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Overview of the study

Historically, unpartnered mothers (never married or previously married) have experienced lower employment rates than their partnered counterparts (those who are married or in a common-law partnership). Using data from the Labour Force Survey, this study assesses the degree to which employment and hourly wage rates of unpartnered mothers have caught up to their partnered peers. Focusing on mothers aged 18 to 49 living with at least one child aged 5 or younger, this trend analysis examines differences by marital status. The study also examines employment and wage gaps by various diverse groups, such as the experiences of immigrant mothers, as well as Indigenous mothers.

- Between 1997 and 2023, the employment rate for all mothers living with one or more young child (aged 5 or younger) rose 11 percentage points, from 62% in 1997 to 73% in 2023.
- The growth rate in employment varied by marital status. Employment growth was nearly double for unpartnered mothers (+17 percentage points) than it was for partnered mothers (+9 percentage points). The differing rate of growth resulted in a narrowing of the historical gap between unpartnered and partnered mothers. In 2023, the employment rate for unpartnered mothers stood at 64% - a 10-point difference with partnered mothers (74%), much smaller than the 1990s employment gap of 18 percentage points.
- Gaps in employment rates between partnered and unpartnered mothers decreased in all provinces, except for Alberta. Employment gaps narrowed most in British Columbia and Quebec.
- Among unpartnered mothers, previously married mothers had higher employment rates (71%) than their never married peers (61%) in 2023. Indeed, the employment rate of previously married mothers has become on par with married or common law mothers, with the closing of the employment gap from 1997 to 2023 (by 5 percentage points).
- The employment gap between never married unpartnered mothers and partnered mothers persisted (61% versus 74%) but has narrowed by 11 percentage points over the same time period. While change in age composition was a leading contributor to the narrowing of the gap, approximately three-quarters of the change could not be explained by the demographic variables studied.
- Educational attainment and age played a large role in the differences in employment rates between never married mothers and partnered mothers in both 1997 and 2023. In particular, these factors explained 61% of the employment gap in 2023.
- On average, hourly wages for unpartnered mothers were 19% lower than married or common law mothers, with virtually no change since 1997. Relative to partnered mothers, the wage gap for unpartnered mothers was greater among never married mothers (23%) than it was for previously married mothers (10%) in 2023.

Introduction

Mothers with young children are increasingly active in the Canadian labour market. Employment rates among all mothers aged 18 to 49 with one or more child aged 0 to 5 years[1] rose substantially from 62% in 1997 to 73% in 2023.[2] The employment rate of mothers (i.e., those working at a job, self-employed or absent from work) generally increases with the age of the youngest child in the household, as the child begins school and starts becoming more self-reliant. There were no differences in employment rates of women whose youngest child was aged 12 to 17 and those with older children (aged 18 to 24).

Rising employment rates among mothers are driven by a range of factors, some of which include higher levels of educational attainment among mothers, delayed age of having children, and the trend towards fewer children.[3] Other broader social factors are also at play. The rise in service sector jobs favouring women's employment, employers offering more flexible and family friendly work arrangements, and government family support policies (such as changes to social assistance, paid parental leave, child benefits, and increases in childcare subsidies) have helped women remain in or return to paid employment after having children.

Despite the overall growth, it is important to better understand whether differences by the mothers' marital status persist. It well-known that there is a strong relationship of employment and earnings to financial well-being, which in turn, has far-reaching impacts on both the short and long-term mental and physical health well-being of parents and children.[4] Historically, unpartnered mothers have experienced lower employment rates than their married or common-law counterparts. This may be attributed to socio-demographic differences, but also variations in the extent of financial assistance and caregiving support from the other parent, which may impact employment and earnings potential.[5] Indeed, even among unpartnered mothers, there are considerable differences in financial assistance from the other parent, with legally separated and divorced mothers being more likely than mothers who were never legally married to be receiving child support.[6]

Also, previous research suggests that mothers who were unpartnered at the time of the birth of their first child begin with lower labour market qualifications and earnings than those who separate. These differences continue after birth.[7] Without support, some never-married mothers may have difficulty gaining future education or career development which may, in turn, impact their future labour market outcomes.

Using data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), this article assesses the degree to which employment and hourly wage rates of unpartnered mothers with young children have caught up to those of partnered mothers since the late 1990s. 'Partnered mothers' refer to mothers who are currently married or living common law, while 'unpartnered mothers' refer to those who are not currently married or living common law. This study disaggregates unpartnered mothers into two groups: 1) never married mothers, regardless of any previous common-law relationships,[8] and 2) previously married mothers – those who are separated, divorced or widowed.[9,10]

This study also examines whether employment and wage gap findings vary among mothers from diverse backgrounds – namely Indigenous mothers, immigrant women who became permanent residents in Canada at the age of 18 or younger (child immigrants), and those who became permanent residents at age 19 or older (adult immigrants).

For brevity, this study uses '1997' to describe the estimates using combined data from 1997 to 2001 and '2007' to refer to estimates from 2007 to 2011. To highlight the full range of years covered, '2023' is used to describe the estimates for the combined data from 2018 to 2023. Data from 2020 is not included in the 2018 to 2023 period, as the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in different patterns in employment and earnings, with 2021 returning to similar patterns as seen in 2019 in the study sample.

The changing composition of mothers with young children

According to the LFS, partnered mothers represented 91% of all mothers aged 18 to 49 with young children in 2023, up from 87% in 1997. Never married unpartnered mothers comprised 6% of mothers of young children in 2023, down from 8% in 1997, while previously married mothers made up 3% in 2023, down from 6% in 1997. Among all unpartnered mothers with young children, the proportion that were never married mothers rose from to 58% in 1997 to 68% in 2023. With the growing prevalence of common-law unions in recent decades, the rise in the proportion of never married mothers partially reflects the increase of never married mothers who were previously in common law relationships. The LFS does not identify those previously in common law relationships.

In addition to these changes, other demographic shifts linked to employment and earnings have occurred over the past two decades. Some of these changes started prior to 1997 but continued to gain traction, impacting trends in mothers. Three key areas stand out: age; educational attainment; and the number of children.

Age is particularly important in relation to women and childbearing. Trends in fertility patterns suggest that women in Canada may delay family formation in pursuit of higher levels of education and while securing their careers.[11] Since 1997, the average age of mothers at childbirth rose from 28.5 years in 1997 to 31.6 years in 2022.[12] Today's mothers of young children are older than their counterparts in 1997 (Table 1). Partnered mothers with young children were, on average, around two years older in 2023 than in 1997, rising to 35 years of age. This trend was similar for unpartnered mothers. However, previously married mothers are slightly older than partnered mothers, while never married mothers are younger. The average age of previously married mothers increased from 33 to 36 years, while the average age of never married mothers, who are typically younger than other mothers, increased from 28 to 32 years.

