



# FAMILY LIFE

The structure of the family and the character of relationships within it make up the primary setting for child development.

## KEY INDICATORS:

- Family structures
- Parental employment
- Family functioning

## CANADIAN FAMILIES CHANGING

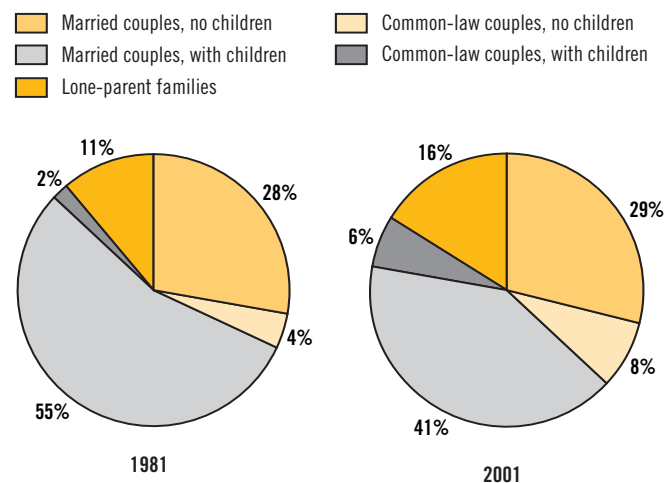
The family provides the most significant influence on a child's development. Families provide physically for children – with food, shelter and clothing. They teach children skills, values and attitudes to help them participate in society, and through nurturing and support, foster their self-esteem. They protect them from harm. By providing these developmental foundations, families enable children and youth to be independent, healthy members of society.

In a rapidly changing world, families are changing, too – in a number of ways.

Couples with children at home now represent a declining proportion of Canadian families. Married couples living with children under 25 still constitute the largest group, but they declined from 55% of families in 1981 to 41% by 2001. Over that same period, the proportion of married or common-law couples without children rose from 32% to 37% of all families. The proportion of lone parents and common-law couples with children also rose.

Various factors have contributed to these trends. Some couples delay having children and others choose not to have any. As well, population aging results in more children having moved out on their own.

THE STRUCTURE OF CANADIAN FAMILIES, 1981 & 2001



Source: Calculations by the Canadian Council on Social Development using data from Statistics Canada's Census, 1981 & 2001.

## Fewer babies

Between 1994 and 2003, the annual number of births in Canada decreased by 14% – from 385,114 to 331,522. This trend was evident across all provinces and territories, with Newfoundland reporting the largest decline (28%), and Nunavut the smallest (0.7%).

## Delayed motherhood

Two decades ago, only one-quarter of women giving birth were over age 30; by 2003, nearly half (48%) were aged 30 or older. Mothers aged 30 or older were in the majority in Ontario (54%) and British Columbia (53%).

Between 1994/95 and 2002/03, the number of births among women aged 35 to 39 rose by 19% and among those aged 40 to 44, by 53%.

## Smaller families

Large families are becoming rare. These days, families with children average 1.8 children at home, down from 2.0 in 1981. Family size declined among married couples and lone parents, but among couples in common-law relationships, the average number of children remained about 1.7 in both 1981 and 2001.

In 2000, two-thirds of children under age 12 had one sibling or were the only child in their family. This proportion has been relatively stable since 1994. The proportion of children under 12 with three or more siblings declined from 11.1% in 1994 to 9.7% by 2000.

## Fewer marriages & divorces

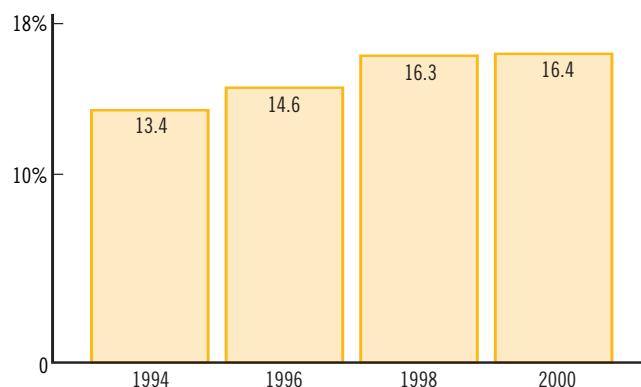
In 2003, there were about 145,000 marriages in Canada – down 9% from 1994. In 1981, about 65% of both women and men could be expected to marry at least once by the time they reached age 50. By 2001, this was true of only 51% of women and less than half of Canadian men.

