

Marital Status, 1996

Abstract

A person's marital status can be referred to as legally married, separated, divorced, widowed, or single. A significant proportion of the population is classified as either single (46% of the population), or legally married (41% of the population). In 1996, only 3% of persons 15 years of age or older were separated. The largest proportions of divorced persons are in the provinces of Quebec (9.0%) and British Columbia (7.9%). Saskatchewan had the highest proportion of widowed persons in Canada, 7.6%. Women make up more than 80% of this group, a figure that will increase as people age, since men have a much higher mortality rate at advanced ages.

The data presented in this series of maps were derived from the 1996 Census. The data specifically refers to the "legal conjugal status of a person". The classifications used to compile these maps are based on the definitions provided by Statistics Canada:

- **Legally married (and not separated):** represents couples where both the husband and wife are living together.
- **Separated, but still legally married:** individuals who are currently married but are no longer living together and have not obtained a divorce.
- **Divorced:** persons who have obtained a legal divorce and who have not remarried.
- **Widowed:** persons who have lost their spouse through death and have not remarried.
- **Single (never married):** single, never-married persons of all age groups, and also those persons who had their marriage annulled.

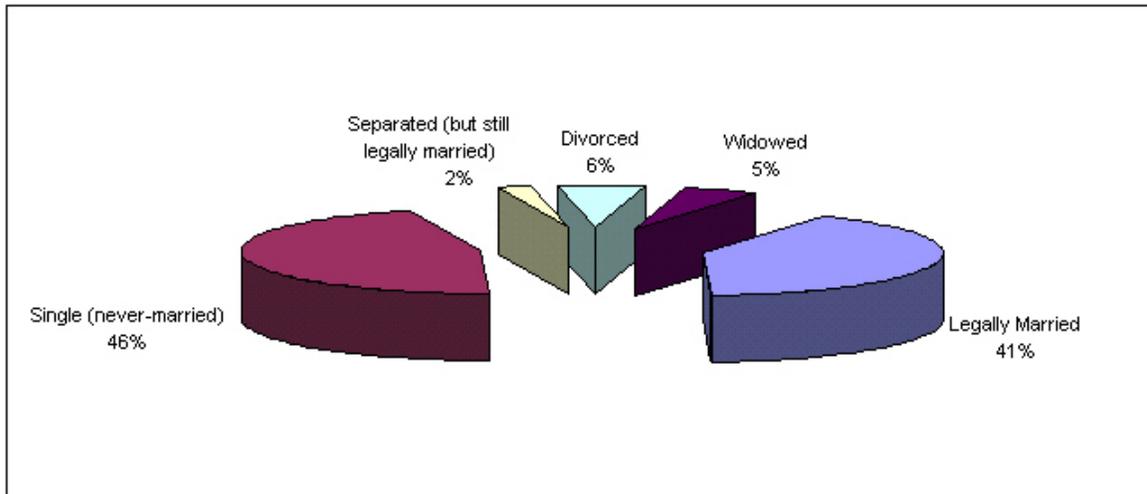


Figure 1. Total Population Showing Proportions of Marital Status

Source: Canada. Statistics Canada. 1996 Census

A significant proportion of the population is classified as either single (46% of the population), or legally married (41% of the population). The classification, "single", includes individuals who are living in common law relationships and have never been married. This category also includes young children that could only be classified as single owing to their age. The remaining 13% of the population is either separated, divorced or widowed.

Trends in the Canadian population show that more single people remain single for longer periods of time, delaying couple relationships, and in many cases, remaining at home or living alone. Many young Canadians are also choosing common-law unions as an alternative to marriage, which may explain why the proportion of "single" marital status is so high.

Legally Married

In 1996, 41% of Canadians were legally married. The patterns evident on this map indicate a distinctly smaller proportion of married persons in Quebec and the Territories in comparison to the rest of Canada. This is attributed to the relatively high proportion of common-law unions in those areas. In the 1960's, nine out of ten newlyweds were in their first marriage. By 1990, a third of the couples had at least one spouse that had been previously married. Couples choosing to marry for the first time are doing so at an older age. In 1990, women married at an average age of 26 years and men at 27.9 years, as compared to 22.7 years and 25.1 years respectively, in 1970.