Table 1
Mothers with children aged 5 or younger, by marital status and selected characteristics, 1997-2001 and 2018-2023

			Unpartnered					
	Partnered		All unpartnered		Previously married		Never married	
Selected characteristics	1997-2001	2018-2023	1997-2001	2018-2023	1997-2001	2018-2023	1997-2001	2018-2023
					percent			
Age group								
18 to 24 years	7.8	2.6	24.0	9.1	5.7	2.1	37.1	12.3
25 to 29 years	22.4	13.7	27.4	21.7	23.7	11.1	30.0	26.6
30 to 34 years	34.8	33.9	24.2	27.3	31.0	26.4	19.3	27.7
35 to 39 years	25.7	33.2	16.3	23.6	25.5	32.2	9.7	19.6
40 to 49 years	9.4	16.6	8.0	18.3	14.0	28.1	3.7	13.7
					average			
Average age of mother in years	32.3	34.5	29.8	33.1	33.0	35.9	27.5	31.8
					percent			
Level of education								
High school or less	33.4	14.8	49.5	29.6	41.8	20.4	55.0	34.0
Some postsecondary[1]	44.9	36.2	43.3	51.0	48.0	47.9	40.0	52.4
Bachelor's degree or above	21.7	49.0	7.2	19.4	10.2	31.7	5.0	13.6
					percent			
Number of children (regardless of age)								
One	34.3	34.7	45.3	39.5	28.6	26.8	57.3	45.5
Two	42.3	43.0	34.9	34.9	42.0	41.5	29.8	31.9
Three or more	23.4	22.3	19.8	25.5	29.4	31.7	12.8	22.6
					average			
Average number of children	2.0	2.0	1.8	2.0	2.1	2.2	1.6	1.9

1. Includes those who have some post-secondary education, a trades certificate or diploma, a college/CEGEP credential, or a university certificate below a bachelor's degree.
Note: In this study, data from 2020 was excluded from the 2018-2023 period.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, March and September monthly files, 1997-2001, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, and 2023.

Examining detailed age distributions shows that the share of mothers aged 35 and older has increased, while the share of mothers younger than the age of 25 has decreased. This is true for all groups of mothers. For example, half (50%) of partnered mothers were aged 35 and older in 2023, up from 35% in 1997. Among never married mothers, about one third (33%) were 35 and older in 2023, compared to 13% in 1997. Over the same period, the share of partnered mothers under the age of 25 declined from 8% to 3%. The drop was more considerable for never married mothers, falling from 37% in 1997 to 12% in 2023.

Educational attainment of mothers rose substantially between 1997 and 2023 but was not seen equally among all groups of mothers. Almost half (49%) of partnered mothers held a bachelor's degree or above in 2023, up from 22% in 1997. Over the same period, the share of unpartnered mothers holding a bachelor's degree or higher tripled, yet it remained the lowest for never married mothers. In 2023, 32% of previously married mothers held a bachelor's degree, up from 10%. Among never married mothers, 14% held a bachelor's degree, up from 5% in 1997.

Trends in fertility patterns suggest that women in Canada continue to have fewer children. Canada's total fertility rate[13] has trended downward from 1.6 children per woman in 1997 to a record low of 1.3 in 2022.[14] Conditional on having at least one child aged 5 or younger living with them, the average number of children remained comparatively stable between 1997 and 2023 for all mothers of young children. While there is little change in the average number of children for different types of mothers, the proportion of never married mothers with three or more children increased from 13% to 23%. That said, never married mothers were still more likely to have only one child (46%) compared to partnered mothers (35%) or previously married mothers (27%) in 2023.

Never married mothers of young children remain the least likely to be employed, but the gap with partnered mothers is narrowing

In 1997, 62% of all mothers aged 18 to 49 years with young children were employed (i.e., they had a job, either as a paid worker or were self-employed),[15,16] rising to almost three quarters (73%) in 2023, approaching the rate (77%) for women without children or no children under the age of 25.

The growth in employment was nearly double for unpartnered mothers (+17 percentage points) than it was for partnered mothers (+9 percentage points), resulting in a narrowing of the historical gap between the two groups of mothers. In 2023, the employment rate for unpartnered mothers stood at 64% - a 10-point difference with partnered mothers, much smaller than the 1990s employment gap of 18 percentage points.

While the employment gap lessened for unpartnered mothers as a whole, differences were seen between previously married and never married mothers. The employment gap between partnered and previously married mothers disappeared between 1997 and 2023, meaning by 2023, previously married mothers were equally as likely to be employed as their partnered peers in 2023. While the largest growth in employment rates (+20 percentage points) was seen for never married mothers, they remained the least likely be employed. Overall, their employment gap with partnered mothers decreased from 24 percentage points in 1997 to 13 percentage points in 2023.

Increase in mothers' employment rates driven by full-time employment

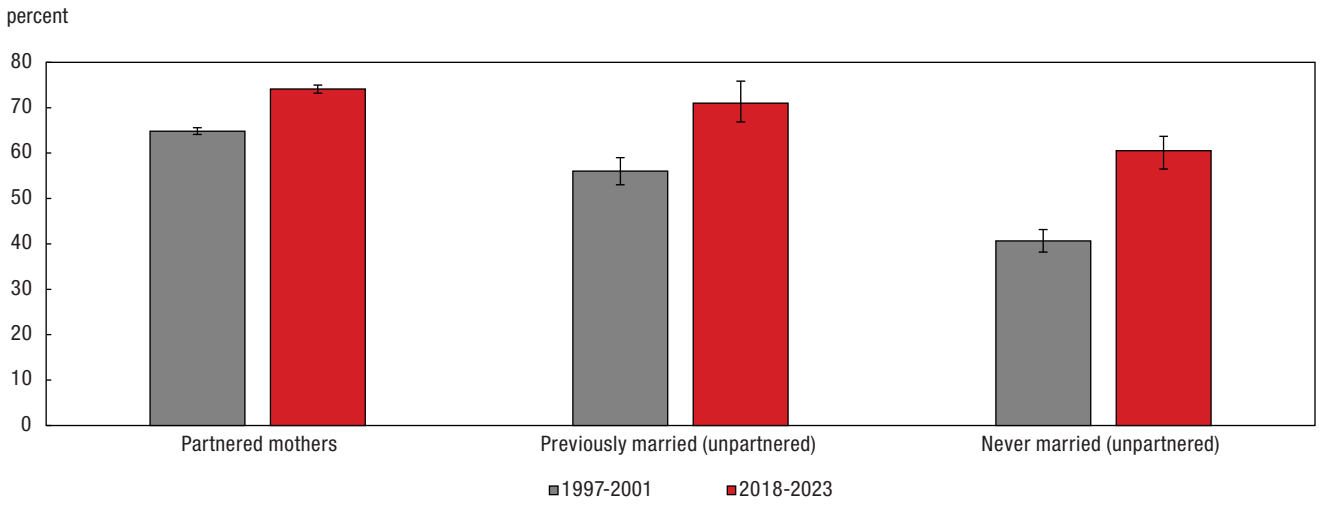
Most of the increase in the overall employment rates of mothers has been driven by a rise in full-time employment - defined as usually working 30 hours or more per week. This is particularly important in the context of financial wellbeing, as the number of paid hours influences overall income.

All mothers of young children, whether partnered, never married or previously married, saw an increase in full-time employment, though the trends in part-time employment somewhat differed. Part-time employment dropped by 5 percentage points for partnered mothers between 1997 and 2023, while rates of part-time employment was relatively stable among unpartnered mothers. The increase in the employment rate of unpartnered mothers was almost entirely driven by the increase in their full-time employment rate (from 35% in 1997 to 50% in 2023) and to a much lesser extent due to an increase in their part-time rate (from 12% to 14%) (Table 2). This pattern was seen for both previously married and never married mothers.