The number of divorces is also declining. In 2003, there were about 71,000 divorces in Canada – down 10% from 1994. All provinces and territories, with the exception of Prince Edward Island, reported a drop in the number of divorces. The Canadian divorce rate peaked at 41% in 1986 and has remained relatively stable at around 38% since 1996.



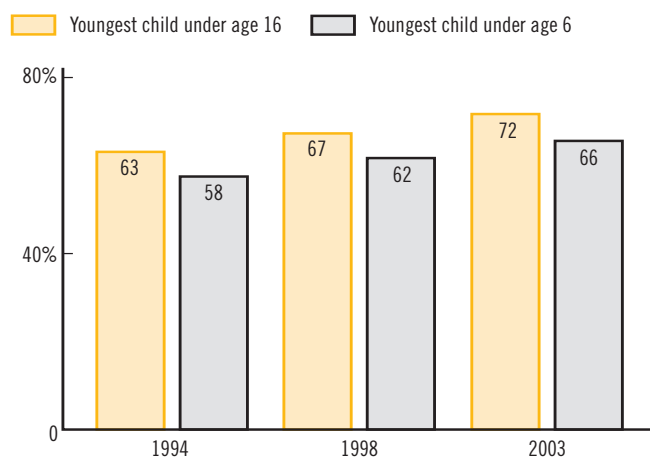
# KEY INDICATORS

## CHILDREN UNDER AGE 12 IN LONE-PARENT FAMILIES



Source: Calculations by the Canadian Council on Social Development using microdata files from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1994, 1996, 1998, & 2000.

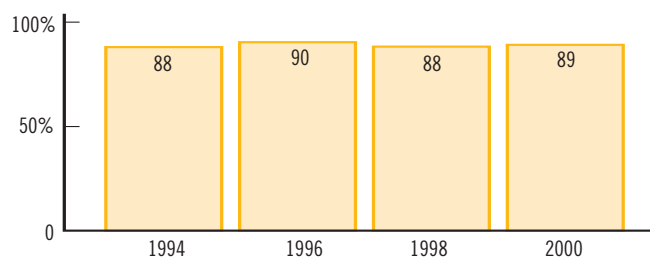
## WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT RATE, BY AGE OF YOUNGEST CHILD



Source: Calculations by the Canadian Council on Social Development using data from Statistics Canada's Labour Force Historical Review, 2003.

## FAMILY FUNCTIONING

% OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 12 IN FAMILIES THAT FUNCTION WELL



Source: Calculations by the Canadian Council on Social Development using microdata files from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1994, 1996, 1998, & 2000.

### More common-law families

In 2001, about 733,000 children under age 15 lived with common-law parents – more than four times the proportion of 20 years earlier (3% in 1981; 13% by 2001). And younger children are more likely to live with common-law parents. In 2001, 17% of children under age 5 lived with common-law parents, compared to 9% of those aged 10 to 14. Children in Quebec were much more likely to live with common-law parents – 29%, compared with 8% of children elsewhere in Canada.

While the number of children under 15 living with two married parents rose from 3.9 million in 1981 to 4.6 million by 2001, their proportion fell substantially – from 84% to 68%.

### Many blended families

In 2000, almost 279,000 children under age 12 – 6% of all children in this age group – lived in blended families. Younger children (those under 6) were more likely to live in blended families; by 2002, almost 7% did so, up from 6% in 1994.

### Same-sex families

For the first time in 2001, the Census gathered data on same-sex families. There were an estimated 34,000 same-sex couples that year – accounting for 0.5% of all couples – but many believe this number to be an underestimate. The proportion was highest in Quebec, British Columbia, and the Yukon (0.6%).

According to the Census, at least 3,000 of these same-sex couples were raising children. Most of the children were born to mother-father unions which later ended in divorce, with the lesbian or gay parent obtaining custody. Increasingly, however, lesbian couples are giving birth or adopting children, and gay couples are choosing to adopt.

### More lone parents raising children

Lone-parent families accounted for 25% of all Canadian families with children in 2004, up from 21% in 1994. Back in 1961, only 11% of families were headed by lone parents.