As of 1995, the overall marriage rate for Canada was 541 marriages per 100 000 persons. All provinces maintained rates slightly higher than the national average with the exception of Quebec and the Northwest Territories.

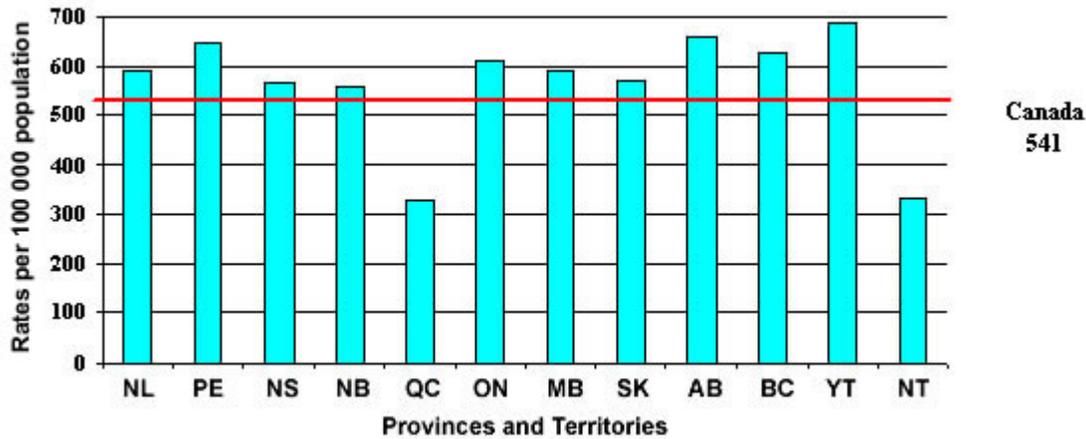


Figure 2. Marriage Rates, Provinces and Territories (1995)

Source: Canada. Statistics Canada. Marriages, 1995

The acceptance of remarriage has contributed to the growing phenomenon of "blended families" which are composed of members from different families. These complex family arrangements have only added to the diversity of today's Canadian families.

The overall propensity to live as a couple has been decreasing since 1981. Two factors that have contributed towards this trend are: young people are delaying living as a couple, and many new couples are choosing common-law relationships. According to the 1991 Census, 35% of divorced men and 25% of divorced women were living common-law. Further trends have suggested that these common-law unions are not as long-lasting, and that legal marriages of the younger generations are more fragile than the marriages of the older generations, adding to the increase of individuals living alone.