Largest increase in employment rates for never married unpartnered mothers with less than a university degree

While employment rates increased for all types of mothers, changes in employment rates varied by age. Employment gaps narrowed between partnered and unpartnered mothers for all age groups of mothers, yet the gaps remained largest among younger mothers. For example, by 2023, the employment gap between unpartnered and partnered mothers

Chart 1
Employment rates of mothers with children aged 5 or younger, by marital status, 1997-2001 and 2018-2023



Notes: Error bars represent the 95% confidence intervals. In this study, data from 2020 was excluded from the 2018-2023 period.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, March and September monthly files, 1997-2001, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, and 2023.

was higher for those aged 18 to 24 (12 percentage points) and those aged 25 to 29 (13 percentage points), compared to those aged 40 to 49 (2 percentage points) (Table 2). This pattern was seen for both never married mothers and previously married mothers.

Additionally, higher educational attainment was associated with higher employment rates. Among mothers with a bachelor's degree or above in 1997, there was no difference in the employment rate of unpartnered (79%) and partnered mothers (77%). By 2023, unpartnered mothers (86%) with a bachelors' degree or higher were more likely to be employed than their partnered peers (81%) (Table 2). This difference among university-educated mothers was entirely driven by the higher employment rate among never married mothers (89%), as employment rates between university-educated partnered mothers and previously married mothers remained equal.

That said, never married mothers with less than a university degree remained less likely to be employed than their partnered peers, though the largest increases in employment were seen for this group. As a result, the employment gap between never married mothers and partnered mothers with high school or less narrowed 14 percentage points between 1997 and 2023.

Caring for multiple children can increase the demands of juggling working and family life, particularly for unpartnered mothers. Yet, employment rates increased for all mothers between 1997 and 2023, regardless of the number of children (Table 2).

Employment gaps between partnered and unpartnered mothers narrowed in most regions

Between 1997 and 2023, gaps in employment rates between partnered and unpartnered mothers narrowed in all regions except for Alberta. The gaps decreased most in British Columbia (16 percentage points) and in Quebec (15 percentage points). In 2023, the largest employment gaps were recorded between never married mothers and partnered mothers in central Canada[17] (25 percentage points), the Atlantic region (18 percentage points), and Ontario (15 percentage points).

Distinct employment patterns were seen among mothers of young children in Alberta. In 1997, unpartnered mothers in Alberta had the highest employment rates

among unpartnered mothers in Canada and were equally likely to be employed as partnered mothers. Employment rates then decreased among unpartnered mothers in Alberta. For example, between 1997 and 2023, the employment rate of never married mothers fell from 62% to 58%, while the employment rate of partnered mothers in Alberta grew from 62% to 68% creating a 10-percentage point gap (Table 3). There were no statistically significant differences between previously married mothers and their partnered peers in either time period.

Due to a relatively low employment rate in 1997 and modest gains over the period, partnered mothers in Alberta were the least likely to be employed compared with their partnered peers in the rest of Canada in 2023. It is possible that the economic boom that took place between the mid-1990s and 2014 led to increases in household incomes in two-parent families, making it possible for households to be able to afford only one wage earner.[18]

Considerations such as availability, accessibility, and cost of childcare may also impact decisions to work. Quebec introduced a universal low-fee daycare in 1997, which was gradually expanded by 2000

Table 2
Employment rates of mothers with children aged 5 or younger, by marital status and selected characteristics, 1997-2001 and 2018-2023

			Unpartnered					
	Partnered (ref.)		All unpartnered		Previously married		Never married	
	1997-2001	2018-2023	1997-2001	2018-2023	1997-2001	2018-2023	1997-2001	2018-2023
Selected characteristics	percent							
Overall employment rates	**64.8**	**74.1**	**47.1***	**64.1***	**56.0***	**70.6**	**40.7***	**61.0***
Full-time employment rates	44.6	58.9	34.9*	50.2*	42.9	55.2	29.2*	47.8*
Part-time employment rates	20.3	15.3	12.2*	13.9	13.2*	15.5	11.5*	13.2*
Age group								
18 to 24 years	43.9	52.3	30.1*	40.0*	30.6*	39.9	30.0*	40.0*
25 to 29 years	61.7	67.9	45.7*	54.8*	51.9*	53.4*	42.2*	55.1*
30 to 34 years	67.9	75.1	53.9*	66.6*	58.6*	71.4	48.4*	64.4*
35 to 39 years	68.9	76.4	58.9*	70.9*	61.4*	73.9	54.2*	68.5*
40 to 49 years	67.0	76.3	58.1*	74.5	57.9*	75.4	58.6	73.6
Level of education								
High school or less	51.0	50.9	33.6*	43.3*	43.4*	47.7	28.3*	42.0*
Some postsecondary[1]	69.4	74.6	57.2*	67.8*	62.8*	72.0	52.4*	65.9*
Bachelor's degree or above	76.5	80.8	78.6	86.1*	75.8	83.3	82.6	89.3*
Number of children (regardless of age)								
One	69.7	79.4	51.0*	70.2*	66.2	80.9	45.6*	67.2*
Two	66.6	76.4	47.1*	65.8*	57.5*	73.8	36.5*	60.9*
Three or more	54.4	61.6	38.0*	52.2*	44.0*	57.9	28.2*	48.5*

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) for the same time period ($p < 0.05$)
1. Includes those who have some post-secondary education, a trades certificate or diploma, a college/CEGEP credential, or a university certificate below a bachelor's degree.
Note: In this study, data from 2020 was excluded from the 2018-2023 period.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, March and September monthly files, 1997-2001, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, and 2023.

to include daycare spaces for all preschool-aged children, a program that, for many years, distinguished Quebec from the rest of Canada. Previous research suggests that low-fee childcare in Quebec corresponds with an increase in the employment rates of women in that province.[19] Accordingly, the proportion of working mothers with at least one young child aged 5 or younger was highest in Quebec in 2023 compared with other regions. For partnered mothers in Quebec, employment rates increased by 16 percentage points from 64% in 1997 to 80% in 2023 and were among the highest in the country by 2023. The period since the introduction of low-cost daycare in Quebec also saw dramatic gains in employment rates for unpartnered mothers. Employment rates for unpartnered mothers climbed 31 percentage points, from 42% in 1997 to 73% in 2023 – among the highest rates for unpartnered mothers, relative to other regions.

While never married mothers in Quebec remained less likely to be employed than their partnered peers in 2023, the gap in employment rates narrowed by 22 percentage points since 1997.[20] There were no statistically significant differences in employment rates of previously married mothers and partnered mothers between any region in 2023. However, the employment rate of previously married mothers in Quebec rose substantially between 1997 and 2023, from 54% to 74% (Table 3).

While the largest gains in employment for unpartnered mothers were seen in Quebec (31 percentage points) between 1997 and 2023, other regions also saw considerable growth. For example, in British Columbia, employment rates for unpartnered mothers increased by 24 percentage points, from 41% to 65% between 1997 and 2023 (Table 3). The employment rate for partnered mothers grew at a slower pace than it did for unpartnered mothers, by 8 percentage points. This narrowed the gap by 16 percentage points. In British Columbia, employment rates rose the most for never married mothers, who narrowed their employment gap with partnered mothers by 22 percentage points.