There were about 1,366,400 lone-parent families in 2004 – an increase of 27% in only 10 years. Eighty-one per cent of these families were headed by women.

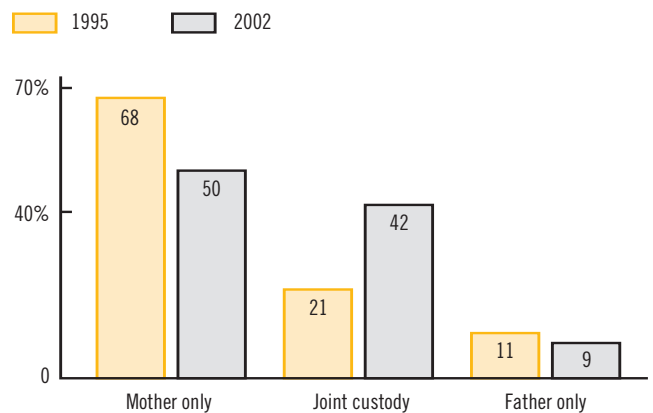
Although the number of female lone parents is much higher, male lone-parent families have increased at a greater rate. Over this 10-year period, the number of female lone parents rose by 24%, while the number of male lone parents grew by 38%.

### Child custody arrangements

Who receives custody of the kids following divorce? The answer has changed quite dramatically. In 1995, more than two-thirds of custody orders ruled in favour of the mother, but by 2002, that was true in less than half the cases.

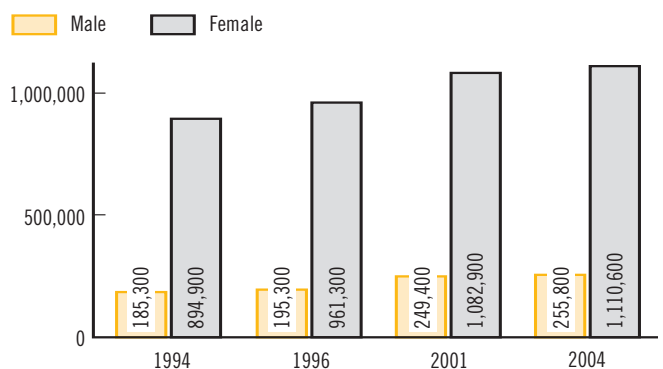
Court rulings have increasingly favoured joint custody arrangements, but this varies considerably across Canada. In 2002, families in Prince Edward Island were the most likely to have joint custody awarded (77%), followed by families in Alberta and the Northwest Territories (68%). Quebec had the lowest rate (25%). Mothers were most often awarded custody in Quebec (62%), Ontario (59%), and British Columbia (51%).

**COURT-ORDERED CUSTODY ARRANGEMENTS**



Source: Calculations by the Canadian Council on Social Development using data from Statistics Canada's Divorces, 2001 & 2002, Cat No. 84F01213XPB.

**LONE-PARENT FAMILIES, 1994 TO 2004**



Source: Calculations by the Canadian Council on Social Development using data from Statistics Canada's Annual Demographic Statistics, 2004, CD ROM 91-12



## ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

### Young population

Overall, about one-third of the Aboriginal population in 2001 were under 15 years of age and 17% were aged 15 to 24. In other words, half of the Aboriginal population were under age 25. By contrast, about one-third (32%) of the non-Aboriginal population were under 25. Between 1981 and 2001, however, the proportion of children and youth in the Aboriginal population declined, while the share of older age groups increased. The fertility rate in the Aboriginal population has been declining over time. In the 1960s, it was four times the Canadian rate; today, it is 1½ times the Canadian rate.

### Living in cities

Almost three of every 10 Aboriginal people (28%) lived in large urban centres in 2001. Aboriginal children under 15 now make up 30% to 40% of the Aboriginal population in most large urban centres in Western Canada. Furthermore, the size of the Aboriginal youth population (15 to 24 years) more than doubled between 1981 and 2001 in all major urban centres from Sudbury to the west coast; in Saskatoon, it increased nearly five-fold.

