

## Family Structure, 1996

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### Abstract

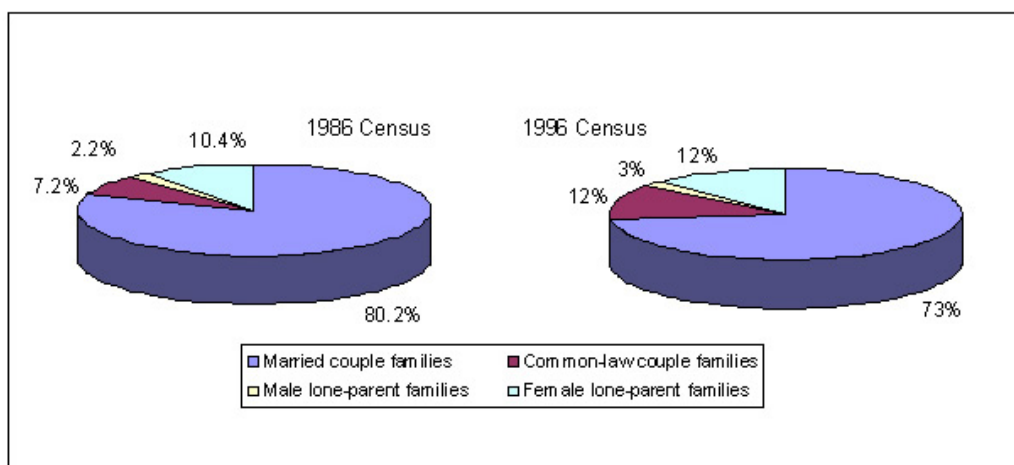
Family structure refers to the, "classification of census families into families of now-married couples and common-law couples (with or without children) and lone-parent families". Married couple families still constitute the large majority of families. The highest proportion of married couple families was in Newfoundland at 78% of all families and Quebec had the lowest proportion among the provinces at 64%. Since 1981, common-law unions have been steadily increasing. The number of lone parents increased 33% between 1986 and 1996. In 1996 there were approximately 1 138 000 lone-parent families, and families headed by women continue to outnumber those headed by men by four to one, or 83% of all lone-parent families.

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Canadian families have become more diverse over the last two decades as a result of increases in separation, divorce, remarriage, common-law unions and lone-parent families. The Canadian family has also been shaped by a decrease in fertility rates. The changing composition of families, census family structure and the family status of individuals are measures used by Statistics Canada to determine some of the trends in the family.

According to Statistics Canada, "Census Family Structure" refers to the "classification of census families into families of now-married couples and common-law couples (with or without children) and lone-parent families.

The reference to "all husband - wife families" includes families of both legally married couples and common-law couples. Together the husband-wife families and lone-parent families make up the total number of families in Canada. The figure below shows the changes in the distribution of family structures over a ten-year period.

