

NEW CENSUS DATA SHOWS FEWER CHILDREN LIVING WITH MARRIED PARENTS

Provincial and Territorial Breakdown

MARCH 2018

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CARDUS



Cardus is a think tank dedicated to the renewal of North American social architecture with offices in Hamilton and Ottawa, Ontario. Cardus Family aims to create a larger body of Canadian family research, show the importance of family stability in strengthening civil society and bring experienced and reliable academic, political, civil service and think tank voices together in vibrant discussion.

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In an earlier report, we highlighted the national data on the living arrangements of children, contrasting cohabitation and marriage. In this report, we highlight the provincial and territorial breakdown of the same.

We continue to draw attention to the increase in children living with cohabiting parents and the decrease in children living with married parents, **because the research shows a child's living arrangements matter for a host of outcome measures.**

The 2016 census release on the living arrangements of children reported on two-parent families, distinguishing between intact (biological and adoptive parents) and step-parents. However, for the first time since 1981, the census release did not report the distinction between married and common-law-parent families.¹ This is something research continues to show is critical for family health and stability: thus Cardus Family placed a special request to make this data public. This information continues to be collected and analyzed by other countries, such as the United Kingdom and the United States.²

1. Statistics Canada, "2016 Census topic: Families, households and marital status," November 15, 2017, <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/rt-td/fam-eng.cfm>.

2. Laurie DeRose et al., *World Family Map 2017: Mapping Family Change and Child Well-Being Outcomes* (New York: Social Trends Institute, 2017), http://sti.pushroom.com/Media/files/000008/0000381_WFM-2017-FullReport.pdf.

WHY DISTINGUISH BETWEEN MARRIED AND COHABITING PARENTS?

Ultimately, according to much research, marriage is the gold standard for raising children:

- Marriage is more likely to last than cohabitation.
- Marriage offers greater financial resources and financial stability.
- Marriage offers benefits to children in the area of education.
- Finally, the distinction between marriage and cohabitation has implications for public policy.

STABILITY

We know several aspects of marriage are substantively different from cohabitation. *Cohabitation is less stable than marriage, even as cohabitation grows in prevalence.*³ Children born to cohabiting parents who don't go on to marry are roughly three times more likely to experience family breakdown compared to children born to married parents who don't live together before marriage.⁴

Why is cohabitation less stable? There are several reasons. Consider how a cohabiting relationship may begin. Scholars like Scott Stanley at the University of Denver refer to the concept of “sliding vs. deciding.”⁵ Sliding refers to entering a live-in romantic relationship with little or no discussion about the future of the relationship. Deciding refers to a deliberate decision-making process considering the purpose and future of the relationship. In the former, one person may be less keen or committed to the relationship. Couples often enter cohabiting relationships as a test of the relationship, but each partner may have a different degree of commitment to the relationship. What this means is that by default, one or both parties has a foot out the door.

Of course, adults can pursue relationships as they choose. However, for children, the fact that one or both parents may be less than fully committed to each other results in the risk of the parental union dissolving, which presents difficulties for children. This lack of commitment in the relationship shows itself in other ways, itemized below.

This release focuses on children and their living arrangements because of the differing outcomes. However, as a side note, it is worth noting that adults may be unaware of how their relationship decisions are affecting their own desire for life-long love. For adults who desire life-long love, living together before marriage may affect the relationship for the worse, not the better. Cohabiting couples are more likely to break up and experience marital conflict if they do eventually marry.⁶

MONEY

Other studies have found distinctions in financial choices, for example, in how families budget. A 2014 Canadian study indicates that cohabiting couples are less likely to pool their financial resources

3. France-Pascale Ménard, “What Makes It Fall Apart? The Determinants of the Dissolution of Marriages and Common-Law Unions in Canada,” *McGill Sociological Review* 2 (2011): 59–60.

4. Nicole Marcil-Gratton. “Growing Up with Mom and Dad? The Intricate Family Life Course of Canadian Children,” Ottawa: Statistics Canada, p. 16.

5. Scott Stanley, “‘That Decision Wasn’t Made There’: A Super Bowl Insight on Commitment,” Sliding vs Deciding: Scott Stanley’s Blog, February 9, 2018, <http://slidingvsdeciding.blogspot.ca/>.

6. Claire M. Kamp Dush, Catherine L. Cohan, and Paul R. Amato, “The Relationships Between Cohabitation and Marital Quality and Stability: Change Across Cohorts?,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 65, no. 3 (2003): 539–49.

when contrasted with married couples, even in Quebec, where cohabitation is more normalized.⁷ Another study suggests that married couples receive more financial support from family.⁸ This has obvious implications for financial resources made available to children living with cohabiting parents.

We further see in a sample of international studies including from Canada that the decline of marriage has not occurred equally across all income levels. Higher-educated couples are more likely to marry and stay married than their peers with lower levels of educational attainment.⁹ Recent work by sociologists Sharon Sassler and Amanda Miller suggest that similar divisions persist among cohabiting couples with higher-educated couples more likely to transition into marriage.¹⁰ Such divisions have implications for economic and social-capital outcomes.

EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

*A 1998 Canadian study shows declines in children's perceived educational achievement when contrasting stable cohabiting homes with stable married homes.*¹¹ The reason for this may be again the decreased commitment of one or both parties in the relationship. Even where stability is present, for example, the child lives with the same parents, might a cohabiting couple where one party is less engaged spend less time helping with homework or reading to children? If one party is less engaged, might he or she be less interested in the child's future plans and educational success? The authors of the study muse about these possibilities:

Although there are two parents in the home, cohabiting relationships may not translate into the same level of direct parental involvement in school work that is found in married families and that is linked with enhanced achievement. For example, compared to married parents, cohabiting parents may spend less time learning about children's school activities, assisting with the selection of courses, monitoring homework completion, or communicating with school personnel. These differences may arise out of different priorities of cohabiting couples compared to marital couples, less personal well-being among parents, or less clearly defined role responsibilities.¹²

Still other research suggests cohabiting couples tend to have a lower level of education themselves.¹³

7. Dana Hamplová, Céline Le Bourdais, and Évelyne Lapierre-Adamcyk, "Is the Cohabitation–Marriage Gap in Money Pooling Universal?," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 76, no. 5 (2014): 983–97.

8. Lingxin Hao, "Family Structure, Private Transfers, and the Economic Well-Being of Families with Children," *Social Forces* 75 (1996): 269–92.

9. W. Bradford Wilcox et al. "When Marriage Disappears: The New Middle America," *The State of Our Unions* (Charlottesville, VA: The National Marriage Project, 2010); Philip Cross and Peter Jon Mitchell, *The Marriage Gap Between Rich and Poor Canadians: How Canadians Are Split into Haves and Have-Not's Along Marriage Lines* (Ottawa: Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, February 2014), http://www.imfcanada.org/sites/default/files/Canadian_Marriage_Gap_FINAL_0.pdf; Fraser Nelson, "Revealed: The Marriage Gap between Britain's Rich and Poor," *The Spectator*, November 15, 2014, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2014/11/marriage-is-becoming-a-preserve-of-the-rich/>; Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960–2010* (New York: Crown Forum, 2013).

10. Laurie DeRose, "Social Class Shapes the Experience of Living Together: A Review of Cohabitation Nation," Institute for Family Studies, January 9, 2018, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/social-class-shapes-the-experience-of-living-together-a-review-of-cohabitation-nation>.

11. Zheng Wu et al., "Change and Stability in Cohabitation and Children's Educational Adjustment," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 41, no. 4 (2010): 557–79.

12. Wu et al., "Change and Stability," 573.

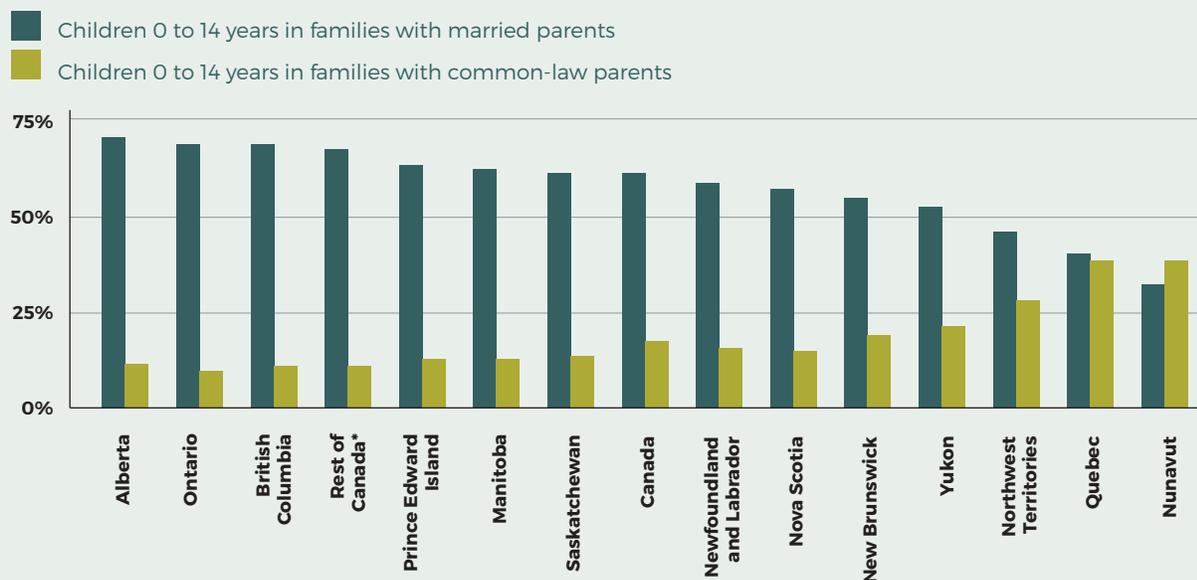
13. "Social Indicators of Marital Health and Wellbeing," *State of Our Unions*, 2012, http://www.stateofourunions.org/2012-social_indicators.php#sb4fn4: "Cohabitation is more common among those of lower educational and income levels. Our 2010 report indicates that among women in the 25 to 44 age range, 75 percent of high school dropouts have cohabited compared to 50 percent of college graduates."

IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY

All of this research has implications for public policy. University of Windsor professor Lydia Miljan, writing on public policy in Canada, puts it this way: “While some experts and advocates argue that family configuration either does not matter or would not matter if the right social and economic policies were in place, the preponderance of the evidence suggests that they are wrong.”¹⁴ Increasing numbers of children living with cohabiting parents may imply greater funding needs in our schools for tutors or other supports to account for increases in negative behaviours as well. Increasing cohabitation may imply heightened societal inequality, something public policy seeks to alleviate and address where it occurs. Finally, increased cohabitation, with the looser family ties, increased relationship conflict, and reduced financial support that studies show, may have ramifications for both elder care and child care. All of these are areas public policies speak into, and thus the data of how children are living remains very relevant precisely because family forms are evolving and changing (FIGURE 1).