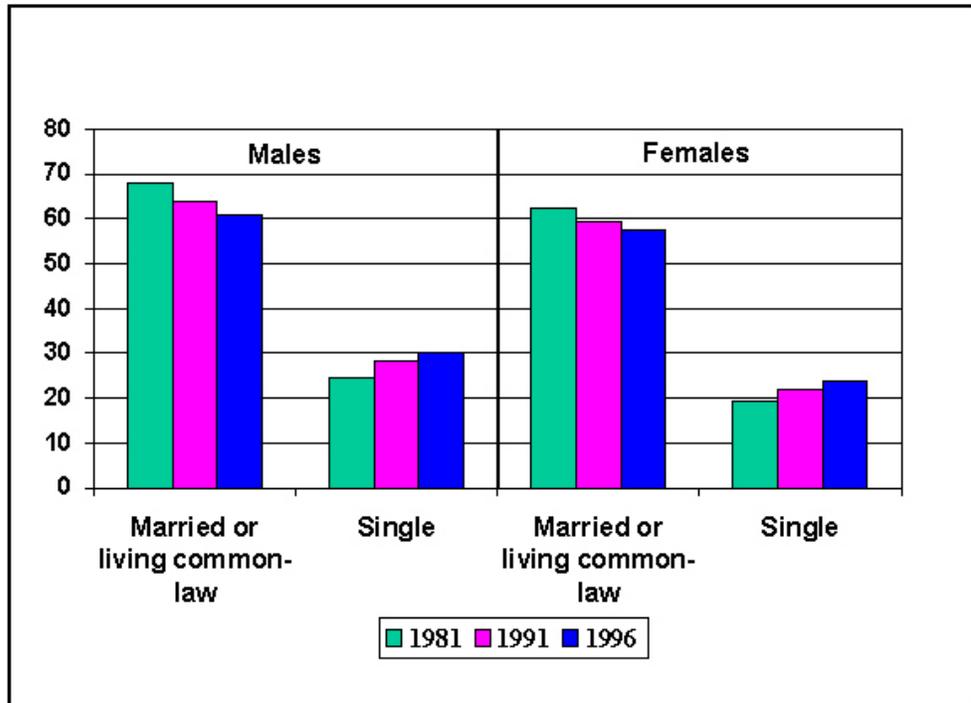


Figure 3. Comparison (males and females 15 years of age or older) Married or Common-law to Single Marital Status, 1981 to 1996

Source: Canada. Statistics Canada. 1996 Census.

In the 1996 Census, Aboriginal people who married according to traditional customs were instructed to report themselves as "legally married". Of those persons who did not do this and had never been married previously, they would have been classified as "single".

Single Marital Status

Statistics Canada has defined "single marital status" as single, never-married persons of all age groups, including those persons who had their marriage annulled.

In 1996, 13.3 million persons were single and had never married – that is, 46.1% of the Canadian population. Since 1981, there has been an increase in the proportion of single people 15 years of age or older. This is partly attributable to the fact that young people are waiting longer to get married or prefer to live common-law. In 1996, four out of ten individuals living alone reported being of a "single marital status", the same as for 1991. The proportion of single people aged 25 to 29 years has increased where, in 1996, 59% of that age group has never married. This does not take into account the persons living in a common-law union.

The map indicates that the proportion of single persons is largest in the areas in which common-law unions are more popular, primarily Quebec and the Northwest Territories. Based on 1996 Census data, two thirds of the persons living common-law are single. Another explanation for the higher incidence of single persons in the northern regions may be related to the large population of young children and young adults.

Consult the Children Living at Home maps, the Population Structure maps and the Family Structure maps for similar information. When making map comparisons, keep in mind that each map is generated from a unique data set and the legend classifications are defined to reflect that specific map content.

Separated, but Still Legally Married

In Canada, separation is usually seen as a transitional state before divorce or marriage annulment and perhaps remarriage. Many chose to remain single. In 1996, only 3% of persons 15 years of age or older were separated. These individuals are still considered legally married, but no longer live with their spouse. Overall, the rate of marriage breakdowns has continued to rise significantly since the early 1900's as a result of changes to attitudes and perceptions of the institution of marriage. To a certain extent, religion and the influence of the church has maintained some control over formal marriage dissolution through divorce.

Divorced

Between 1985 and 1989, the number of divorces greatly increased in most of the provinces, then remained fairly stable during the 1990s. In Canada, 1.6 million persons reported being divorced in 1996 – that is, 7.2% of persons 15 years of age or older. The provinces of Newfoundland (4.0%) and Prince Edward Island (4.8%) have relatively few divorced persons. The largest proportions of divorced persons are in the provinces of Quebec (9.0%) and British Columbia (7.9%). The figure below shows the Canadian divorce rates for 1995.