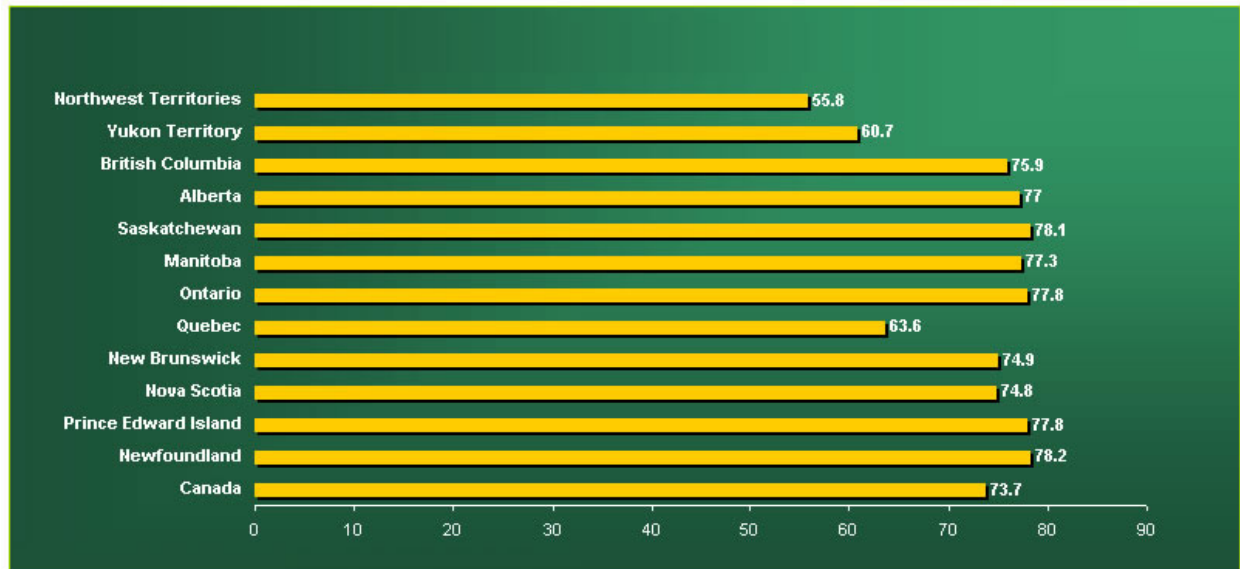


**Figure 1: Family Structure**  
**Source:** Statistics Canada

The married couple family remains the dominant family type in Canada. Since 1986, however, the proportion of this type of family has decreased from 80% to 74% of all families, while growth among common-law couple families saw an increase of 28% from 1991. According to the 1996 Census, 14.5% of all families were lone-parent families. The total number of lone-parent families in 1996 reached 1 138 000, a 19% increase from 1991 and a 33% increase from 1986.

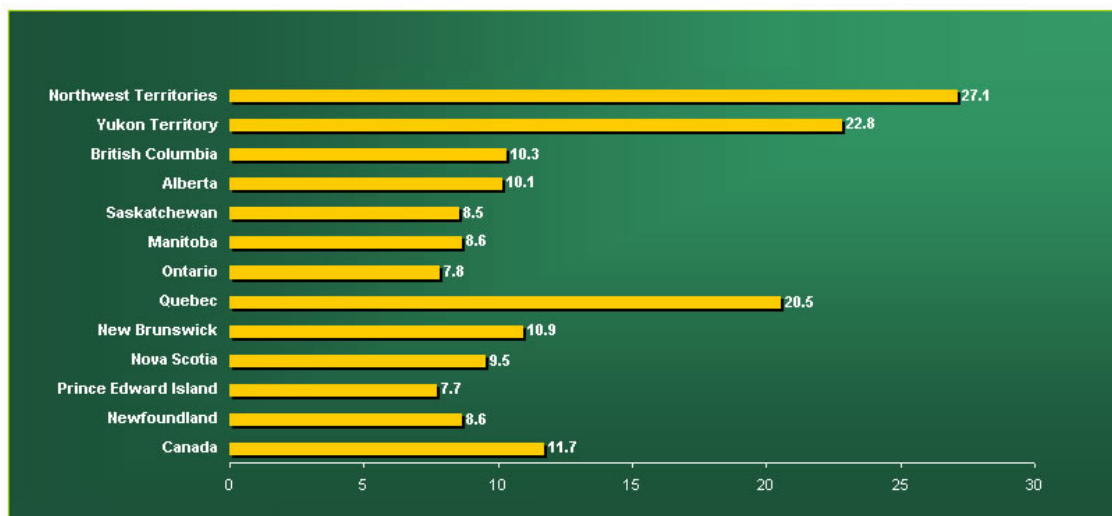
The distribution of different family structure varies across Canada. Married couple families are relatively more prominent throughout the Prairie Provinces, southern Ontario and Newfoundland, while families of common-law couples are most prominent in Quebec, Yukon and the Northwest Territories. Although lone parent families are evident in all regions of Canada, the highest proportions have been observed in larger urban communities. The highest proportions of lone-parent families, although evident in all regions of Canada, are observed in larger urban communities.

The charts below summarize the distribution of family structure for all of Canada and for each of the provinces and territories.



