



L'Institut Vanier de la famille

**VANIER**

The Vanier Institute of the Family

# **FAMILY WORK**

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## Contents

<b>Family work: how family members support and provide for each other</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>15. The gender gap in labour force participation is closing but at a slower pace</b>	<b>39</b>
Labour force participation rates of population aged 15 and older, by gender, Canada, 1975-2023	40
Labour force participation rate, by age group and gender, Canada, 1976 and 2023	40
<b>16. Women are breadwinners in a growing percentage of couple families</b>	<b>41</b>
Percentage of different-gender couple census families in which the woman received more than half of the couple's employment income, by presence of children, Canada, 2000-2022	42
<b>17. Most mothers of young children are working for pay</b>	<b>43</b>
Labour force participation rate of parents aged 25 to 54, by gender and age of youngest child, Canada, 1976 and 2023	44
<b>18. Women are more likely than men to work part-time to care for children</b>	<b>45</b>
Percentage of employees aged 15 and older who worked part-time, by age group, Canada, 1976 and 2023	46
Percentage of part-time employees aged 25 to 44 who cited "caring for children" or "other personal or family responsibilities" as their main reason for working part-time, Canada, 1997 and 2023	46
<b>19. Family caregivers are playing an increasingly important role</b>	<b>47</b>
Percentage of population aged 15 or older, by gender and type of care, Canada, 2022	48
<b>20. Reconciling family care with paid work is a struggle for many families</b>	<b>49</b>
Percentage of unpaid caregivers who reported that their caregiving had an impact on their employment, by gender, 2022	50
<b>21. Most children receive some form of non-parental childcare</b>	<b>51</b>
Percentage of children under age six who received childcare from someone other than their parent or legal guardian, Canada and provinces and territories, 2023	52



22. Parental benefits are used by a growing percentage of fathers .....53

23. Men are more involved in unpaid work at home, but the gender gap persists .....55

24. The percentage of employees working from home has more than doubled since 2016 .....57

Percentage of employees aged 15 and older who worked at home, Canada, provinces and territories, 2021 .....58

25. More older adults are working for pay and retiring later .....59

Labour force participation rate of adults aged 65 and older, by gender, Canada, 1976-2023 .....60

26. Commuting rebounds after having declined during COVID-19 .....61

27. Working far from home separates but also supports many families .....63

28. Women are more likely than men to choose self-employment for work-family balance .....65

Percentage of employees aged 15 to 69 who were self-employed, by gender, Canada, 1976 and 2023 .....66

29. Irregular and non-standard work schedules create challenges for many families .....67

Percentage of employed parents and non-parents aged 15 and older who worked an irregular schedule, by gender, Canada, 2015 .....68



# Family work: how family members support and provide for each other

Work is an essential part of family life. Whether it takes the form of paid employment, unpaid household work, or caring for children and/or adults, family members provide for each other in diverse ways that support their wellbeing. In the [Family Diversities and Wellbeing Framework](#), the Family Work lens is rooted in a broad understanding of “work” that focuses on the full range of paid and unpaid responsibilities associated with family life.

The ways that families organize and distribute this work have been shaped by ever-changing social, economic, cultural, and environmental circumstances. Chapters in this section use the Family Work lens to identify and highlight patterns of inequality in how paid and unpaid work is distributed within families. Data show that these patterns have changed over time in a context of shifting gender roles, population aging, and greater insecurity in the labour market and economy.

Women’s participation in the paid labour market has increased substantially in the past half century, and their economic contributions play a growing role in families’ financial capacities, resilience,

and wellbeing. Even so, gender inequality persists, as reflected in wage and poverty gaps and lower labour force attachment. Men have been spending more time caring for children and on household labour, but data show that women continue to perform most of this work.

