was also in a racialized group, the prevalence of low income was higher among persons in OPFs headed by an Arab or Chinese parent (Chart 4). Conversely, the prevalence of low income was lower among persons in OPFs headed by a Filipino parent. These results are aligned with the pattern observed among all immigrants in Canada, wherein higher shares of Chinese and Arab immigrants and lower shares of Filipino immigrants were in low income.

Chart 4

Prevalence of low income (LIM-AT) among persons in OPFs with children aged 17 years and younger and with an immigrant parent, by gender and racialized group of parent, 2020



Notes: Data on racialized groups are measured using the “visible minority” variable.

The category “Women+” includes women, as well as some non-binary persons, while the category “Men+” includes men, as well as some non-binary persons.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

The gender gap in the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant parent was particularly pronounced among persons in OPFs headed by a South Asian immigrant parent. Specifically, almost one-quarter (23.7%) of persons in OPFs headed by a South Asian immigrant woman were in low income, compared with 13.4% of persons in OPFs headed by a South Asian immigrant man, yielding a gap of 10.3 percentage points. Conversely, no gap was observed among persons in OPFs headed by a Black immigrant parent, with approximately one-quarter of persons in OPFs headed by a Black immigrant parent in low income, irrespective of the parent’s gender.

Although persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant parent who was part of the racialized population were generally more likely to be in low income than persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant parent, this was not the case for persons in OPFs headed by a Filipino immigrant parent, who were much less likely to be in low income. For example, 10.7% of persons in OPFs headed by a Filipino immigrant woman were in low income, compared with 24.1% of persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman. In addition, the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs headed by a South Asian immigrant woman (23.7%) was comparable to the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman.

Persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman aged 15 to 24 years are three times more likely to be in low income than persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant man in the same age group

Overall, immigrant mothers in OPFs were younger than immigrant fathers, but older than non-immigrant mothers. Specifically, the median age of immigrant mothers in OPFs was 42.8 years, compared with 46.4 years for immigrant fathers, 40.4 years for non-immigrant mothers and 43.6 years for non-immigrant fathers in OPFs.

Large gender gaps in the prevalence of low income were observed among persons in OPFs headed by a younger (i.e., aged 15 to 24 years or 25 to 34 years) immigrant parent. For example, among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant parent aged 15 to 24 years, those in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman (30.0%) were three times more likely to be in low income than those in OPFs headed by an immigrant man (10.1%; Table 1).

Table 1

Prevalence of low income (LIM-AT) among persons in OPFs with children aged 17 years and younger, by gender, immigrant status and age of parent, 2020

Age group	Immigrants		Non-immigrants	
	Women+	Men+	Women+	Men+
	percent			
15 to 24 years	30.0	10.1	42.4	13.7
25 to 34 years	33.9	14.7	35.0	22.3
35 to 44 years	28.3	22.0	22.3	19.0
45 to 54 years	22.2	22.1	15.3	16.4
55 to 64 years	21.3	26.0	21.7	20.7
65 years and older	25.4	18.4	32.2	15.8

Note: The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary persons, while the category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Despite the fact that, overall, persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman were more likely to be in low income than their counterparts in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman, this did not hold true across all age groups. In fact, the prevalence of low income was considerably higher among persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman aged 15 to 24 years (42.4%) than among persons in OPFs headed by a same-aged immigrant woman (30.0%).

Persons in OPFs headed by a never-married immigrant woman are less likely to be in low income than persons in OPFs headed by a never-married non-immigrant woman

In 2021, non-immigrant parents in OPFs were most likely to have never been married. Meanwhile, immigrant parents in OPFs were most likely to be separated or divorced. Specifically, more than half of non-immigrant mothers (55.8%) and fathers (51.1%) in OPFs were never married, whereas the same was true for about one-quarter each of immigrant mothers (26.5%) and fathers (24.7%) in OPFs. Conversely, more than half of immigrant mothers (55.8%) and fathers (52.5%) in OPFs were separated or divorced, while the same was true for 39.6% of non-immigrant mothers and 43.2% of non-immigrant fathers in OPFs. Notably, more than one in ten immigrant mothers (11.7%) and immigrant

fathers (13.8%) in OPFs were married, compared with 1.4% of non-immigrant mothers and 1.6% of non-immigrant fathers.^{15,16}

The gender gap in the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant was largest among persons in OPFs headed by a parent who reported their marital status as married. In 2020, 36.6% of persons in OPFs headed by a married immigrant woman were in low income, compared with 23.2% of persons in OPFs headed by a married immigrant man (a gap of 13.4 percentage points; Table 2). This was partly because persons in OPFs headed by a married immigrant woman were more likely to be in low income than persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman who was either never married, separated or divorced, or widowed. Conversely, the gap was much smaller among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant parent who was separated or divorced.