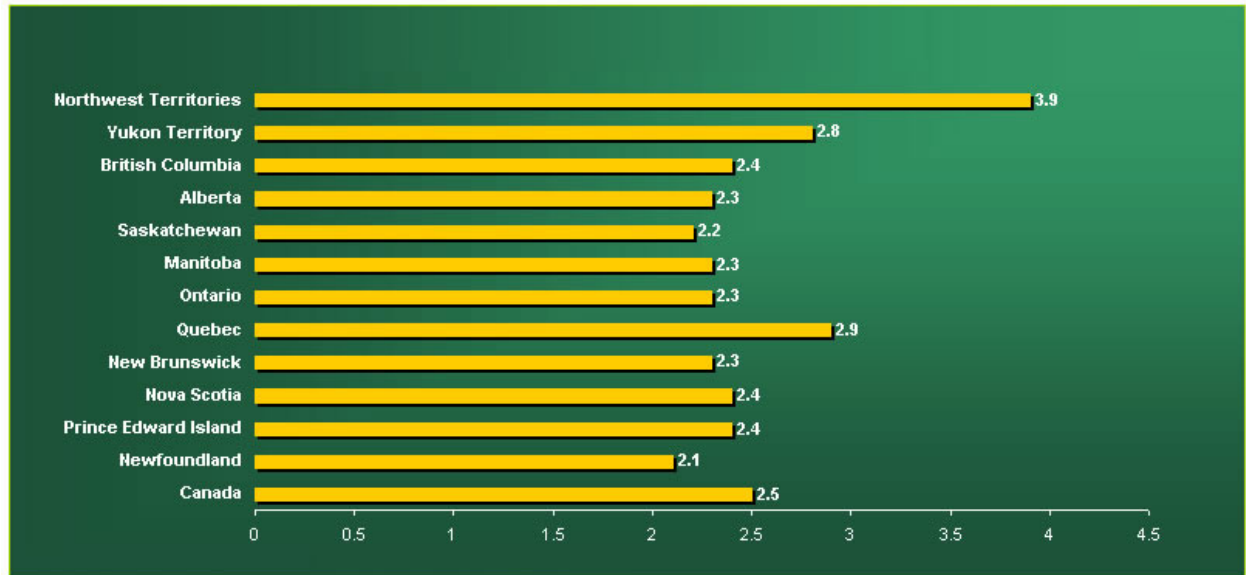
**Figure 2.** Married Couples

**Source:** Canada. Statistics Canada. The Daily, October 14, 1997. Catalogue Number 11-001E.



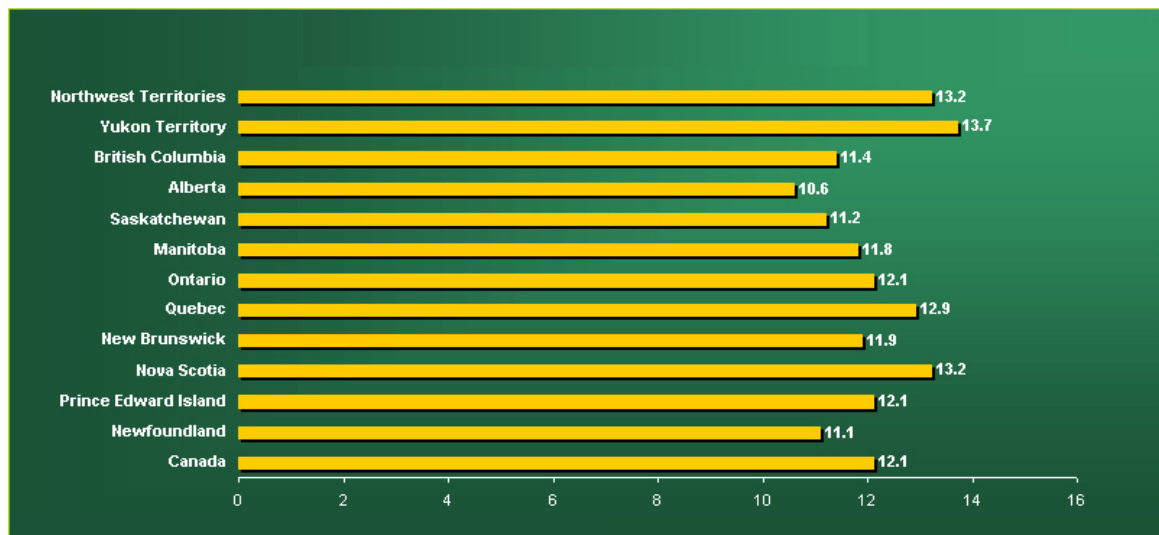
**Figure 3 :** Common-law Couples

**Source:** Canada. Statistics Canada. The Daily, October 14, 1997. Catalogue Number 11-001E.



**Figure 4.** Lone Parent Families (Men)

**Source:** Canada. Statistics Canada. The Daily, October 14, 1997. Catalogue Number 11-001E.



**Figure 5.** Lone Parent Families (Women)

**Source:** Canada. Statistics Canada. The Daily, October 14, 1997. Catalogue Number 11-001E.

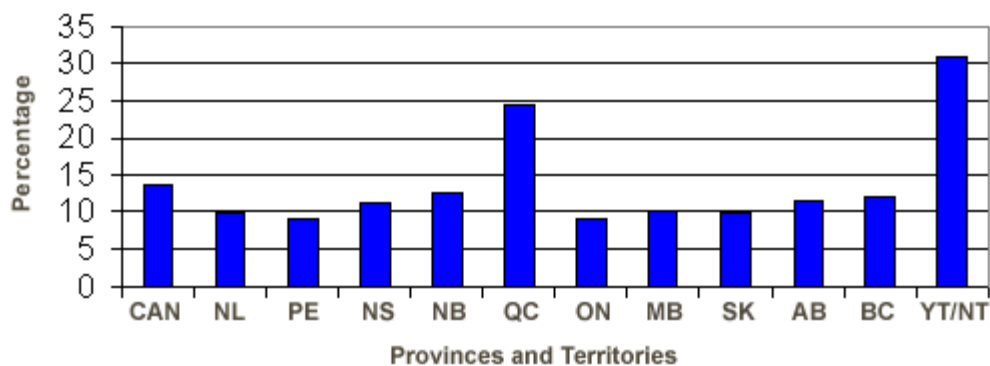
## Married Couple Families – “Marriage Still Popular”

According to the results of the 1996 Census, “married couple families” still constitute the large majority of families. Since 1986, the proportion has declined from 80% of all families to 74%, due to substantial increases in both common-law and lone-parent families. In 1996 there were 5.8 million married couple families living in Canada. The highest proportion of married couple families was in Newfoundland at 78% of all families. Quebec had the lowest proportion among the provinces at 64% of all families. All of the provinces and territories observed a decrease in the proportion of married couple families for the period 1986 to 1996.

Although legal marriage is still the preferred lifestyle of the majority of Canadian adults, marriage is now taking place later in life. There has also been an increase in the number of couples that have chosen not to marry at all. Research has indicated that the fluctuating marriage rate has coincided with social and economic indicators over the last 70 years. As a result there has been the tendency for individuals without employment or financial security to postpone marriage or to not marry. This has happened in the past: the depression of the 1930’s was witness to the lowest marriage rate at 6 marriages per 1000, compared to 425 per 1000 in 1993. The highest rates were observed in the 1950’s and 1960’s with rates of 950 per 1000 and over. The situation today reflects the growing popularity and acceptance of common-law unions, re-marriage and, to a large extent, single lifestyles.