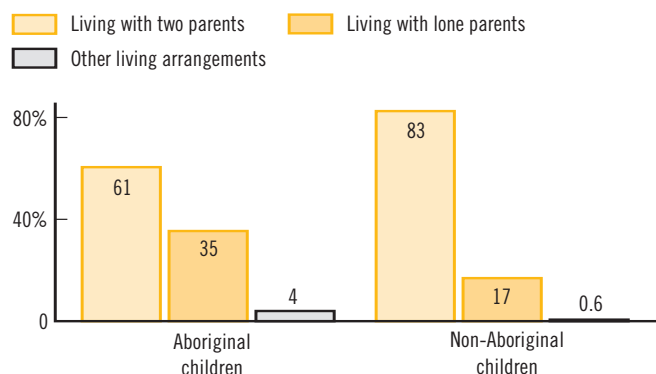
### Lone-parent families

In 2001, far fewer Aboriginal children under age 15 lived with two parents, compared to non-Aboriginal children.

Among those living on reserves in 2001, 65% lived with two parents and 32% lived with a lone parent. The remaining 3% had other living arrangements. Among Aboriginal children in large urban centres, 46% lived with a lone parent; in smaller centres, 40% lived with a lone parent. On rural non-reserves, 23% lived in lone-parent families.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that for a variety of social and economic reasons, many Aboriginal households are multiple family households. On reserves, it is estimated that about one in 10 households in 2001 was a multiple family household. In urban areas, about 2% were multiple family households.

### LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL CHILDREN UNDER 15, 2001



Source: Calculations by the Canadian Council on Social Development using data from Statistics Canada's Aboriginal Peoples of Canada, A Demographic Profile, 2001 Census Analysis Series.

“Aboriginal family life, like that of other families in Canada, has undergone enormous changes in recent decades. The Aboriginal family in traditional, land-based societies was, until recently, the principal institution mediating the participation of individuals in social, economic and political life. The extended family distributed responsibilities for the care and nurturing of its members over a large network of grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. While many Aboriginal people have moved to the city, and many others residing on reserves and in rural towns and villages engage in wage labour rather than traditional harvesting, the notion of the caring, effective, extended family continues to be a powerful ideal etched deep in the psyche of Aboriginal people.”

*Marlene Brant Castellano. Aboriginal Family Trends: Extended Families, Nuclear Families, Families of the Heart. Ottawa: Vanier Institute of the Family, 2002.*

## PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT

### Dual-earners the norm

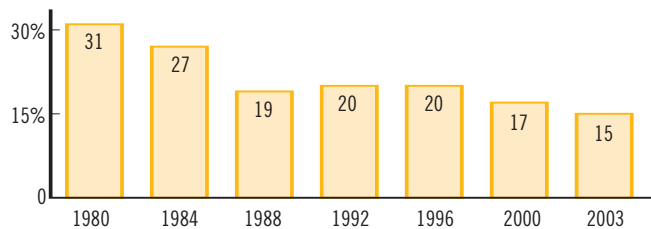
In 2003, 15% of two-parent families with children had only one income-earner, down from 21% in 1994 and 30% in 1980. Sixty-five per cent of female lone-parent families had only one earner in 2003, up from 49% in 1994.

Increasing numbers of mothers now participate in the workforce. In response to women's rising aspirations and growing economic pressures, the proportion of employed women with children under age 16 has climbed steadily – from 40% in 1976 to 72% by 2003.

The increase in women's employment is particularly notable among women with very young children. In 1984, less than half (46%) of mothers whose youngest child was under age 6 were employed; by 1994, 58% were employed, and by 2003, two-thirds (66%) were in the workforce. Among women whose youngest child was under age three, 63% were employed in 2003.

The unemployment rate among women with children under 16 declined from 10.3% in 1994 to 6.3% in 2000. It rose to 7.2% by 2003.

### TWO-PARENT ONE-EARNER FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN, 1980 TO 2003



Source: Calculations by the Canadian Council on Social Development using data from Statistics Canada's Income Trends in Canada, various years.

### Mothers working full-time

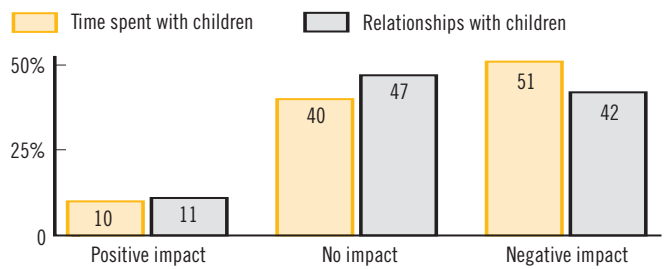
Among employed women with children under age 16, almost three-quarters (74%) worked full-time in 2003. This was also true for women with very young children. Seventy-three per cent of employed women with children under age three worked full-time.