Table 2
Prevalence of low income (LIM-AT) among persons in OPFs with children aged 17 years and younger, by gender, immigrant status and marital status of parent, 2020

Marital status	Immigrants		Non-immigrants	
	Women+	Men+	Women+	Men+
	percent			
Never married	24.3	18.2	28.2	20.7
Married	36.6	23.2	25.3	19.6
Separated or divorced	25.8	22.9	19.2	16.6
Widowed	24.2	18.2	19.1	14.0

Note: The category “Women+” includes women, as well as some non-binary persons, while the category “Men+” includes men, as well as some non-binary persons.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Although persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman were more likely to be in low income than persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman, this was not the case for persons in OPFs headed by a never-married woman. Rather, persons in OPFs headed by a never-married immigrant woman (24.3%) were less likely to be in low income than their counterparts in OPFs headed by a never-married non-immigrant woman (28.2%).

Almost one-quarter of persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman with a bachelor’s degree or higher are in low income

In 2021, immigrant parents aged 25 to 64 years¹⁷ in OPFs were more highly educated than non-immigrant parents in the same age group.¹⁸ For example, more than one-third of immigrant mothers (34.5%) and immigrant fathers (35.7%) in OPFs had a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared with 21.6% of non-immigrant mothers and 16.9% of non-immigrant fathers in OPFs.

The prevalence of low income was higher for persons in OPFs headed by a parent who had no certificate, diploma or degree than for persons in OPFs headed by a parent with a bachelor’s degree or higher, regardless of the parent’s gender or immigrant status (Chart 5).

15. In the census, “marital status” and “census family status” are separate concepts. As such, it is possible to have a marital status of “married,” while not being in a census couple family. For more information about these concepts, readers may refer to the *Families, Households and Marital Status Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021*.

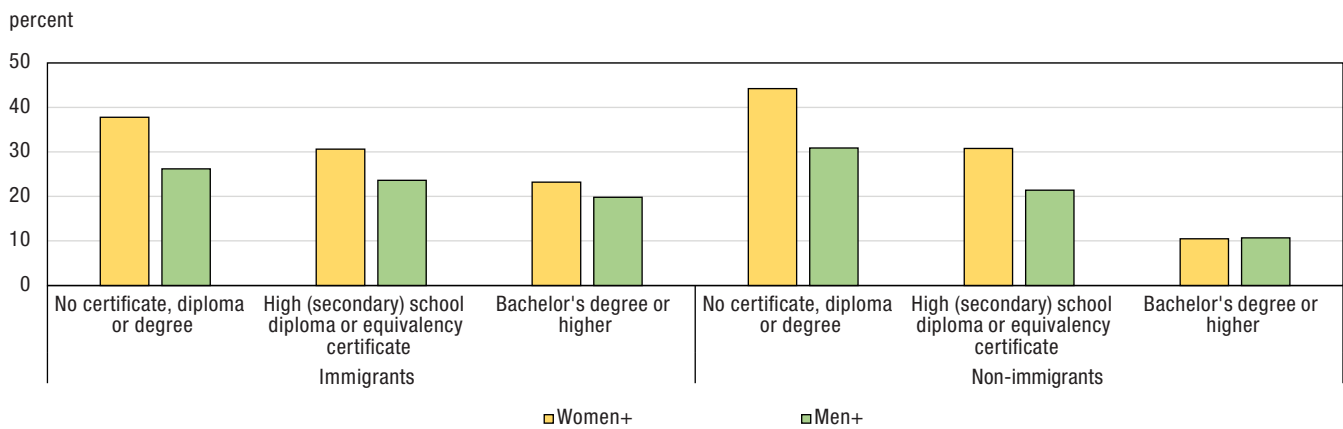
16. These parents may have had a spouse who lives elsewhere, including in their home country, either temporarily (e.g., waiting for their immigration application to be processed) or permanently.