## Common-law Couple Families

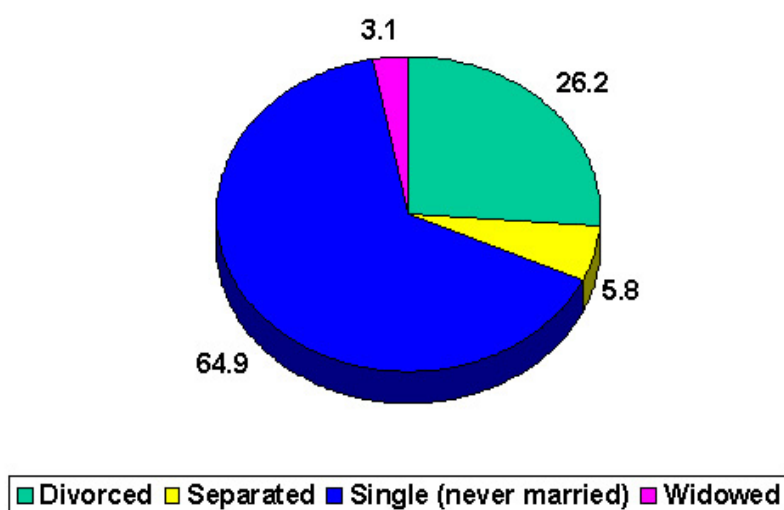
Since 1981, common-law unions have been steadily increasing. This is particularly true in the province of Quebec. In 1981, 8% of Quebec couples lived common-law, compared to 25% in 1996. The rest of Canada has also seen a marked, but lower, increase from 6% in 1981 to 10% in 1996. Common-law unions are prevalent among the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Of the couples living in the Territories, 31% were in common-law unions in 1996.



**Figure 6.** Couples in Common-law Unions  
**Source:** Canada. Statistics Canada. 1996 Census.

Many regional patterns can be noted on this map layer. Common-law unions are more frequent in northern New Brunswick, in the census divisions where there is a geographically high concentration of persons whose mother tongue is French. Ontario, too, has higher concentrations of common-law unions in census divisions with more than 25% French mother tongue, for example, Sudbury, Cochrane and Prescott-Russell. In Quebec, lower proportions of common-law are found along the Ontario-Quebec border. Montreal shows a clear split between English and French census divisions.

The individuals living in common-law unions have been further grouped according to their reported "legal marital status" based on 1996 Census data. Refer to figure below:



**Figure 7.** Distribution of Persons 15 Years of Age or Older Living Common-law, by Marital Status, 1996 Census

**Source:** Canada. Statistics Canada

## Lone-Parent Families - General

Statistics Canada has defined a lone parent as "a mother or father, with no spouse or common-law partner present, living in a dwelling with one or more never-married sons and/or daughters." According to this definition, when a child marries or moves into a common-law union, the lone parent is no longer considered a member of a census family.

Lone parents are not a new phenomenon in Canada, however an increase of 33% has been observed between 1986 and 1996. Today there are approximately 1 138

000 lone-parent families, and families headed by women continue to outnumber those headed by men by four to one, or 83% of all lone-parent families. Lone parent families make up 22% of all families with children.

Prior to 1960, the death of a spouse was the primary cause of lone-parenthood accounting for 60% of these families. As of 1996 a spouse's death accounted for 20% of all lone parent families. Changes to the Canadian Divorce Law in 1968 and 1985 have directly influenced the increase of divorce rates. Divorce now accounts for one-third of all lone-parent families and separation accounts for one-fifth. A further trend indicates that in 1996 nearly 24% of all female lone parents had never been married, an increase of 22% from 1986.



**Figure 8.** Marital Status of Male and Female Lone-parents (1991)

**Source:** Canada. Statistics Canada. Colin Lindsay. Lone-parent Families in Canada

Results of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) indicated that common-law families, particularly outside of Quebec, were more likely to experience a family breakdown. An example of this is shown by the higher proportion of lone parent families in the northern Prairie Provinces and the Northwest Territories where there are also high proportions of common-law unions. The agricultural regions of western Canada show smaller proportions of lone parent families. In comparison, significant concentrations of lone parent families are found in major urban centres such as Montréal, Toronto and Ottawa-Hull.

For additional information, see the "Family Structure" series of maps, specifically the Common-law Couple Families.

### Lone Parent Families Headed by Women

The majority of lone parent families in Canada are headed by women, where they outnumber those headed by men four to one. The 1996 Census data indicate that these families increased by 20% between 1991 and 1996 as compared to families headed by men (a 16% increase). The overall proportion of lone parents who had

never married increased from 14% in 1986 to 22% in 1996. In 1996, 24% of all female lone parents reported a marital status of "single".

The number of children living with a lone mother increased by 20% as compared to children living with a lone father (11%). This increase of female lone parents is closely tied to the increase of families living below the poverty line. The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY, 1994 to 1995) indicated that 92% of all children living in a lone parent family, lived with their mother.