Since 2000, average hours of work have been declining for both men and women. In 2003, the lowest average hours on record were reported – 36.5 hours per week for men and 28.8 hours per week for women. (This includes part-time workers.) Despite that, the proportion of women working 41 hours a week or more rose from 9% in 1976 to 13% by 2003, while those working 35 to 39 hours per week dropped from 21% to 17%.

### Juggling work & family

Difficulties balancing work and family responsibilities was an issue identified in previous *Progress* reports. It is still a problem for many families, according to a 2001 national survey of more than 31,000 employees of medium and large organizations. Over half said that work had a negative impact on the time they spent with their children; 42% said it had a negative impact on their relationships with their children.

### WORK-LIFE IMPACTS, 2001



Source: Linda Duxbury and Chris Higgins. Work-Life Conflict in Canada in the New Millennium: A Status Report. Ottawa: Health Canada, 2003.

Employees with child or elder care responsibilities are less likely to feel that their families are well adapted. Thirty-five per cent of male employees with dependent care responsibilities said they were completely satisfied with their level of family adaptation; this was true of 47% of male employees without such responsibilities. Similarly, 32% of female employees with dependent care responsibilities said they were completely satisfied with their level of family adaptation, compared with 44% of female employees without such responsibilities.

### Lost work days

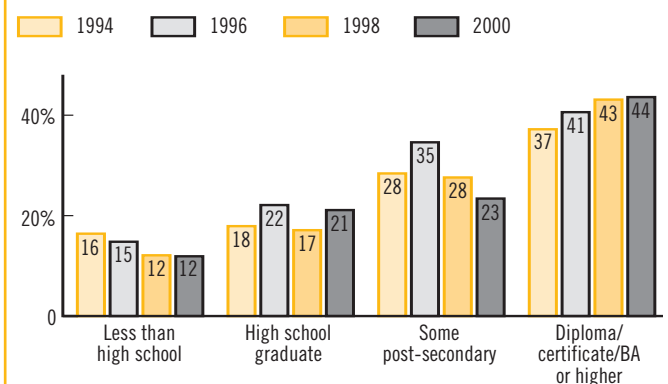
Work days lost due to personal reasons – such as one's own illness or disability or other personal and family demands – have been increasing. In 2003, full-time employees missed an average of nine days of work, compared to 7.3 days in 1997. Women were absent from work more days than their male counterparts: 10.2 days for women, versus 8.1 days for men in 2003. The presence of preschool-aged children influences work absences, especially among women. In 2003, mothers employed full-time lost an average of 4.5 days due to family responsibilities, compared with four days among fathers.

### Parental Education

More children are living with parents who have post-secondary education – and the trend continues to rise. Almost half of both mothers and fathers of children under age 12 have a post-secondary diploma, certificate or degree.

### MOTHER'S EDUCATION

% OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 12



Source: Calculations by the Canadian Council on Social Development using microdata from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1994, 1996, 1998, & 2000.

## FAMILY DYNAMICS

How family members relate to one another and how well parents are feeling influences children's lives. Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), *Progress* tracks a number of indicators of family dynamics, including parental health and well-being, the quality of family relationships, and parenting styles.

### Healthy parents

The majority of children live with parents who report that they are in very good or excellent health. But that rate has been declining. In 2000, 71% of children under age 12 lived with parents in very good or excellent health, down from 75% in 1994. In 2002, 72% of children under six had parents who were in very good or excellent health, down from 77% in 1994.

While only a small minority of children live with parents who are depressed, the impact on the child's well-being can be significant. Parents who are depressed are often withdrawn, tired and despondent about the future. This creates a very stressful family environment. In 2000, less than 10% of children under age 12 lived with parents who were experiencing symptoms of depression, down slightly from 1994 (11%). Unfortunately, children in low-income families are more likely to live with a parent who is depressed. In 2000, 20% of children in low-income families (under \$30,000 per year) had a parent who was depressed, compared to 6% of children in families with incomes over \$60,000.