17. The analysis in this section is restricted to persons in OPFs headed by a parent aged 25 to 64 years, given that it examines persons in OPFs headed by a parent with a bachelor’s degree or higher.

18. This is aligned with the pattern observed among the total population aged 25 to 64 years, wherein immigrants were more highly educated than their non-immigrant counterparts.

Chart 5

Prevalence of low income (LIM-AT) among persons in OPFs with children aged 17 years and younger and with a parent aged 25 to 64 years, by gender, immigrant status and highest level of education of parent, 2020



Note: The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary persons, while the category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons.
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant, the gender gap in the prevalence of low income was largest among persons in OPFs headed by a parent with lower levels of education. Specifically, 37.8% of persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman with no certificate, diploma or degree were in low income, compared with 26.2% of persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant man with the same educational attainment, yielding a gap of 11.6 percentage points. This gap was smaller among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant with a bachelor's degree or higher (3.4 percentage points).

Notably, the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman with a bachelor's degree or higher (23.2%) was more than double that among persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman with the same credential (10.5%). Conversely, among persons in OPFs headed by a woman with no certificate, diploma or degree, the prevalence of low income was lower among those in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman, compared with those in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman.

Compared with persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant parent, the gender gap in the prevalence of low income is larger among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant parent when young children are present in the family

The age of children in the family is an important characteristic to consider when examining the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs, partly because young children may incur notable expenses (e.g., child care, time available for paid work). Studies show that the presence of young children impacts employment among mothers (that is, the employment rate increases with the age of the youngest child in the family), as well as their number of hours spent on paid work, whereas it has less of an effect on the employment of fathers (Moyser, 2017). It could also be partly because the parents in families with young children tend to be younger and, thus, earlier in their career.

The majority of OPFs did not have young children (i.e., aged 0 to 5 years) in the family. OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman (29.7%) were most likely to have children aged 0 to 5 years in the family,¹⁹ followed by OPFs headed by an immigrant woman (27.3%), immigrant man (25.9%) and non-immigrant man (22.8%).

Generally, persons in OPFs with young children in the family were more likely to be in low income than persons in OPFs without young children, although this did not always hold true depending on the parent's gender and immigrant status (Table 3). Among persons in OPFs with young children in the family, the gender gap in the prevalence of low income was larger among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant parent (15.3 percentage points) than among

19. Children aged 6 to 17 years may also be present in these families.

persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant parent (12.5 percentage points). This larger gap may be explained, in part, by the fact that the presence of young children in the family did not have the same impact on persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant man as it did on persons in the other OPFs studied. Rather, among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant man, persons in families with young children (18.5%) were less likely to be in low income than persons in families without young children (22.4%).

Table 3
Prevalence of low income (LIM-AT) among persons in OPFs with children aged 17 years and younger, by gender and immigrant status of parent and family and household characteristics, 2020

Characteristic	Immigrants		Non-immigrants	
	Women+	Men+	Women+	Men+
	percent			
Age of children				
With children aged 0 to 5 years	33.8	18.5	34.7	22.2
Without children aged 0 to 5 years	23.6	22.4	19.4	17.5
Number of children aged 17 years and younger				
One	21.3	18.8	19.1	16.4
Two	28.9	22.3	24.3	19.0
Three or more	35.5	28.9	35.3	24.9
Household type				
One-census-family household without additional persons	32.3	29.2	28.5	22.9
Multigenerational household	9.2	9.1	5.5	5.7
Multiple-census-family household	3.8	4.7	5.0	4.4
One-census-family household with additional persons	12.3	10.1	10.4	7.4

Note: The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary persons, while the category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Despite the fact that, overall, persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman were more likely to be in low income than persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman, this was not the case among persons in families with young children. Rather, the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman (33.8%) was comparable to that of persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman (34.7%) when young children were present in the family.

The number of children aged 17 years and younger in the family has a greater impact on the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs headed by a woman compared with those in OPFs headed by a man

Previous research (e.g., Statistics Canada, 2017) has demonstrated that the likelihood of being in a low-income OPF increases with the number of children aged 17 years and younger in the family. In 2021, most OPFs had only one child aged 17 years and younger. OPFs headed by an immigrant man (62.4%) were most likely to have only one child aged 17 years and younger in the family, followed by OPFs headed by a non-immigrant man (59.4%), immigrant woman (58.2%) and non-immigrant woman (54.7%).