Table 3
Employment rates of mothers with children aged 5 or younger, by marital status and region, 1997-2001 and 2018-2023

			Unpartnered					
	Partnered (ref.)		All unpartnered		Previously married		Never married	
	1997-2001	2018-2023	1997-2001	2018-2023	1997-2001	2018-2023	1997-2001	2018-2023
Region	percent							
Atlantic	63.1	77.8	38.4*	63.1*	50.8*	77.0	32.5*	59.5*
Quebec	64.3	80.2	42.4*	73.3*	53.8*	74.0	35.1*	73.1*
Ontario	65.6	73.1	49.8*	61.2*	56.2*	69.0	44.7*	57.7*
Central	68.7	72.8	44.1*	54.0*	55.9*	71.1	38.7*	48.2*
Alberta	62.2	67.7	68.0	63.8	74.9	71.4	61.8	57.6*
British Columbia	64.2	72.3	41.0*	64.8*	48.3*	66.1	34.1*	63.9

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) for the same time period ($p < 0.05$)
Note: In this study, data from 2020 was excluded from the 2018-2023 period.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, March and September monthly files, 1997-2001, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, and 2023.

The federal Budget 2021 announced a Canada-wide early learning and childcare (CWELCC) system offering low-fee and high-quality childcare for families with young children, to be implemented through bilateral agreements with provinces and territories over five years. While it is too soon to identify shifts resulting from the implementation of the program, it is likely that patterns in labour market participation among mothers will evolve as access to affordable childcare increases across the country.

Educational attainment and age are the two most important factors explaining differences in employment rates between never married mothers and partnered mothers

Employment rates among never married mothers, though increasing at the fastest rate, are still not on par with previously married mothers and partnered mothers. What are the driving forces behind why employment rates for never married mothers, unlike for previously married partners, did not catch up with partnered mothers?

To uncover these factors, a Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition (see Data sources, methods and definitions) was used.[21] This analytical technique allows the determination of the extent to which demographic factors (age group, educational attainment, region, and number of children of any age) explain disparities in employment rates. The gap is explained first, if partnered mothers and never married mothers differ in their characteristics, and second, if the factors being considered are determinants of employment. The unexplained portion contains the effects of any variables that were not contained in the model, such as behavioural changes in response to social policies, cultural change,

or changes within the wider labour market structure.[22] Given that there was no difference in employment rates of previously married mothers and partnered mothers by 2023, the following section focuses on decomposing the employment gap between never married mothers and their partnered peers.

In both 1997 and 2023, the combined factors of age and educational attainment explained a large part of the employment gap between never married and partnered mothers. In 1997, the younger age profile and lower educational attainment of never married mothers explained 48% of the employment gap, while these same factors explained 61% of the gap in 2023 (Table 4). Notably, age was the leading factor in 1997 (31%), while educational attainment was the leading factor in 2023 (41%). As the age of never married mothers has increased, age explained less of the gap in 2023.

While demographic factors helped explain employment rate differences between never married and partnered mothers, what accounted for the narrowing of the gap by 11 percentage points between 1997 and 2023? Part of the explanation resides in the shifting population composition. Changes in the age composition (38%) explained most of the decrease in the gap during this period, followed by educational attainment (7%) (Table 5). At the same time, the share of employed mothers with three or more children increased more for never married mothers (from 28% to 48%) than for partnered mothers (from 54% to 62%) (Table 2). This increase, all else equal, would serve to widen the employment gap with partnered mothers. Altogether, the population composition explained 24% of the narrowing of the gap between 1997 and 2023, with most of the decrease in the employment gap being unexplained (76%), meaning that the factors not included in this study may be at play (Table 5).

Table 4
Decomposition of the gap in employment rates between never married (unpartnered) mothers and partnered mothers with children aged 5 or younger, 1997-2001 and 2018-2023

	1997-2001	2018-2023
	percent	
Total employment gap	**24.2**	**13.1**
Gap explained by differences in demographic characteristics	**36.5**	**53.3**
Demographic characteristics		
Educational attainment	16.9	40.5
Age group	31.3	20.0
Number of children	-11.0	-3.3
Province/region	-0.8	-3.9
Total unexplained	**63.5**	**46.7**

Note: In this study, data from 2020 was excluded from the 2018-2023 period.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, March and September monthly files, 1997-2001, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, and 2023.

Wage gap between partnered and unpartnered mothers changed little between 1997 and 2023

Employment income of mothers plays an important role in family income, financial security and economic well-being, and facilitates better outcomes for children. In 1997, the hourly wages[23] of unpartnered mothers ($21.00) were, on average 18% less than partnered mothers ($25.75).[24] By 2023, there was little change in the wage gap (19%) in the average hourly wages of unpartnered mothers ($27.50) and their partnered peers ($33.80). After controlling for demographic (age group, educational attainment, number of children and region) and job characteristics (occupation, industry, full-time status, and union coverage), the wage gap between unpartnered and partnered mothers decreased from 18% to 6% in 1997, and from 19% to 5% in 2023.

Like employment rates, there were wage gap differences among unpartnered mothers. The wage gap was highest between never married and partnered mothers (26% in 1997 and 23% in 2023), compared to the wage gap between previously married and partnered mothers in 1997 and

Table 5
Explaining the change in the employment rate gap between never married (unpartnered) mothers and partnered mothers with children aged 5 or younger, 1997-2001 and 2018-2023

	percent
Change in employment rate gap between 1997-2001 and 2018-2023	**-11.0**
Gap explained by differences in demographic characteristics	**24.4**
Demographic characteristics	
Age group	38.1
Educational attainment	6.7
Province/region	-0.7
Number of children	-19.7
Total unexplained	**75.7**

Note: In this study, data from 2020 was excluded from the 2018-2023 period.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, March and September monthly files, 1997-2001, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, and 2023.

2023 (10% in both periods). After controlling for demographic factors and job-related characteristics, much of the wage gap disappears. In particular, the wage gap between never married mothers and partnered mothers decreased from 26% to 7% in 1997, and from 23% to 4% in 2023.

Employment in lower paying occupations was the main factor explaining the wage gap between unpartnered and partnered mothers, followed by differences in educational attainment

A Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition was used to examine the extent to which the above demographic factors and job-related characteristics explain the difference in hourly wages (Table 6). The majority of the wage gap between never married and partnered mothers is explained by these factors in both 1997 (78%) and in 2023 (82%). Differences in the demographic characteristics 'explained' one third (33%) of the wage gap in 2023. In particular, educational attainment accounted for 18% of the gap, reflecting the finding that partnered mothers are more likely than never married mothers to hold a bachelor's degree.

The younger age of never married mothers accounted for 11% of the wage gap.

Differences in job characteristics explained about half of the wage gap in 2023, with occupation being the leading contributor (36%) overall. Never married mothers were more likely than partnered mothers to work in lower wage occupations. For example, in 2023, 30% of never married mothers worked in sales and service occupations, compared with 17% of partnered mothers. Moreover, never married mothers were half as likely as partnered mothers to work in professional (16% versus 37%) and managerial (3% versus 6%) occupations.

Industry of employment (11%) also contributed to the wage gap between never married and partnered mothers. Likewise, never married mothers were overrepresented in lower wage industries such as retail (11% versus 8%) and accommodation and food services (8% versus 4%) compared with partnered mothers. Table 6 shows that these same factors – age, education, occupation and industry – also primarily explained the gap in 1997.

A somewhat different story emerged for previously married mothers. The gap in hourly wage rates between previously married mothers and partnered mothers remained at 10% in both 1997 and 2023. After controlling for demographic and job characteristics, the wage gap decreased from 10% to 4% in 1997 and from 10% to 5% in 2023.

Around half of the wage gap between previously married mothers and partnered mothers is explained by demographic and job-related characteristics in 1997 (57%) and 2023 (49%) (Table 6). Differences in educational attainment explained 24% of the gap in 1997 and 19% in 2023. Given that wages typically increase with age and that previously married mothers were somewhat older on average than their partnered peers, it would be expected that the wages of previously married mothers would be higher than those of partnered mothers. However, this is not the case, as age actually widens the wage gap by 6% in 1997 and 15% in 2023.