FIGURE 1
NEW DATA: CHILDREN’S LIVING ARRANGEMENTS BY PROVINCE AND TERRITORY (2016)

Provinces arranged from highest percentage of children living with married parents to lowest in order to see how declining marriage generally correlates with increasing cohabitation. Otherwise, all charts are arranged by geography.



*Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding and because children aged 0–14 not living in census families are not shown.

**Rest of Canada refers to Canadian statistics without including the province of Quebec, which traditionally has different social statistics, particularly as regards marriage and cohabitation.

In 2016, the highest percentages of children living with married parents are found in Alberta, Ontario, and British Columbia. Likewise, these provinces have the lowest rates of children living with common-law parents. Knowing that Quebec traditionally has very different social statistics, we also highlight the “rest of Canada,” which refers to Canadian statistics without Quebec. In the rest of Canada, almost

14. Lydia Miljan, *Public Policy in Canada: An Introduction*, 7th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 242.

seven in ten children are living with married parents. This contrasts with 62.3 percent of children living with married parents when we include Quebec. Of particular note is that Nunavut is faring least well. In Nunavut, more children are living with common-law parents than are children living with married parents. Nunavut is the only jurisdiction in Canada where this is the case, including Quebec.

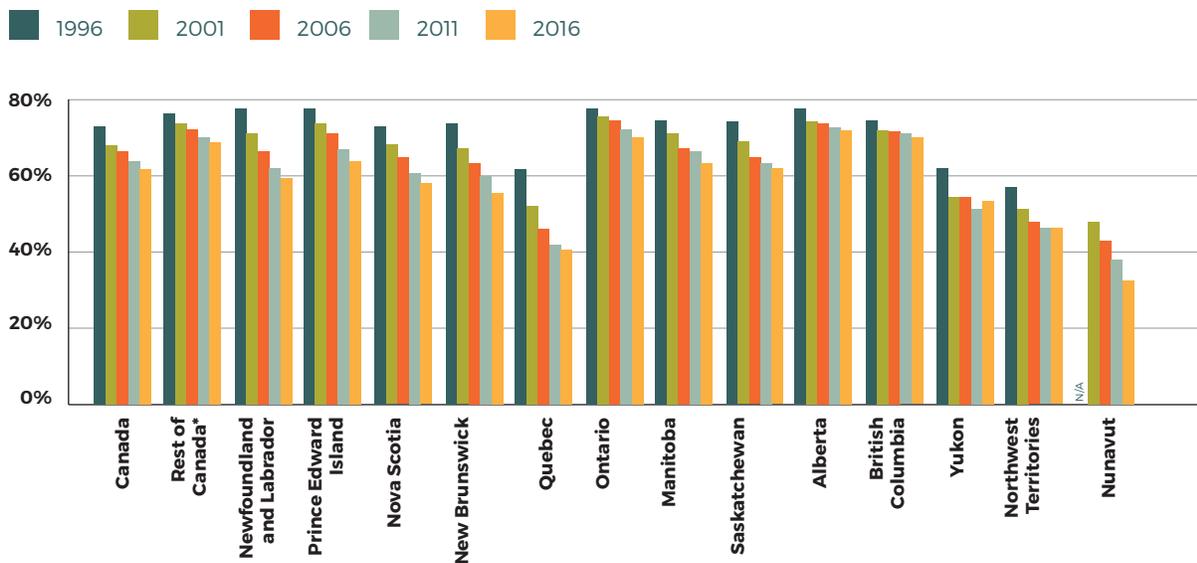
In general, the provinces with more children living with married parents have fewer children living with common-law parents (FIGURES 2-3).

FIGURE 1 shows how the portion of children with married parents has fallen consecutively between census years 1996 and 2016, with the exception of a plateau in British Columbia between 2001 and 2006 and slight increases in Northwest Territories and Yukon between 2011 and 2016.

British Columbia has had the slowest decline in percent of children living with married parents among all provinces and territories.

FIGURES 2-3 show how children living with common-law parents have increased.