The highest concentrations of female lone parent families, as a proportion of all lone parent families, are found in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and the Atlantic Provinces. The proportion of married couples also tends to be relatively high in these areas. In the case of the Atlantic Provinces, the percentage of births to single mothers is the highest in Canada (NLSCY, General Social Survey 1990). The reverse is true for Quebec, where fewer births to single mothers were reported, and fewer children experienced lone-parenthood very early in life. However, by the time Quebec children reached the age of 4, they were as likely to be living in a lone parent family as other children in Canada. By the age of 10, Quebec children were more likely to be living with one parent than other children in Canada.

### **Common-law Couple Families: Detailed Regional Descriptions**

In New Brunswick, the proportion of couples living common-law was 12.6% in 1996 – slightly more than the proportions in the other provinces, except Quebec. The map indicates that common-law unions are more frequent in northern New Brunswick, in the census divisions where there is a geographically high concentration of persons whose mother tongue is French. The proportion of couples living common-law is 19.4% in Gloucester, 16.9% in Madawaska, and 16.0% in Restigouche (regions in which most people have French as their mother tongue).

In Ontario, 9.1% of couples were in common-law unions in 1996. Although such unions are less popular there than in Quebec or New Brunswick, the proportion of persons living common-law is higher in the census divisions in which persons whose mother tongue is French make up at least one quarter of the population. This type of union was higher in Cochrane (15.6%); Prescott-Russell (15.4%); Timiskaming (13.6%) and Sudbury (13.5%). In the Kenora census division (16.2%) and the Manitoulin census division (12.8%), the proportion of couples living common-law is higher than that for the province, which may be attributable to the high concentration of Aboriginal persons.

In Quebec, the propensity to be in common-law unions is highest in the Vallée de l'Or region, at 36.8%. In most of the other census divisions, the frequency of common-law unions varies between 20% and 34%. However, in the Pontiac region of southern Quebec, on the Ontario border, the proportion of persons living common-law is only 13.7%. This is related to the large concentration in this division of persons who have English as a mother tongue.



The differences between the Francophone and Anglophone population, with regards to common-law unions, are even more marked in the Montréal Island census subdivisions. In the Montréal urban community as a whole, 20.3% of couples were living common-law in 1996. In all the subdivisions in which Anglophones account for a large majority of the population, the propensity to live in common-law unions is lower than 11%. Examples of such subdivisions include Westmount, West Montréal, Côte Saint Luc, Hampstead, Pointe-Claire, Kirkland, Beaconsfield, Baie D'Urfé and Dollard des Ormeaux. However, when the population having English as the mother tongue accounts for less than one quarter of the subdivision's total population, common-law unions increase to more than 20%. Examples of such subdivisions include Anjou, North Montréal, Montréal, Saint-Pierre d'Outremont and East Montréal.

## Data and Mapping Notes

### Mapping Notes

The data presented on the map layers were derived from the 1996 Census and were based on either the 288 census divisions (CD) or 5984 census subdivisions (CSD) for which data are released. The choropleth mapping technique is limited in use when displaying data for the large areas in the northern and rural regions, which contain small populations and are therefore, overemphasized. To view the population figures of a specific CD or CSD on a map, press the "Get Statistics" button and select the area of interest.

When comparing information between maps, it is important to understand that each map layer is based on a unique set of data. The class intervals used have been generated to represent the unique information on each map. As a result, the maps cannot be directly compared to each other. The individual maps, together with the supporting map text are the best sources for content comparison.

Note that in choropleth technique, areas are completely shaded and only one such layer can be viewed at a time.

At the time the census division boundaries were defined, Nunavut had not yet been designated as an official territory. It is therefore not referenced on the maps.