Job characteristics accounted for 40% of the gap in 1997 and 45% of the gap in 2023. Employment in lower paying occupations was the main contributor, accounting for 34%

Table 6
Decomposition of the hourly wage gap between unpartnered and partnered mothers with children aged 5 or younger, 1997-2001 and 2018-2023

	Previously married (unpartnered) and partnered		Never married (unpartnered) and partnered	
	1997-2001	2018-2023	1997-2001	2018-2023
	percent			
Unadjusted wage gap	10.0	10.0	26.1	23.2
Adjusted wage gap	4.3	5.3	6.8	4.4
Total explained	**56.9**	**48.6**	**77.6**	**82.3**
Demographic characteristics	**16.6**	**3.6**	**35.6**	**33.3**
Educational attainment	24.2	18.8	10.9	18.2
Age group	-6.3	-14.8	22.9	11.2
Number of children	1.7	3.3	-0.9	0.6
Province/region	-2.9	-3.6	2.7	3.3
Job characteristics	**40.3**	**45.0**	**42.0**	**49.0**
Occupation	33.6	38.2	22.2	36.2
Industry	9.4	3.3	15.2	10.6
Union status	2.1	2.7	5.0	1.4
Full-time status	-4.9	0.8	-0.4	0.8
Total unexplained	**43.1**	**51.4**	**22.4**	**17.7**

Notes: In this study, data from 2020 was excluded from the 2018-2023 period. Includes paid workers aged 18 to 49.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, March and September monthly files, 1997-2001, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, and 2023.

of the wage differential in 1997 and 38% in 2023. Similar to never married mothers, previously married mothers were more likely to work in lower paying sales and service occupations (23%) compared with partnered mothers (17%) in 2023, and less likely to work in higher paying professional positions (27% versus 37%).

This examination reveals the persistent wage inequalities experienced by unpartnered mothers. These pay gaps may compound the challenges of juggling work, household chores and parenting responsibilities, as unpartnered mothers receive less return on the hours spent in the paid workforce.

As the population becomes more diverse, so too are mothers

To examine possible differences in employment rates and wage gaps among mothers from diverse backgrounds, this section takes a closer look at four diverse groups of mothers: 1) immigrant mothers, including those who became permanent residents in Canada at the age of 18 or younger ('child immigrant') and 2) those who became permanent residents at age 19 or older ('adult immigrant'),[25] 3) non-Indigenous mothers born in Canada (i.e., 'Canadian-born'), and 4) Indigenous mothers.[26] The following section compares data from the 2007 to 2011 and 2018 to 2023 periods, as the LFS began collecting information on the Indigenous and immigrant populations in the late 2000s (see Data sources, methods and definitions).

According to the LFS, immigrant women made up a larger share of all mothers aged 18 to 49 with young children aged 0 to 5 years – increasing from 26% in 2007 to 34% in 2023. This growth was driven by adult immigrant mothers, increasing in share from 19% in 2007 to 26% in 2023, with little change in the proportion of child immigrant mothers. Canadian-born women made up 62% of mothers - down from 70% in 2007. Indigenous women made up about 4% of mothers of young children in 2007 and 2023.

Along with changes in the representation of diverse groups as mothers of young children, there are differences in partnership of mothers. For instance, less than 1 in 10 (9%) never married mothers were adult immigrant mothers in 2023, despite representing 26% of all mothers. This pattern held in both 2007 and 2023 (Table 7). In contrast, 15% of never married mothers were Indigenous, with little change in this proportion since 2007. This proportion was higher than their representation as mothers in Canada (4%).

Canadian-born non-Indigenous partnered mothers have higher employment rates than mothers of other diverse groups

Numerous studies have shown that overall, immigrant and Indigenous women have poorer labour market outcomes (including employment and earnings) than their non-Indigenous[27] and non-immigrant[28] counterparts. These differences are often complex and intertwined. Immigrant women are more likely to be admitted as a dependent spouse under the economic category of admission and have more difficulty in finding employment related to language proficiency and difficulty in having their skills, education or experience recognized, especially if these have not been acquired in Canada.[29] Indigenous women face pervasive barriers to employment stemming from the impacts of colonization (such as racism, discrimination, and negative stereotypes), intergenerational trauma and subsequently lower levels of education.[30] Indigenous women are also more likely to live in rural and remote communities where there are fewer educational and employment opportunities.[31]

Table 7
Distribution of diverse groups of mothers with children aged 5 or younger, by marital status, 2007-2011 and 2018-2023

	Partnered		Unpartnered				Total (all mothers)	
			Previously married		Never married			
	2007-2011	2018-2023	2007-2011	2018-2023	2007-2011	2018-2023	2007-2011	2018-2023
Diverse group	percent							
Canadian-born	70.4	62.1	66.6	60.8	73.0	68.1	**70.4**	**62.4**
Indigenous	2.7	3.1	5.5	5.2	13.2	14.6	**3.6**	**3.9**
Child immigrant	6.4	7.6	10.0	10.2	7.9	7.8	**6.7**	**7.7**
Adult immigrant	20.6	27.3	17.9	23.8	5.9	9.4	**19.3**	**26.0**
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Note: In this study, data from 2020 was excluded from the 2018-2023 period.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, March and September monthly files, 2007-2011 and 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, and 2023.

Employment rates of mothers of young children differed not only by partnership status but also varied across diverse populations. Canadian-born partnered mothers had higher employment rates than immigrant and Indigenous mothers for all partnership types. This held true in both 2007 and 2023. For example, among partnered mothers in 2023, employment rates for Canadian-born mothers (82%) were the highest overall, followed by child immigrant mothers (71%) and Indigenous mothers (68%), and adult immigrant mothers (58%) (Chart 2). Among unpartnered mothers in 2023, adult immigrant (70%), Canadian-born (67%) and child immigrant (60%) mothers had the highest employment rates, followed by Indigenous mothers (40%).

Partnered mothers had higher employment rates than unpartnered mothers in 2023, except among mothers who became permanent residents as adults

The overall finding that never married mothers had lower employment rates than their partnered peers holds true for all groups, except for adult immigrant mothers. In 2023, the employment rate of adult immigrant never married mothers (74%) was much higher than the rate for partnered adult immigrant mothers (58%). This was also the case for adult immigrant mothers who were previously married (67%) (Chart 2). Research on immigrant women suggests that partnership is associated with lower labour market participation, which may be related to source-country gender roles and the lower opportunity costs of not working as a result of their relatively lower pay and over-qualifications for a given job.[32] It is possible that, for unpartnered adult immigrant mothers, the added financial pressures of heading a household may be a determining factor on decisions around seeking employment.

Largest increase in employment for unpartnered adult immigrant mothers, followed by partnered Indigenous mothers

Overall results suggest that employment rates have increased for both partnered and unpartnered mothers between 2007 and 2023. However, the extent of this increase varied among groups of diverse mothers. Among partnered mothers,

employment rates increased the most for partnered Indigenous mothers (16 percentage points), followed by adult immigrant (8 percentage points) and Canadian-born (6 percentage points) mothers (Chart 2). For unpartnered mothers, the largest rise in employment rates was seen for adult immigrant mothers, increasing by 22 percentage points between 2007 and 2023. Meanwhile, more modest gains (6 percentage points) were observed for Canadian-born unpartnered mothers.