FIGURE 2: CHILDREN 0-14 IN FAMILIES WITH MARRIED PARENTS*

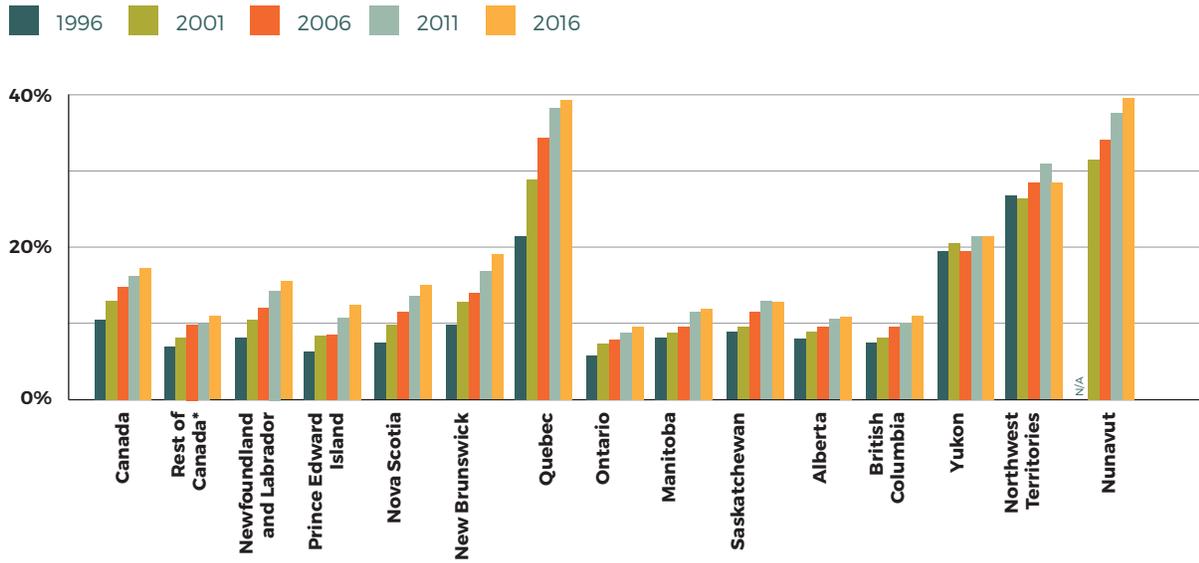


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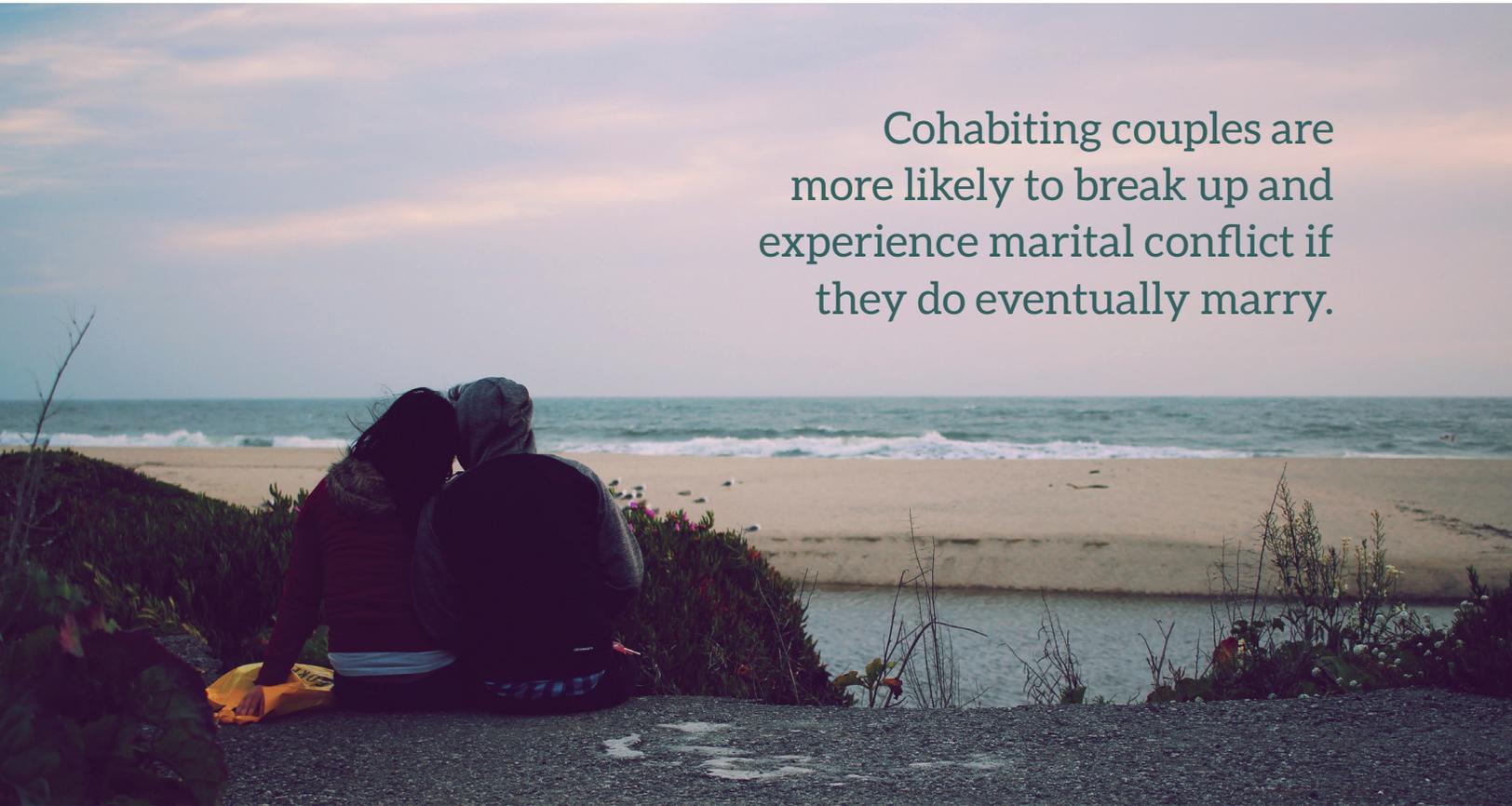
All Data for figures 1-3
can be found in the
Appendix on page 15.