Across all the OPFs, the prevalence of low income increased as the number of children aged 17 years and younger in the family increased (Table 3). Persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman were more likely to be in low income than their counterparts in OPFs headed by an immigrant man, irrespective of the number of children in the family. However, the gap was more pronounced among persons in OPFs with two (6.6 percentage points) or three or more (6.6 percentage points) children aged 17 years and younger, whereas it was notably smaller among persons in OPFs with only one child aged 17 years and younger (2.5 percentage points).²⁰

Of note, the higher prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman, compared with persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman, held true among persons in OPFs with one or two children aged 17 years and younger in the family. However, among persons in OPFs with three or more children aged 17 years and younger, the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman (35.5%) was comparable to that among their counterparts in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman (35.3%).

20. This pattern was also observed among persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant parent (although the gap was more pronounced among persons in OPFs with three or more children aged 0 to 17 years).

Almost one-third of persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman living in one-census-family households without additional persons are in low income

In addition to the age and number of children in the family, household living arrangements also matter when examining the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs. Sharing a household with persons outside the census family may help to offset some of the living costs. In line with this, previous research has demonstrated that the low-income rate of children whose family lives in a household with other persons is lower than that of children whose family lives alone. This pattern holds true for children in both couple families and OPFs, although it is more pronounced among the latter (Statistics Canada, 2017).

In 2021, most OPFs lived in one-census-family households without additional persons. However, a higher share of OPFs headed by an immigrant parent (29.6%) lived in households with additional persons, compared with OPFs headed by a non-immigrant parent (23.4%).

OPFs headed by an immigrant woman were more likely than OPFs headed by an immigrant man to live in one-census-family households without additional persons, as was also the case for OPFs headed by a non-immigrant parent. However, the gender gap was more pronounced among OPFs headed by an immigrant parent (12.6 percentage points) than OPFs headed by a non-immigrant parent (5.5 percentage points). OPFs headed by an immigrant man were more likely than OPFs headed by an immigrant woman to live in multigenerational households (22.1% versus 15.7%, respectively), multiple-census-family households (5.1% versus 3.1%, respectively) and one-census-family households with additional persons (12.9% versus 8.6%, respectively). The same pattern held true among OPFs headed by a non-immigrant parent, although the gaps were less pronounced.

Persons in OPFs living in one-census-family households without additional persons were more likely to be in low income than their counterparts living in other types of households²¹ (Table 3). For example, the proportion of persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman who were in low income was 8.5 times greater for persons living in one-census-family households without additional persons (32.3%), compared with persons living in multiple-census-family households (3.8%).

Although persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman were overall more likely to be in low income than their counterparts in OPFs headed by an immigrant man, this was not always the case when the household type of the census family was considered. In fact, this held true only among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant parent living in one-census-family households without additional persons. Across the other household types, the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman and persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant man was comparable. For example, about 9.0% of persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant parent living in a multigenerational household were in low income, irrespective of the parent's gender.

Conclusion

Overall, persons in OPFs headed by a woman were more likely to be in low income than persons in OPFs headed by a man. This study revealed that persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman were most likely to be in low income, followed by persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman, immigrant man and non-immigrant man. However, disaggregation by various characteristics of the parent, family and household highlighted the diversity of OPFs headed by an immigrant parent, as well as the fact that the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs varies as a function of the intersection of the parent's gender, immigrant status and other characteristics.

It is important to acknowledge that many of the characteristics associated with low income in the current study are associated with low income among the immigrant population in general. For example, compared with immigrants admitted under the economic category or immigrants sponsored by family, refugees are generally more likely to be in low income. As such, the current study cannot conclude whether there are certain characteristics unique to OPFs headed by an immigrant that could explain the higher prevalence of low income observed among persons in these families, particularly families headed by an immigrant woman. Future studies might consider expanding on

21. This includes multigenerational households, multiple-census-family households and one-census-family households with additional persons. Readers may refer to the "Data source, methods and definitions" section for additional information.

this research to determine which characteristics are driving the higher prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant. Nonetheless, the knowledge garnered through this study can serve as a foundation upon which decision-makers can create and tailor policies and programs to reduce the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs headed by immigrants, particularly immigrant women.