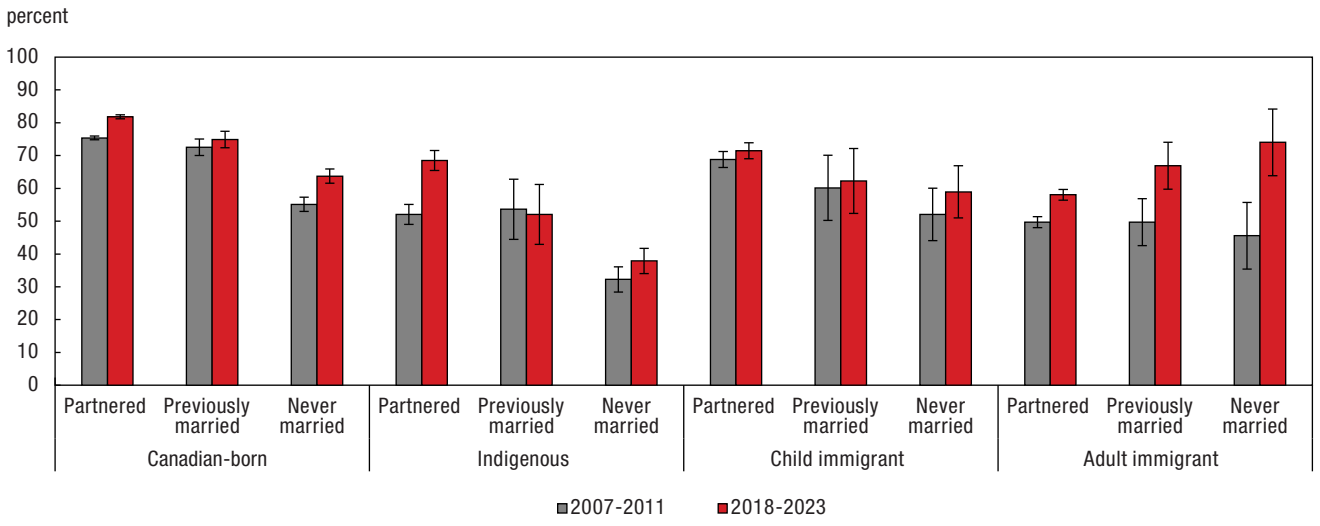
To examine the change in employment gaps over time, this section compares diverse groups of mothers with Canadian-born partnered mothers. Given that the employment rates of partnered mothers from diverse groups vary, comparing partnered and unpartnered mothers from the same group does not tell us which group faces the largest or the most persistent gap. Applying a consistent base group of comparison (i.e., Canadian-born partnered mothers) enables a clearer comparison between populations.

Exceptions to the narrowing of the employment gap were seen for some groups. There was little change in the employment gap between Canadian-born partnered mothers and never married mothers whether they were Canadian-born, child immigrant or Indigenous. In contrast, never married adult immigrant mothers experienced a narrowing of 22-percentage points in the employment gap with Canadian-born partnered mothers between 2007 and 2023. Turning to previously married mothers, results among the aggregate population showed no change in employment rates with partnered mothers between 2007 and 2023, yet this varied when examining diverse groups of mothers. For example, relative to Canadian-born partnered mothers, the employment gap narrowed 11 percentage points for previously married adult immigrant mothers but widened 8 percentage points for Indigenous mothers.

Relative to Canadian-born partnered mothers, wage gaps persist for unpartnered mothers, regardless of being Indigenous, immigrant, or Canadian-born

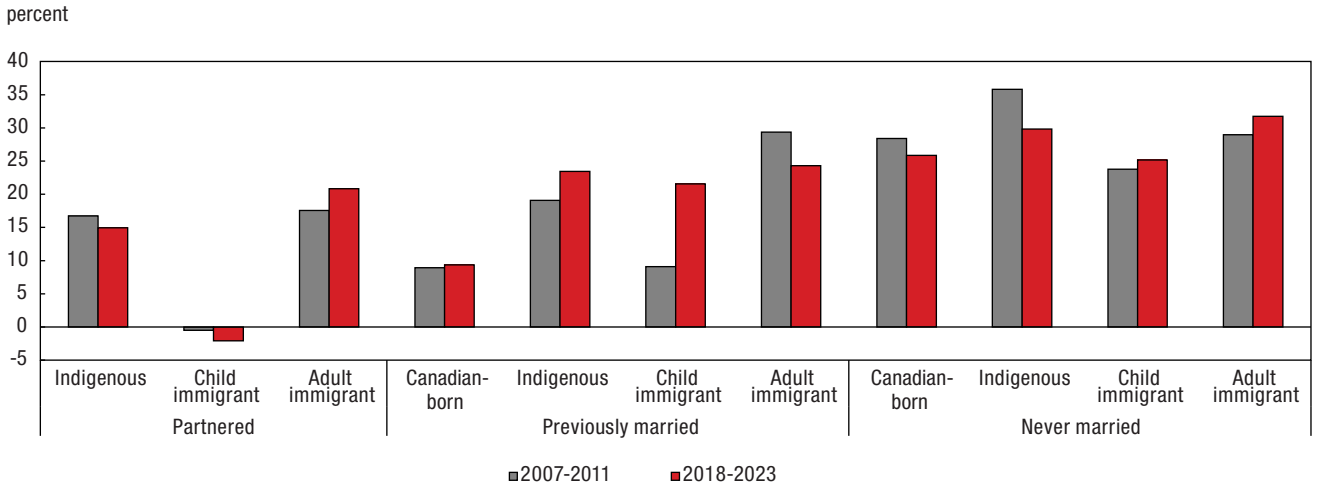
Relative to Canadian-born partnered mothers, wage gaps did not consistently change for diverse groups of mothers. Sizeable wage gaps persisted for unpartnered mothers, regardless of being

Chart 2
Employment rates of diverse groups of mothers with children aged 5 or younger, by marital status, 2007-2011 and 2018-2023



Notes: Error bars represent the 95% confidence intervals. In this study, data from 2020 was excluded from the 2018-2023 period.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, March and September monthly files, 2007-2011, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, and 2023.

Chart 3
Gaps in average hourly wage of mothers with children aged 5 or younger (relative to Canadian-born partnered mothers), by marital status and diverse group, 2007-2011 and 2018-2023



Notes: In this study, data from 2020 was excluded from the 2018-2023 period. Includes paid workers aged 18 to 49.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, March and September monthly files, 2007-2011, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, and 2023.

Indigenous, immigrant, or Canadian-born. For example, Indigenous never married mothers earned 36% less than Canadian-born partnered mothers in 2007, which narrowed by 6 percentage points to 30% by 2023. Meanwhile, the wage gap between adult immigrant never married mothers and Canadian-born partnered mothers widened by 3 percentage points from 29% in 2007 to 32% in 2023 (Chart 3).

Again, the wage gap between previously married mothers and partnered mothers was experienced differently by diverse groups of previously married mothers. Relative to Canadian-born partnered mothers, the wage gap for child immigrant previously married mothers widened by 12 percentage points from 9% in 2007 to 22% in 2023. For Indigenous previously married mothers, the gap also widened 4 percentage points to 23% in 2023. Meanwhile, adult immigrant previously married mothers decreased their gap with Canadian-born partnered mothers from 29% in 2007 to 24% in 2023 (Chart 3).