FIGURE 3: CHILDREN 0-14 IN FAMILIES WITH COMMON-LAW PARENTS*



*Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding and because children aged 0-14 not living in census families are not shown.

**Rest of Canada refers to Canadian statistics without including the province of Quebec, which traditionally has different social statistics, particularly as regards marriage and cohabitation.



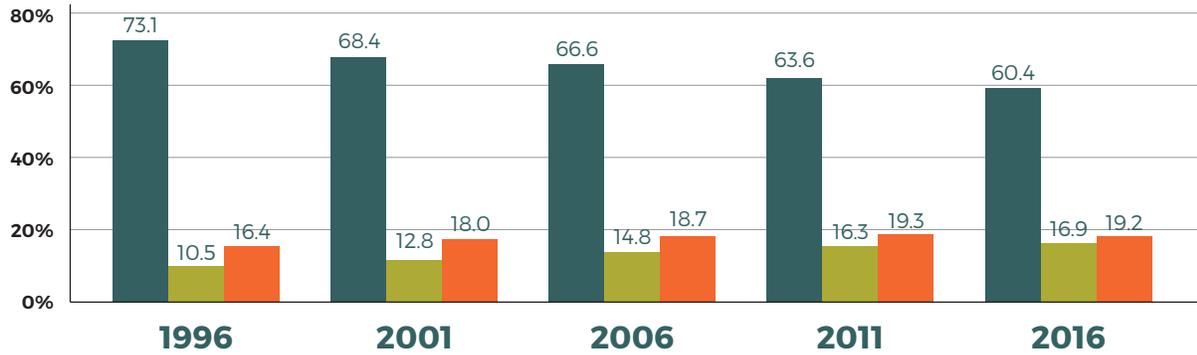
Cohabiting couples are more likely to break up and experience marital conflict if they do eventually marry.

BREAKDOWN BY PROVINCE AND TERRITORY

CANADA

Children 0 to 14 years in families with:

■ married parents
 ■ common-law parents
 ■ single parent



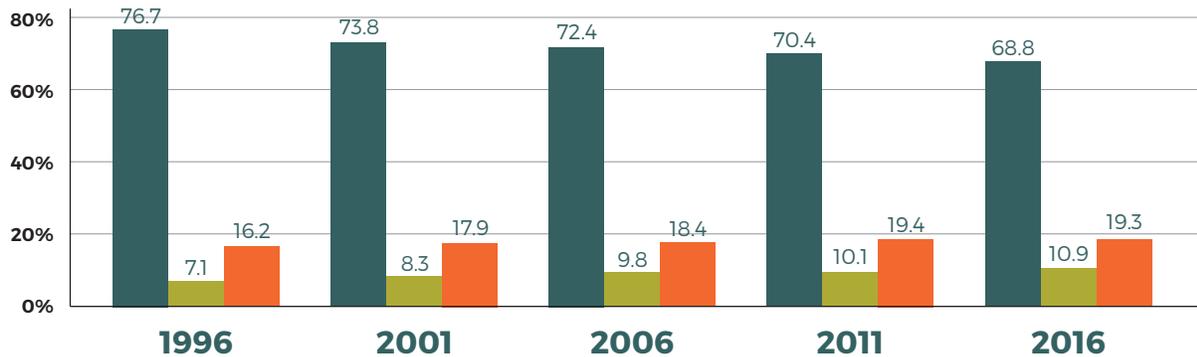
Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding and because children aged 0-14 not living in census families are not shown.

Rest of Canada refers to Canadian statistics without including the province of Quebec, which traditionally has had different social statistics, particularly as regards marriage and cohabitation.

REST OF CANADA

Children 0 to 14 years in families with:

■ married parents
 ■ common-law parents
 ■ single parent



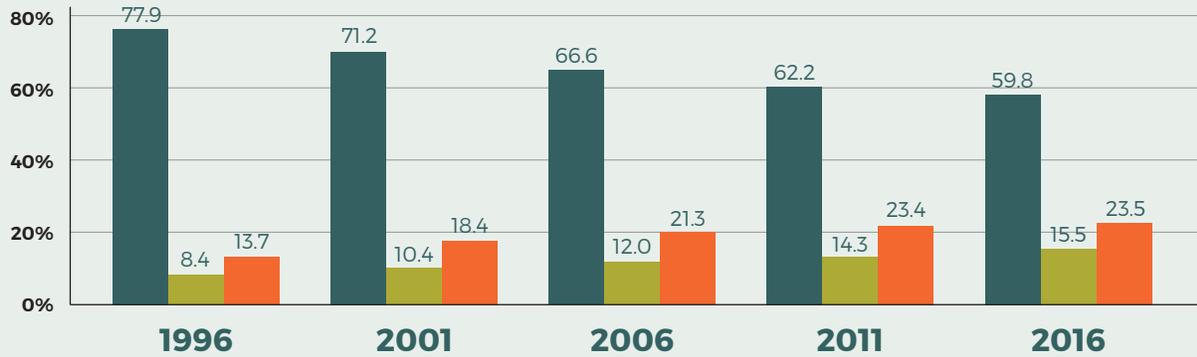
Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding and because children aged 0-14 not living in census families are not shown.

Rest of Canada refers to Canadian statistics without including the province of Quebec, which traditionally has had different social statistics, particularly as regards marriage and cohabitation.