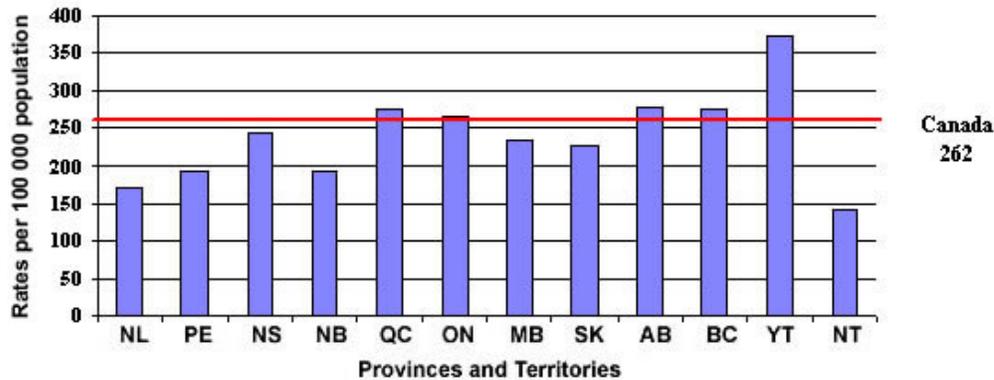


Figure 4. Divorce Rates, Provinces and Territories (1995)
Source: Canada. Statistics Canada. Divorces 1995.

Changes to the Canadian Divorce Law in 1968 and 1985 have directly influenced the increase of divorce rates. The figure below illustrates the trends in divorce and marriage over a period of three decades. In comparison to some other western industrialized countries, Canada's divorce rate of 2.6 per 1000 persons (1995) is considered low. As a comparison, the divorce rate per 1000 persons was 4.0 in the United States, 3.0 in the United Kingdom and 2.7 in Australia, based on 1995 figures.

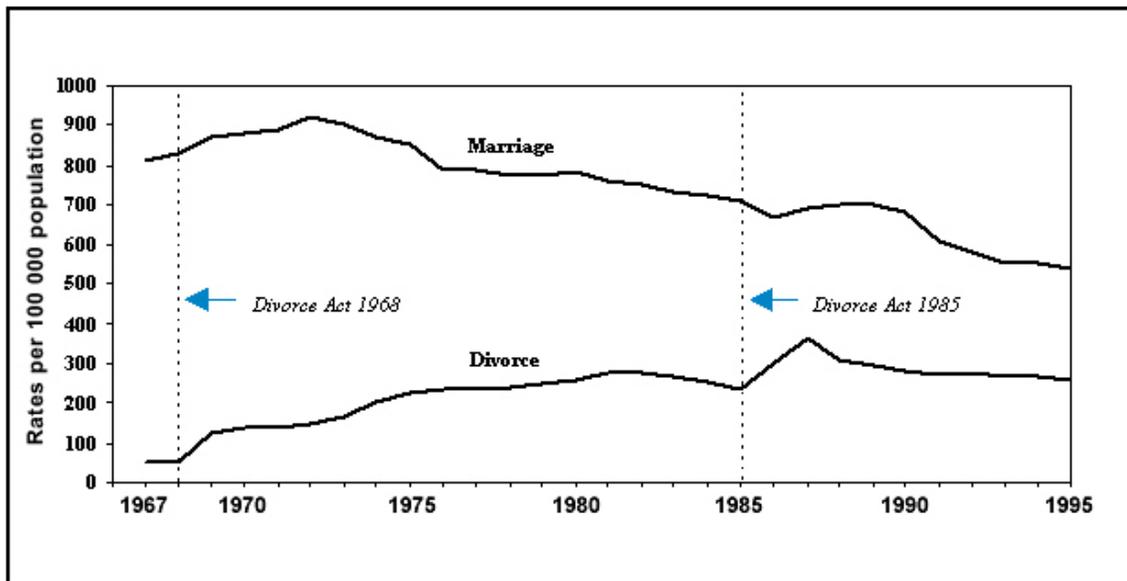


Figure 5. Marriage and Divorce Rates in Canada (1967 to 1995)
Source: Canada. Statistics Canada. Divorces (1987 to 1988, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995). Marriage and Conjugal Life in Canada.

Widowed Persons

In 1996, there were 1.5 million widowed persons in Canada, accounting for 6.4% of the Canadian population 15 years of age and older. Women make up more than 80% of this group, a figure that will increase as people age, since men have a much higher mortality rate at advanced ages. The map inset presents the distribution of widows in Canada. Reference could be made to the Age Structure Series of maps for a comparison of the proportion of widows in Canada, to the elderly population in Canada.