### Definitions

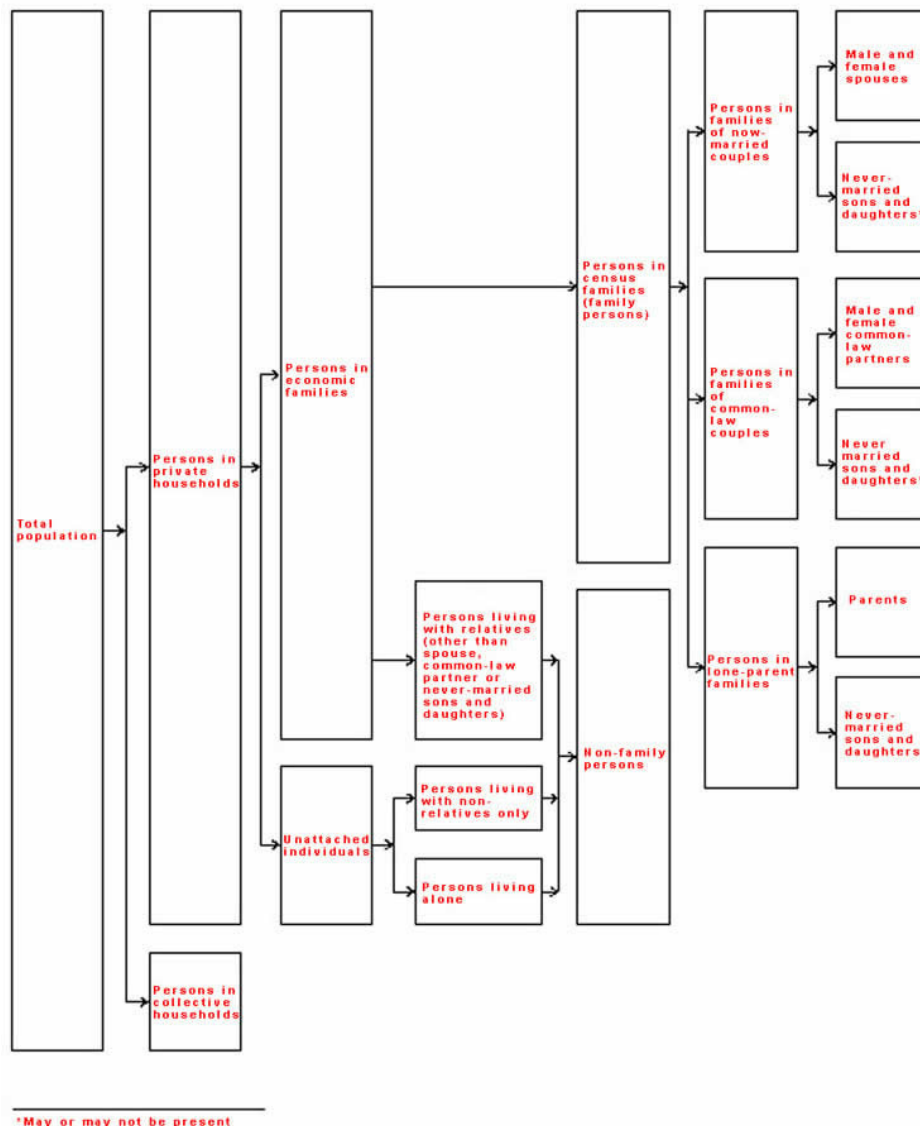
Census Family Status refers to the classification of the population according to whether or not they are members of a census family.

**Family persons** refer to household members who belong to a census family. They, in turn, are further classified as follows:

- **Spouses** refers to persons of the opposite sex who are legally married to each other and living in the same dwelling.
- **Common-law partners** are two persons of opposite sex who are not legally married to each other but live together as husband and wife in the same dwelling.
- **Lone parent** refers to a mother or a father, with no spouse or common-law partner present, living in a dwelling with one or more never-married sons and/or daughters.
- **Never-married sons and/or daughters** refers to blood, step or adopted sons and daughters who have never married (regardless of age) and are living in the same dwelling as their parent(s). Sons and daughters who are currently or were previously married, or who are living common-law, are not considered to be members of their parent(s)' census family even if they are living in the same dwelling. In addition, those never-married sons and daughters who do not live in the same dwelling as their parent(s) are not considered members of their parent(s)' census family.