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Children 0 to 14 years in families with:

■ married parents
 ■ common-law parents
 ■ single parent

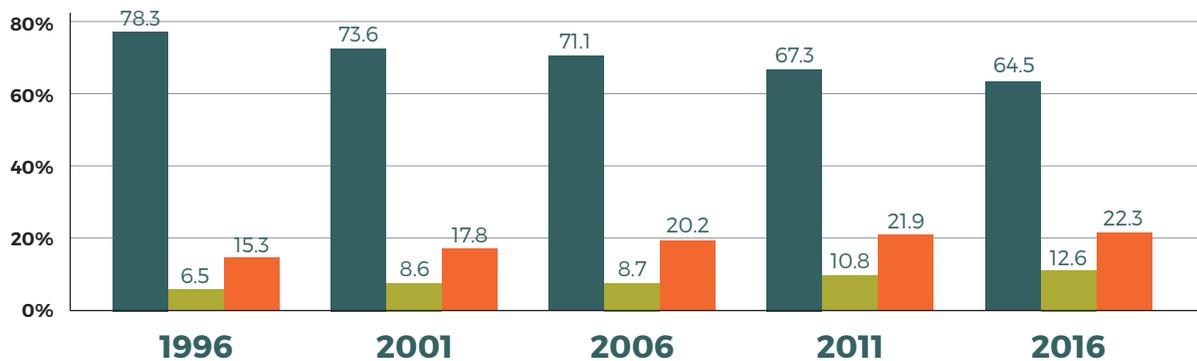


Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding and because children aged 0-14 not living in census families are not shown.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Children 0 to 14 years in families with:

■ married parents
 ■ common-law parents
 ■ single parent



Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding and because children aged 0-14 not living in census families are not shown.

NOVA SCOTIA

Children 0 to 14 years in families with:

■ married parents
 ■ common-law parents
 ■ single parent

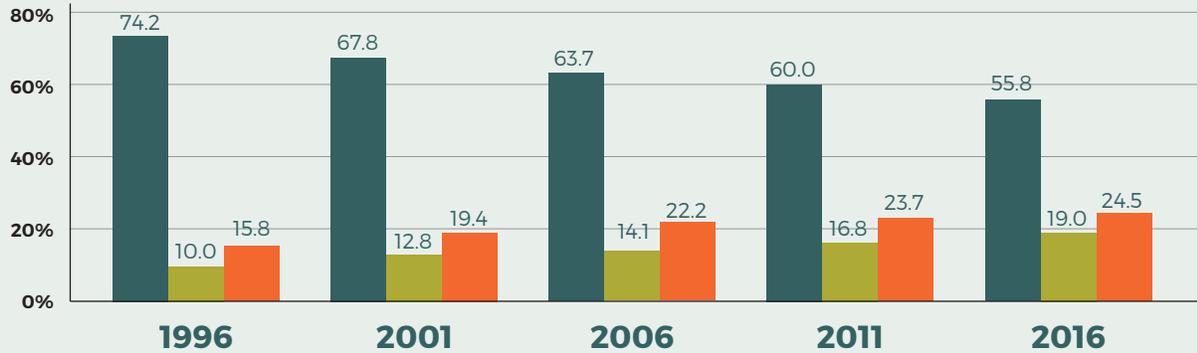


Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding and because children aged 0-14 not living in census families are not shown.

NEW BRUNSWICK

Children 0 to 14 years in families with:

■ married parents
 ■ common-law parents
 ■ single parent

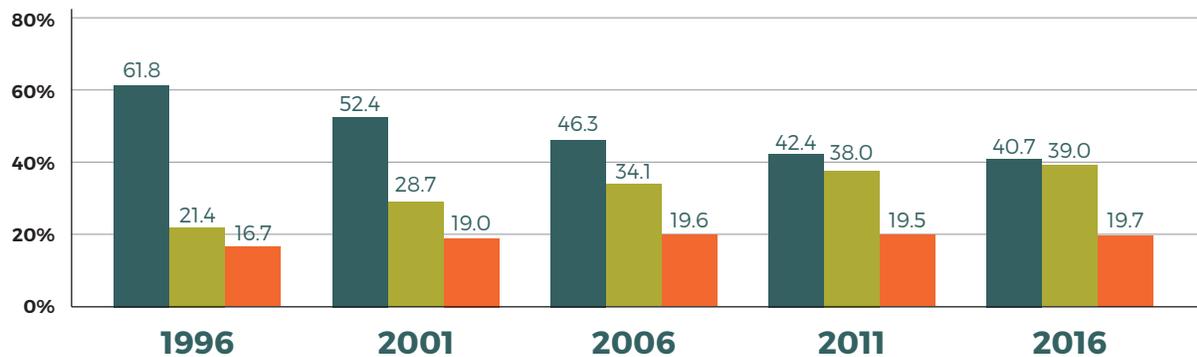


Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding and because children aged 0-14 not living in census families are not shown.

QUEBEC

Children 0 to 14 years in families with:

■ married parents
 ■ common-law parents
 ■ single parent



Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding and because children aged 0-14 not living in census families are not shown.