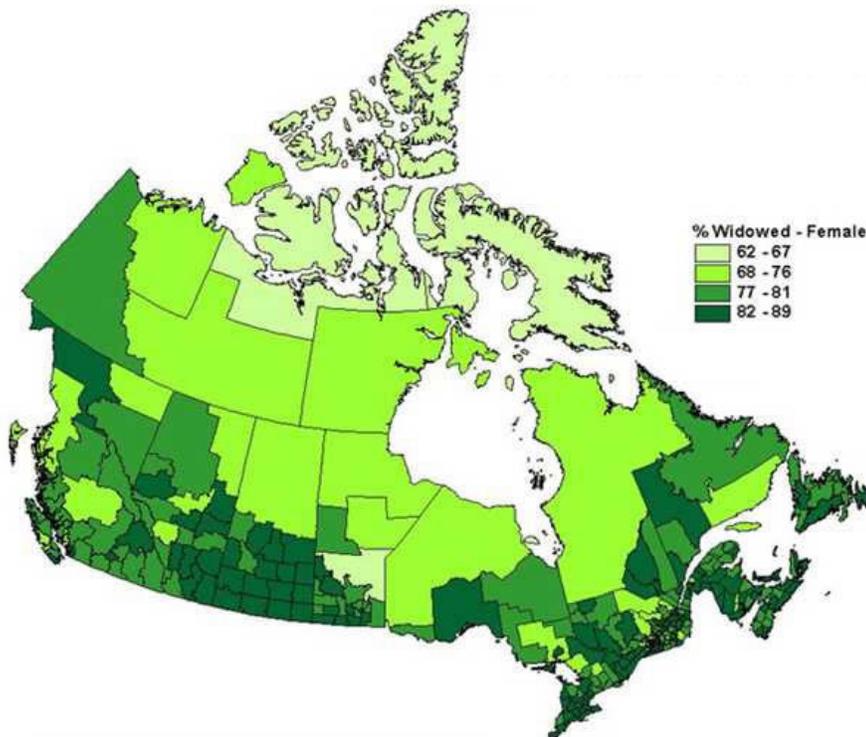


Figure 6. Proportion of the Population that are Widows, 1996 Census
Source: Canada. Statistics Canada. 1996 Census of the Population.

The map layer in this Marital Status Series indicates that widowed persons as a whole live mainly in southern areas, near the large centres. The province of Saskatchewan is an exception, with the highest proportion of widowed persons in Canada (7.6%). The widowed population are spread over much of this region, particularly in the small towns. This is primarily due to the fairly high rates of migration of working-age adults to the other provinces. In Alberta, the situation is

completely different. Alberta has the smallest proportion of widowed persons of all the provinces (5.2%). This is due to Alberta's having one of the highest fertility rates, as well as to the economic prosperity of the 1970s, which attracted young adults from other provinces. In the Northwest Territories, the proportion of widowed persons was much smaller than in all the other provinces (3.1%).

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.