Census Family Structure: refers to the classification of census families into **families of now-married couples** (with or without never-married sons or daughters of either or both spouses), **families of common-law couples** (with or without never-married sons or daughters of either or both partners) and **lone-parent families** by sex of parent.

Census Family Composition: "Refers to the classification of census families according to the number and/or age groups of never-married sons and/or daughters at home". The data is subdivided to include couples with and without children at home and provides age groups of children living at home.



\*May or may not be present

**Figure 1.** Economic and Census Family Membership and Family Status

**Source:** Canada. Statistics Canada. 1996 Census Dictionary, Catalogue Number 92-351-XPE.

## Definitions of underlined terms

**Census Division** : Census Division (CD) is the general term applied to areas established by provincial law which are intermediate geographic areas between the

municipality and the province levels. Census divisions represent counties, regional districts, regional municipalities and other types of provincially legislated areas. In Newfoundland, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, provincial law does not provide for these administrative geographic areas. Therefore, census divisions have been created by Statistics Canada in cooperation with these provinces for the dissemination of statistical data. In the Yukon Territory, the census division is equivalent to the entire Territory. (Source: 1996 Census Dictionary, Statistics Canada)

**Census Subdivision (CSD):** Census subdivision is the general term applying to municipalities (as determined by provincial legislation) or their equivalent (for example, Indian reserves, Indian settlements and unorganized territories). In Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and British Columbia, the term also describes geographic areas that have been created by Statistics Canada in cooperation with the provinces as equivalents for municipalities for the dissemination of statistical data. According to the national hierarchy, census subdivisions add together to form census divisions. The CDs form provinces and territories. Two additional levels are defined in the national hierarchy to facilitate special data analysis. A special aggregation of census subdivisions called census consolidated subdivision (CCS) provides a level of geography between the CSD and CD which facilitates data analysis. In the rural context, the CCS is a grouping of smaller municipalities, usually contained within a larger municipality. For instance, a town located within a surrounding township will be grouped together with the township to form a CCS. In urban areas, CCSs are formed by contiguous groupings of CSDs. A principal user of the CCSs is the Census of Agriculture. (Source: 1996 Census Dictionary, Statistics Canada)

**Choropleth map:** A thematic map in which areas are coloured or shaded to create darker or lighter areas in proportion to the density or a particular characteristic of the theme subject in that area.

## Map Sources

### Common-law Couple Families

Common-law couple families as a proportion of all husband-wife families based on the data derived from the 1996 Census, 20% sample data. Statistics Canada. 1996 Census of Population.

### Female Lone-parent Families

Female lone-parent families as a proportion of all lone-parent families based on the data derived from the 1996 Census, 20% sample data. Statistics Canada. 1996 Census of Population.

### Lone-parent Families

Lone-parent families as a proportion of all families based on the data derived from the 1996 Census, 20% sample data. Statistics Canada. 1996 Census of Population.



## **Married Couple Families**

Married couple families as a proportion of all husband-wife families based on the data derived from the 1996 Census (20% sample data). Statistics Canada. 1996 Census of Population.

## **References**

Canada. Statistics Canada. 1999. Canadian families at the approach of the year 2000. Ottawa. (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/ips/data-donnees/96-321-MPE1998004-eng.htm>)

## **Related Web sites (1999 – 2009)**

### **Federal Government**

Statistics Canada. 1996 Census. Census Families in Private Households by Family Structure 1986, 1991 and 1996  
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/c1996-r1996/oct14-14oct/family-famille2-eng.htm>

Statistics Canada. 1996 Census. Nation Tables. Census Families in Private Households by Family Structure  
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/c1996-r1996/oct14-14oct/family-famille-eng.htm>  
Canada, Provinces and Territories, 1991 and 1996 Censuses (20% Sample Data)

Statistics Canada. The Daily. Tuesday, June 9, 1998. 1996 Census: Private Households, Housing Costs and Social and Economic Characteristics of Families  
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/980609/dq980609-eng.htm>

Statistics Canada. The Daily. Tuesday, October 14, 1997. 1996 Census: Marital Status, Common-law Unions and Families  
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/971014/dq971014-eng.htm>

### **Other**

Vanier Institute of the Family  
<http://www.vifamily.ca/>