ONTARIO

Children 0 to 14 years in families with:

■ married parents
 ■ common-law parents
 ■ single parent

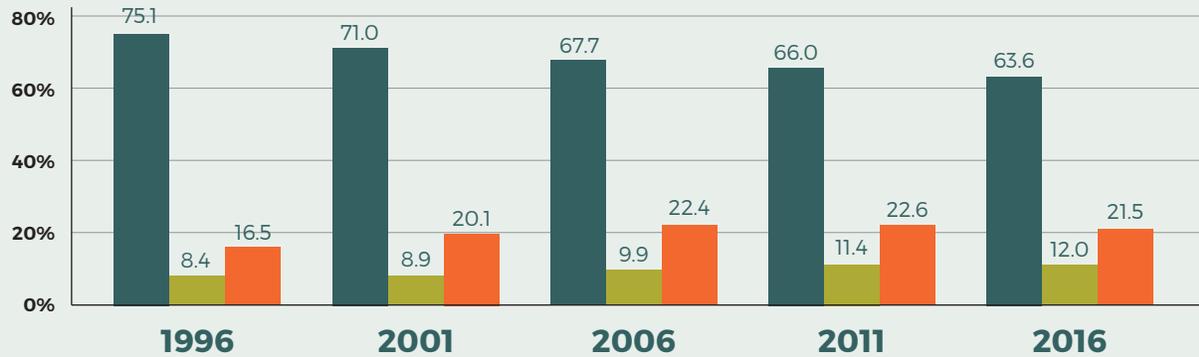


Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding and because children aged 0-14 not living in census families are not shown.

MANITOBA

Children 0 to 14 years in families with:

■ married parents
 ■ common-law parents
 ■ single parent

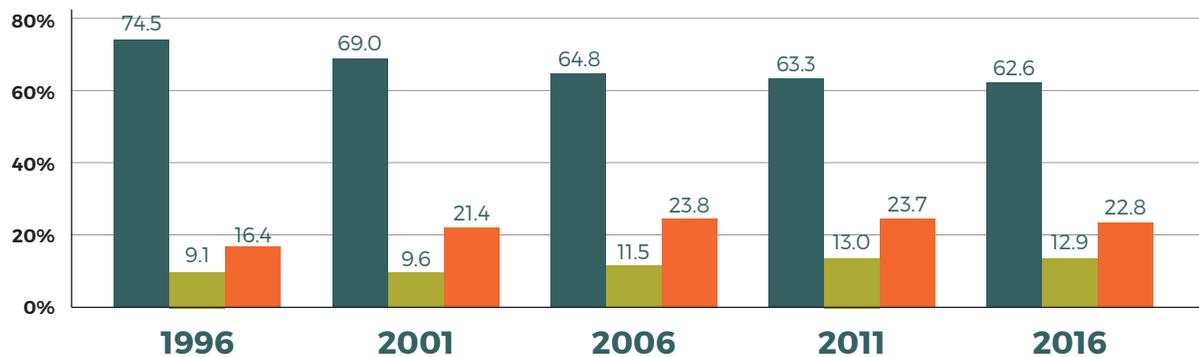


Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding and because children aged 0-14 not living in census families are not shown.

SASKATCHEWAN

Children 0 to 14 years in families with:

■ married parents
 ■ common-law parents
 ■ single parent



Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding and because children aged 0-14 not living in census families are not shown.

ALBERTA

Children 0 to 14 years in families with:

■ married parents
 ■ common-law parents
 ■ single parent

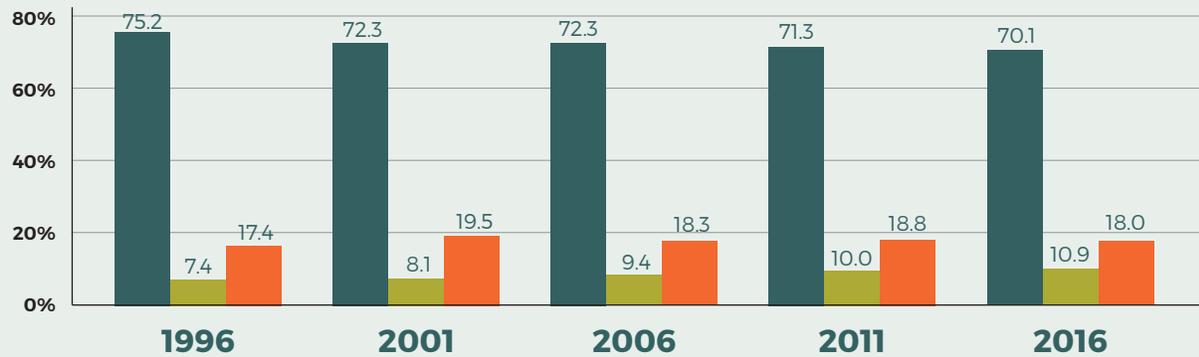


Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding and because children aged 0-14 not living in census families are not shown.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Children 0 to 14 years in families with:

■ married parents
 ■ common-law parents
 ■ single parent

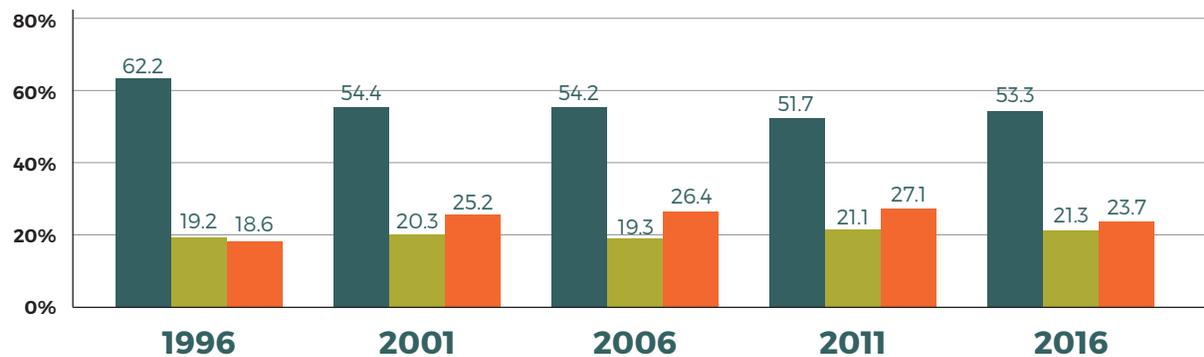


Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding and because children aged 0-14 not living in census families are not shown.