### Supportive parents

Parenting style has long been recognized as a critical influence on healthy child development. Fortunately, most children live with parents who have supportive and positive approaches to parenting. In fact, the vast majority of parents score well on a scale that looks at "effective parenting," including approaches to discipline and consistency. This rate has been increasing over time.

According to a scale which measures positive parenting behaviours such as giving praise, talking, playing and laughing together, in 2002, 92% of children under age two lived with parents who had a positive parenting style – virtually the same rate as in 1994 (91%). And for older children, there has been an increase in positive parenting style since 1994. Rates of positive parenting styles were the same, regardless of the gender of the child or the family income. Younger children are more likely than older children to have parents who consistently use positive parenting approaches.

## Family functioning

The *quality* of family relationships is particularly important for healthy child development. Research shows a significant connection between family dysfunction and mental health problems among children. The NLSCY measures family functioning by looking at how well a family works together – for example, how they solve problems, communicate with each other, treat each other emotionally, and assume their various roles.

Fortunately, the majority of children live in families which function well. "Dysfunctional" families experience a great deal of stress in their daily lives. They often live in poverty and have few social supports. Children in families with incomes under \$30,000 were twice as likely to live in dysfunctional family circumstances as children in families with incomes over \$60,000.

## YOUTH IN FAMILIES

### Young adults living at home

In Canada, there has been a growing trend for young adults to remain in – or return to – their parental home. In 2002, 60% of young people aged 20 to 24 lived with their parents, up from 56% in 1992.

Young men are more likely than women to live at home with their parents, but the proportion for both genders increased between 1994 and 2002. In 2002, 64% of men aged 20 to 24 lived at home, up from 60% in 1994; among women in this age group, 55% lived at home, up from 51% in 1994.

### Less likely to marry or live common law

Of the almost 900,000 young adults aged 20 to 24 who lived away from home in 2002, 31% were either married or living common law, a decline from 35% in 1994. Young women were more likely than men to be married/common law (40% and 21% respectively). About 17% of the young adults who lived away from home in 2002 lived with preschool- or school-aged children, slightly less than was the case in 1994 (18%). Young women were more likely than men to live with preschool- or school-aged children (22% and 10% respectively).

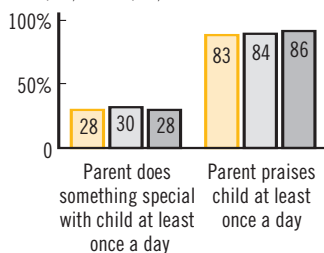
Young adults are increasingly favouring common-law relationships over marriage. However, despite an increase in the proportion of common-law unions, there was an overall decline in the number of young adults living as couples.

### POSITIVE PARENTING, 2000

% OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 12

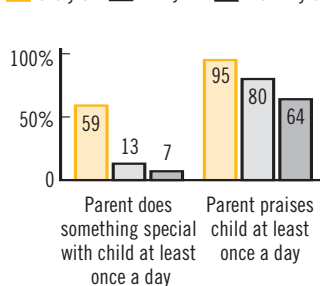
#### BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME, 2000

Under \$30,000    \$30,000 to \$59,999    \$60,000+



#### BY AGE GROUP

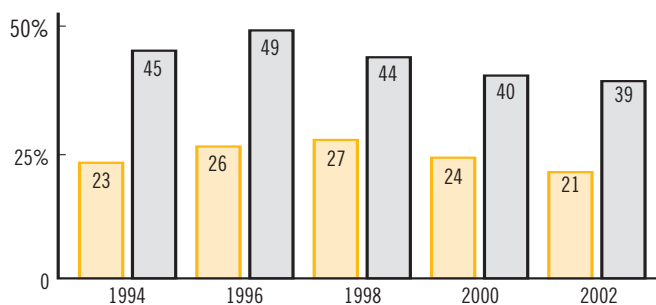
0-5 yrs    6-9 yrs    10-11 yrs



Source: Calculations by the Canadian Council on Social Development using microdata from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1994, 1996, 1998, & 2000.

### YOUNG ADULTS AGED 20-24 LIVING AWAY FROM HOME IN RELATIONSHIPS

Male    Female



Source: Calculations by the Canadian Council on Social Development using data from Statistics Canada's Survey of Income and Labour Dynamics, various years.

## SOURCES:

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