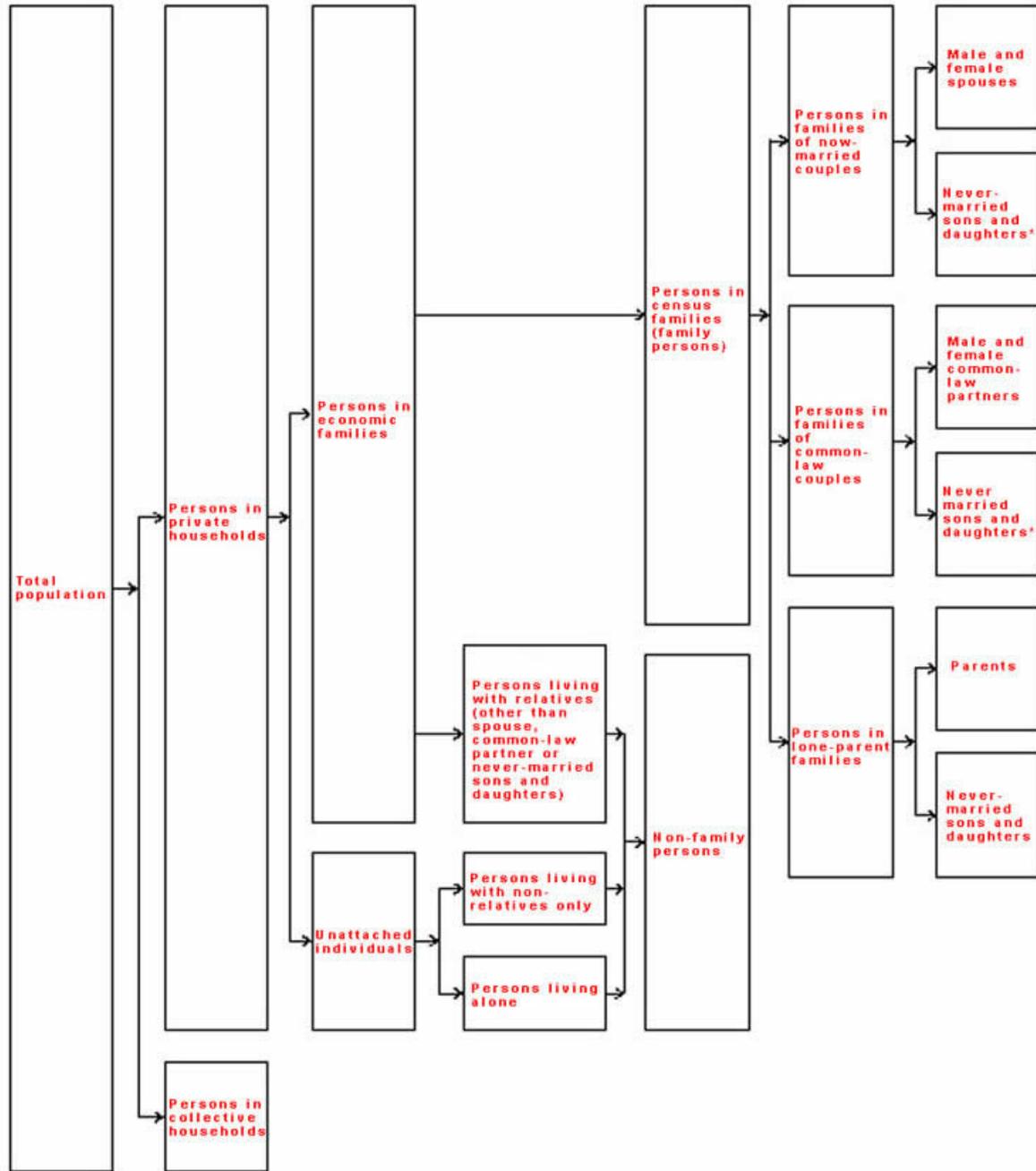
Family persons refer to household members who belong to a census family. They, in turn, are further classified as follows:

- **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

Divorced

Divorced marital status as a proportion of the total population based on the data derived from the 1996 Census (100% data). Statistics Canada. 1996 Census of Population.

Married

Married marital status (legally married) as a proportion of the total population based on the data derived from the 1996 Census (100% data). Statistics Canada. 1996 Census of Population.

Separated

Separated (still legally married) marital status as a proportion of the total population based on the data derived from the 1996 Census (100% data). Statistics Canada. 1996 Census of Population.

Single

Single marital status (never married) as a proportion of the total population based on the data derived from the 1996 Census (100% data). Statistics Canada. 1996 Census of Population.

Widowed

Widowed marital status as a proportion of the total population based on the data derived from the 1996 Census (100% data). Statistics Canada. 1996 Census of Population.

References

Ambert, Dr. Anne-Marie. Divorce: Facts, Figures and Consequences. York University. The Vanier Institute of the Family.

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. 1996 Census. Nation Tables. Marital Status/Common Law

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/c1996-r1996/oct14-14oct/nalis2-eng.htm>



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

Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs
<http://www.frp.ca/>

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

Inter-agency

Child and Family Canada
<http://www.cfc-efc.ca/>
Welcome to Child & Family Canada, a unique Canadian public education website.