These findings highlight not only the differences between partnered and unpartnered mothers but also how Indigenous and immigrant mothers experience the Canadian labour market differently than Canadian-born mothers.

Conclusion

The share of employed unpartnered mothers continues to grow. This study asks whether employment and wage rates of unpartnered mothers of young children have caught up to those of partnered mothers between 1997 and 2023. Results show that the employment gap narrowed for unpartnered mothers overall but was not felt equally for different groups of unpartnered mothers. Employment rates between previously married mothers and partnered mothers converged, with both groups being equally likely to be employed by 2023. For never married mothers, the gap decreased but their employment rate did not catch up with that of their partnered peers. Changes in the demographic characteristics of never married mothers, particularly their increasing age and levels of education, reduced employment gaps in both 1997 and 2023, Among factors studied, changes in age composition explained most of the narrowing of the gap over time, however, three quarters of the narrowing of the employment gap could not be explained by the demographic variables studied in this paper. This remains an area for future research.

While unpartnered mothers have become increasingly part of the paid labour force, they continue to earn less than their partnered peers in terms of hourly wage rates, earning 19% less, on average, than

their partnered peers by 2023 – with virtually no change from 1997. Among unpartnered mothers, wage gaps varied for different groups of mothers. The hourly wages of never married mothers were 26% less than partnered mothers in 1997, narrowing to 23% by 2023. Job characteristics - primarily employment in less well-paid occupations – and, to a lesser extent, industry of work, were leading contributors to the wage gap in both 1997 and 2023. Demographic characteristics, namely the lower educational attainment and younger age profile of never married mothers, relative to their partnered peers, also contributed to the gaps in wage rates in each period. For previously married mothers, a 10% wage gap with partnered mothers persisted in both 1997 and 2023. Employment in lower paying occupations was the main factor explaining the wage gap followed by relatively lower levels of educational attainment, compared with partnered mothers.

This study highlights not only the differences between partnered and unpartnered mothers but also underscores the distinct labour market experiences of Indigenous and immigrant mothers compared with non-Indigenous mothers born in Canada. Results show that Canadian-born partnered mothers had higher employment rates than other groups of partnered and unpartnered mothers and that employment gaps did not narrow for all groups between 2007 and 2023. Moreover, gaps in hourly wages relative to Canadian-born partnered mothers varied among diverse groups of mothers and significant wage gaps persist for unpartnered mothers, regardless of being Indigenous, immigrant, or Canadian-born.

This paper presents a snapshot of mothers at a point in time. It is possible that over time, some partnered mothers may become unpartnered and may later re-partner. Family structures evolve and an ever-increasing number of children may spend part of their childhood in a one-parent household or as part of a blended family. The findings of this study contribute to the discussion around family support policies intended to help women remain in or return to paid employment after having children. Understanding the employment gaps and wage inequalities facing different groups of mothers provides a foundation for those seeking to tailor programs and programs targeting mothers with young children.

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Data sources, methods and definitions

Data sources

This article uses March and September data from Labour Force Survey (LFS) from 1997 to 2023. The LFS is a monthly household survey collecting information about the labour market activities of the population aged 15 years living in the ten provinces excluding residents of collective dwellings, persons living on reserves and other settlements in the province, and full-time members of the Canadian forces. To ensure sufficient sample sizes, March and September monthly files are pooled for each reference year. These months are independent of one another since the LFS follows a rotating panel sample design in which households remain in sample for six consecutive months.

For the section on wage gap analysis, the analytical sample is restricted to paid employees, excluding self-employed workers and those working in a family business without pay.

LFS data does not contain information on the custodial arrangements for children living in one-parent families. Children who are in the shared custody of both parents are considered as usual residents of the dwelling at which they live most of the time. If the shared custody is equal (i.e., they live an equal amount of time with each parent), they are considered as usual residents of the dwelling they are living in during the reference week. Mothers include women living with biological, adoptive, or step children. Mothers whose children do not live with them more than 50% of the time would appear as women with no children, even though they might have partial custody.

Methods

For analysis of changes over time, combined March and September data from survey year 1997 to 2001 (and/or 2007 to 2011 in some analyses) are compared to combined data from survey year 2018 to 2023. The survey year 2020 is not included in the comparison since 2020 is not representative of a typical year and including it would produce spurious results. For brevity, this study uses '1997' to describe the estimates using combined data from the 1997 to 2001 period, '2007' to refer to estimates from the 2007 to 2011 period and '2023' to describe the estimates using combined data from 2018 to 2023. Sample weights are adjusted accordingly. Bootstrap methods were used for variance estimation except for estimates using data from 1997 to 2001 where survey weights were used for variance estimation.

For the regression analysis of the wage gap in 1997 and in 2023, the dependent variable used was the logarithm of hourly wages, and the independent variables included a demographic characteristics (level of education, age group, region, and number of children of any age) and job characteristics (occupation, industry, full-time status, and union coverage). As the LFS does not collect data on lifetime work experience and major field of study, it was not possible to include these variables in this study.

The Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition conducts a regression on the reference population to calculate the average effect of each independent variable on the outcome of interest (in this case, employment rates and the logarithm of hourly wages) for that population. Then, this effect is used to calculate what the expected difference in employment rates or wages would be given the differences in the population characteristics from one population to another. Anything not explained by this effect is considered unexplained.

For any given point in time (t), the relationship between a labour market outcome (y) and observed characteristics (x) can be estimated using ordinary least squares (OLS):

$$Y_{it} = X'_{it}\beta_{it} + u_{it}$$

where y is the dependent variable Y = probability of being employed 0 or 1 (model 1); or y = natural logarithm of hourly wages (model 2);

t is a given time period (t = 1997 – 2001; 2007 – 2011; 2018 – 2023, excluding 2020);

i represents group of mothers (partnered; previously married; or never married);

X is a vector of demographic characteristics: age (five groups); education (3 groups), number of children (3 groups); and region (6 groups). In addition, job characteristics variables include: occupation (11 groups), industry (15 groups), part-time/full-time employment (2 groups); and union status (2 groups).

β is a vector of regression coefficients showing the percentage change associated with a one-unit change in X;

u is a normally distributed error term.

A standard Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition identifies the portion of the differences in y between two groups (i) owing to differences in observable characteristics (x) and differences in returns to those characteristics (β) and a constant term.

The difference in (y) in any given time period (t) between two groups (I = A and B) is:

$$\overline{Y}_A - \overline{Y}_B = \left(\overline{X}_A - \overline{X}_B\right)\hat{\beta}_A + \left(\hat{\beta}_A - \hat{\beta}_B\right)\overline{X_B}$$

Following Baker et al. (1995), the change in unadjusted (y) between period (t) and (t – 1) is expressed as:

$$\left(\overline{Y}_t^A - \overline{Y}_{t-1}^A\right) - \left(\overline{Y}_t^B - \overline{Y}_{t-1}^B\right) =$$

$$\left[\hat{\beta}_t^A\left(\overline{X}_t^A - \overline{X}_{t-1}^A\right) - \hat{\beta}_t^B\left(\overline{X}_t^B - \overline{X}_{t-1}^B\right)\right] + \overline{X}_{t-1}^A\left(\hat{\beta}_t^A - \hat{\beta}_{t-1}^A\right) - \overline{X}_{t-1}^B\left(\hat{\beta}_t^B - \hat{\beta}_{t-1}^B\right)\Big]$$

The first component $\left[\hat{\beta}_t^A\left(\overline{X}_t^A - \overline{X}_{t-1}^A\right) - \hat{\beta}_t^B\left(\overline{X}_t^B - \overline{X}_{t-1}^B\right)\right]$ is the change in y due to changes in characteristics across groups over time.