Note to readers

Beginning in 2021, the census asked questions about both the sex at birth and gender of individuals. While data on sex at birth are needed to measure certain indicators, as of the 2021 Census, gender (and not sex) is the standard variable used in concepts and classifications. For more details on the new gender concept, see [Age, Sex at Birth and Gender Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021](#). Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses. In these cases, individuals in the category “non-binary persons” are distributed into the other two gender categories. Unless otherwise indicated in the text, the category “women” includes women, as well as some non-binary persons, while the category “men” includes men, as well as some non-binary persons. A fact sheet on gender concepts, [Filling the gaps: Information on gender in the 2021 Census](#), is also available.

In this article, data on racialized groups are measured using the “visible minority” variable. Visible minority refers to whether a person is a visible minority or not, as defined by the *Employment Equity Act*. The *Employment Equity Act* defines visible minorities as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.” The visible minority population consists mainly of the following groups: South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese.

Data source, methods and definitions

Data source

This study uses data from the long-form questionnaire of the 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada conducts the Census of Population every five years. It is designed to provide information about persons and housing units in Canada by their demographic, social and economic characteristics on a specific day. The census is the primary source of socioeconomic data for specific population groups and for detailed or small geographies. A sample of approximately 25% of Canadian households received a long-form questionnaire. All other households received a short-form questionnaire. This means that while demographic information is collected from 100% of the population, a random sample of one in four private dwellings in Canada is selected systematically for the long-form questionnaire. For more information about the 2021 Census and the long-form and short-form questionnaires, please consult the [Census of Population](#) documentation.

Methods

This study examines the prevalence of low income among persons in OPFs with children aged 17 years and younger (children aged 18 years and older may also be present). Persons in OPFs with children aged 18 years and older only are excluded from this study. In this study, groups were compared using the confidence intervals overlapping technique.

The historical context and circumstances of Indigenous parents in OPFs (and their families) are unique and necessitate a separate analysis. As such, persons in OPFs headed by Indigenous parents are excluded from the non-immigrant population in this study.

This study focuses on four different household types: one-census-family households without additional persons, multigenerational households, multiple-census-family households and one-census-family households with additional persons. For more information, please refer to [Families, Households and Marital Status Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021](#).

Because of small sample sizes, persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant parent from one of the following racialized groups are combined into the “other racialized group” category: Southeast Asian; West Asian; Korean; Japanese; visible minority, not included elsewhere; and multiple visible minorities.

Measure

Low-income status is measured using the low-income measure, after tax (LIM-AT). The LIM-AT refers to a fixed percentage (50%) of the median adjusted after-tax income of private households. The concept underlying the LIM is that all persons in a household have low income if their adjusted household income falls below half of the median adjusted income.

Definitions

Admission category: The name of the immigration program or group of programs under which an immigrant has been granted for the first time the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. In the 2021 Census of Population, data on admission category are available for immigrants who were admitted to Canada between January 1, 1980, and May 11, 2021.

Census family: A married couple and the children, if any, of either or both spouses; a couple living common law and the children, if any, of either or both partners; or a parent of any marital status in an OPF with at least one child living in the same dwelling and that child or those children. All members of a particular census family live in the same dwelling. Children may be biological or adopted children regardless of their age or marital status as long as they live in the dwelling and do not have their own married spouse, common-law partner or child living in the dwelling. Grandchildren living with their grandparents but with no parents present also constitute a census family.

Established immigrant: A person who first obtained landed immigrant or permanent resident status before 2016.

Immigrant: A person who is, or who has ever been, a landed immigrant or permanent resident. Such a person has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. Immigrants who have obtained Canadian citizenship by naturalization are included in this group. In the 2021 Census of Population, “immigrant” includes immigrants who were admitted to Canada on or before May 11, 2021.

Low-income status: The income situation of the statistical unit in relation to a specific low-income line in a reference year. Statistical units with income that is below the low-income line are considered to be in low income. In this article, the LIM-AT is used. For the 2021 Census, the reference period for low-income data is the 2020 calendar year.

Men: This category includes men, as well as some non-binary persons.

Non-immigrant: A person who is a Canadian citizen by birth. In this study, Indigenous parents are excluded from the non-immigrant population.

Recent immigrant: A person who has been admitted to the country permanently in the five years preceding a census. In the 2021 Census, this period is January 1, 2016, to May 11, 2021.

Women: This category includes women, as well as some non-binary persons.

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