YUKON

Children 0 to 14 years in families with:

■ married parents
 ■ common-law parents
 ■ single parent



Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding and because children aged 0-14 not living in census families are not shown.

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Children 0 to 14 years in families with:

■ married parents
 ■ common-law parents
 ■ single parent



Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding and because children aged 0-14 not living in census families are not shown.

NUNAVUT

Children 0 to 14 years in families with:

■ married parents ■ common-law parents ■ single parent



Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding and because children aged 0-14 not living in census families are not shown. Data is not available for Nunavut from the 1996 census.

MARRIAGE BENEFITS
CHILDREN with stability,
greater financial resources,
and opportunities for higher
educational achievements.

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APPENDIX: CORRESPONDING CENSUS DATA

FIGURE 1: NEW DATA: CHILDREN'S LIVING ARRANGEMENTS BY PROVINCE AND TERRITORY (2016)

	Children 1-14 in families with married parents	Children 1-14 in families with common-law parents
Canada	62.3	17.4
Rest of Canada*	68.8	10.9
Newfoundland and Labrador	59.8	15.5
Prince Edward Island	64.5	12.6
Nova Scotia	58.1	14.9
New Brunswick	55.8	19
Quebec	40.7	39
Ontario	70.4	9.7
Manitoba	63.6	12
Saskatchewan	62.6	12.9
Alberta	71.8	10.9
British Columbia	70.1	10.9
Yukon	53.3	21.3
Northwest Territories	46.3	28.3
Nunavut	32.4	39.4

*Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding and because children aged 0-14 not living in census families are not shown.

**Rest of Canada refers to Canadian statistics without including the province of Quebec, which traditionally has different social statistics, particularly as regards marriage and cohabitation.

FIGURE 2: CHILDREN 0-14 IN FAMILIES WITH MARRIED PARENTS*

	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016
Canada	73.1	68.4	66.6	63.6	62.3
Rest of Canada*	76.7	73.8	77.4	70.4	68.8
Newfoundland and Labrador	77.9	71.2	66.6	62.2	59.8
Prince Edward Island	78.3	73.6	71.1	67.3	64.5
Nova Scotia	73.6	68.4	65.2	61	58.1
New Brunswick	74.2	67.8	63.7	60.0	55.8
Quebec	61.8	52.4	46.3	42.4	40.7
Ontario	77.7	75.9	74.6	72.3	70.4
Manitoba	75.1	71.0	67.7	66.0	63.6
Saskatchewan	74.5	69.0	64.8	63.3	62.6
Alberta	77.9	74.8	74.0	72.8	71.8
British Columbia	75.2	72.3	72.3	71.3	70.1
Yukon	62.2	54.4	54.2	51.7	53.3
Northwest Territories	57.8	51.7	48.2	46.1	46.3
Nunavut	N/A	47.5	42.8	38.1	32.4

*Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding and because children aged 0-14 not living in census families are not shown.

**Rest of Canada refers to Canadian statistics without including the province of Quebec, which traditionally has had different social statistics, particularly as regards marriage and cohabitation.

FIGURE 3: CHILDREN 0-14 IN FAMILIES WITH COMMON LAW PARENTS*

	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016
Canada	105.	12.8	14.8	16.3	17.4
Rest of Canada**	7.1	8.3	9.8	10.1	10.9
Newfoundland and Labrador	8.4	10.4	12.0	14.3	15.5
Prince Edward Island	6.5	8.6	8.7	10.8	12.6
Nova Scotia	7.5	9.9	11.6	13.3	14.9
New Brunswick	10.0	12.8	14.1	16.8	19.0
Quebec	21.4	28.7	34.1	38.0	39.0
Ontario	5.9	7.3	8.0	8.8	9.7
Manitoba	8.4	8.9	9.9	11.4	12.0
Saskatchewan	9.1	9.6	11.5	13.0	12.9
Alberta	8.0	8.9	9.6	10.4	10.9
British Columbia	7.4	8.1	9.4	10.0	10.9
Yukon	19.2	20.3	19.3	21.1	21.3
Northwest Territories	26.4	26.3	28.3	30.7	28.3
Nunavut	N/A	31.3	33.9	37.4	39.4

*Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding and because children aged 0-14 not living in census families are not shown.

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THINK FAMILY IS MERELY PERSONAL? THINK AGAIN.

Family is something private and personal, yet it's also the bulwark of civilization and the institution undergirding other aspects of civil society. In both cases, we can no longer take family for granted. Cardus Family seeks to examine and present research, statistics and interesting thinking about family and engage in informed public dialogue. Follow the conversation: cardus.ca/family

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