The second component $\left[\overline{X}_{t-1}^A\left(\hat{\beta}_t^A - \hat{\beta}_{t-1}^A\right) - \overline{X}_{t-1}^B\left(\hat{\beta}_t^B - \hat{\beta}_{t-1}^B\right)\right]$ is the change in returns to characteristics across groups over time.

Definitions

Employed persons are those who, during the reference week, did any work for pay or profit or had a job and were absent from work. Reasons for work absences includes among others, those on maternity leave. This study includes mothers who were on maternity leave in the reference week. In these cases, the data reflects employment and hourly wage rates prior to birth of the child, as these are likely to be similar as those upon return to work. While not all mothers may qualify for maternity leave benefits, Choi (2023) found that in 2009 and in 2019 most mothers on maternity leave returned or planned to return to the same employer and expected to work the same hours as prior to maternity leave. In the present study, conclusions were qualitatively similar whether or not mothers on maternity leave were included in the sample.

The **employment rate** for a particular group is the number employed in that group expressed as a percentage of the population for that group.

The article includes an analysis of the following population groups:

1. Data for the **Indigenous population** have been available in the LFS since 2007. Respondents are asked to self-identify as being an Indigenous person, that is, First Nations (North American Indian), Métis, or Inuk (Inuit). A person may also identify with more than one group. Separate analyses are not possible due to small sample sizes.

The LFS target population excludes persons living on reserves and other settlements in the provinces. All information in this article reflects the situation of people living off-reserve in Canada's ten provinces. According to the 2021 Census, about 80% of the Indigenous population lived off-reserve in the provinces in 2021. First Nations reserves have historically been excluded from the LFS conducted in the provinces due to the serious challenges in contacting and interviewing potential respondents, as many live in remote locations not easily accessible to LFS interviewers.

Although the LFS produces data on the territories, a different methodology is used than in the provinces. As a result, estimates for the territories are not included in this analysis. According to the 2021 Census, the Inuit population is relatively small (about 75,500) and mostly reside in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. As such, a large portion of the Inuit population is not covered in this analysis.

2. The **Canadian-born population** refers to non-Indigenous persons born in Canada.

3. In January 2006, questions were added to the LFS to identify Canada's immigrant population. Canada's **immigrant population** comprises those individuals not born in Canada and who are granted the right to live in Canada permanently. Non-permanent residents and Canadian citizens by birth (born outside of Canada) are excluded from the analysis. The immigrant population is further disaggregated by their age at which they became a landed immigrant (permanent resident) in Canada. 'Child immigrant' refers to those who became permanent residents in Canada at the age of 18 or younger while 'adult immigrant' refers to those who became permanent residents at age 19 or older.

Notes

1. Some mothers with children aged 0 to 5 may also have older children.
2. Unless otherwise stated, the data used in this study comes from the Labour Force Survey. See Data, Methods and Definition section for more details.
3. Galarneau (2005).
4. Bushnik et al., (2020); Garriguet (2021); Statistics Canada (2020).
5. Some children in one-parent families may have access to two parents that share legal and financial responsibilities and who participate in the upbringing of children, while others may reside in households where the unpartnered parent is the only breadwinner and caregiver. In 2017, one-third (34%) of divorced or separated parents had sole custody of their child and another 53% shared custody with the other parent (Statistics Canada, 2021).
6. Justice Canada (1999).
7. Harkness (2018).
8. It should be noted that the 'never married' category may include previously common law mothers, as the LFS does not have a specific category for this group.
9. Although the population of partnered couples contains some same-sex couples, it is not possible to determine the sex of previous partners of unpartnered mothers. As such, comparisons by same-sex and different-sex couples were not possible. The LFS does not collect data on sexual orientation of respondents. Data on gender diversity of mothers was not available for the study period, as the LFS began collecting data on gender, in addition to sex at birth, in January 2022. LFS data on gender from January 2022 to present is scheduled for release in January 2025.
10. Some individuals may be in a stable relationship but not live together, known as 'living apart together' (LAT), for reasons such as study, work, financial circumstances, not yet being ready to live together, or by choice (Turcotte 2013). As living arrangements can be complicated, the marital status variable is used to delineate groups of mothers in this study.
11. Milan (2013).
12. Provencher and Galbraith (2024).
13. Total fertility rate is an estimate of the average number of live births a female can be expected to have in her lifetime, based on the age-specific fertility rates of a given year.
14. Provencher and Galbraith (2024).
15. This study includes mothers who were on maternity leave in the reference week. In these cases, the data reflects employment and hourly wage rates prior to birth of the child, as these are likely to be similar as those upon return to work. Conclusions were qualitatively similar whether or not mothers on maternity leave were included in the sample. See Data sources, methods and definitions.
16. Canada substantially increased parental leave benefits on December 31, 2000, adding 25 weeks of parental leave to the existing 10 weeks, for a total of 50 weeks including maternity leave. Not all employed mothers with of children less than age one have access to maternity benefits, as these are determined through a combination of hours and weeks worked prior to birth of child. Among the study sample, partnered mothers were more likely to be absent from work due to maternity leave than unpartnered mothers in each time period.
17. The 'Central' category includes Saskatchewan and Manitoba and 'Atlantic' includes New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador. Some provinces were grouped into regions because of a small sample size in each province.
18. Kneebone (2021).
19. Gu (2022); Moyser and Milan (2018).
20. According to the 2021 Census, Quebec had a substantially larger share of couples living common law than other provinces (Statistics Canada, 2022). It is possible that the increase in employment rates of never married mothers in Quebec could reflect a higher share of previously common law mothers in the never married category.
21. Using a linear probability model, a binary indicator of employment (equal to one if employed and zero otherwise) is regressed on age group, educational attainment, number of children, and region.
22. This study is limited to variables collected by the LFS. As such, it recognizes that there may be other factors that are correlated with employment and wages that are not fully accounted for in this article.

23. The LFS does not collect data on annual employment income. Differences in annual income arise from a combination of differences in weekly hours worked, number of weeks worked and hourly wage rates. Given that there was no difference in average weekly hours worked between mothers who were paid workers in 2023, hourly wages were a key determinant of earnings.
24. Income amounts were adjusted to 2022 dollars.
25. The LFS started collecting information on the Indigenous population in 2007 and on the immigrant population in 2006. As such, data prior to 2007 cannot be disaggregated by these populations. It was not possible to disaggregate by visible minority status as the LFS only started collecting information on this variable in August of 2020. Hudon (2015) estimates that 61% of immigrant women belonged to a visible minority group compared to 19% of Canada's total population of women.
26. LFS data on First Nations people is limited to those living off-reserve. It should also be noted that data from the territories is not included in this study. As such, a large portion of the Inuit population is not covered in this analysis. See Data sources, methods and definitions for additional information.
27. Reid et al. (2021); Anderson (2019) and Hahmann et al. (2019).
28. Picot and Sweetman (2012); Lamb, Banjeree and Verma (2021) and Hou and Picot (2022).
29. Houle and Yssad (2010); Picot and Sweetman (2012); Bonikowska and Hou (2017); Frank and Hou (2015). Hudon (2015) notes that a growing number of immigrant women are admitted as principal applicant.
30. National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (2017).
31. Bleakney and Melvin (2022).
32. Drolet (2022); Morissette and Galarneau (2016).

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