Although baby boomers are no longer the largest generation in Canada, population aging is projected to continue for decades, which will continue to shape the relationship between families and work. As the labour force continues to age, a growing proportion of older adults—many of whom are grandparents—are staying in the paid labour market. Some of these older workers provide financial support to younger generations. Yet, doing so can affect their ability to provide adequately for themselves or retire from the paid labour force at a time of their choosing.

The nature of work has also changed, with recent advances in information and communications technology (e.g., high-speed internet, smartphones, and online collaboration platforms) making a growing number of jobs possible to do from home. The COVID-19 pandemic made employers, employees, and policymakers reassess assumptions



about how, when, and where paid work should take place. Although many employees express a preference to some degree of remote work, this is not an option for many, depending on what they do or where they live. Conversely, many family members travel far from home to make a living, but there is growing evidence that this mobility has an impact on their families and communities.

Family Work is about how people go about acquiring the resources they need to support their families. Chapters in this section use this lens to recognize the full spectrum of family work, examine patterns of inequality, and look at how some of the public and workplace policies have supported, hindered, or otherwise shaped family work arrangements.



# 15 The gender gap in labour force participation is closing but at a slower pace

One major shift that has taken place over the past half-century in Canada is the rising labour market participation of women. In 1976, fewer than half of women aged 15 and older (45.7%) participated in the paid labour market.<sup>1</sup> This has since grown to 61.6% in 2023, though much of this shift had occurred by 1990, when the labour force participation rate of women stood at 58.5%. In the decade between 2013 and 2023, the gap between men and women narrowed from 9.2 to 8.1 percentage points (a change of only 1.1 percentage points).

Women's increasing participation in paid employment has been supported by changing social, cultural, and economic conditions. Another contributing factor is the introduction and gradual expansion of parental benefits, which have helped new mothers to stay in the workforce after childbirth. In past generations, many women would have exited the labour force at this time to become full-time homemakers.

Labour market activity varies by age, with a smaller gender gap among younger age groups who typically do not have caregiving

or childcare responsibilities. In 2023, there was almost no gender gap (0.3 percentage points) in labour force participation rates of people aged 15 to 24, with women (65.1%) having a slightly higher rate than men (64.8%).<sup>1</sup> Among the core working-age group of 25 to 54 years, the rate for women (85.5%) was 6.6 percentage points below that of men (92.1%). The biggest gap was between women (31.9%) and men (42.3%) aged 55 and older, at 10.4 percentage points.

These gaps were much larger in the 1970s. In 1976, there was a 10.7 percentage point gap between women (58.2%) and men (68.9%) aged 15 to 24.<sup>1</sup> The largest was a gap of 42.2 percentage points between women (52.3%) and men (94.5%) aged 25 to 54. However, the 29.5 percentage point gap between women (17.7%) and men (47.2%) aged 55 and older was not far behind.

While these figures represent progress toward gender equality in labour force participation, it is important to note that the pace at which the gender gap in the labour force participation rate has been closing has slowed considerably since the early 2000s.



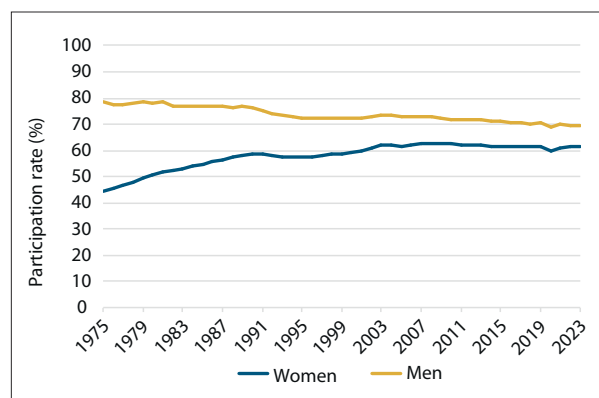
## Why this matters

The growing participation of women in paid work has profoundly changed the economic status of women and the earning capacity of families. Women's earnings have become integral to the economic security of most family households in Canada.

A gender gap remains, however, and there has been little change over the past decade. In addition, women's increased labour force participation has not been

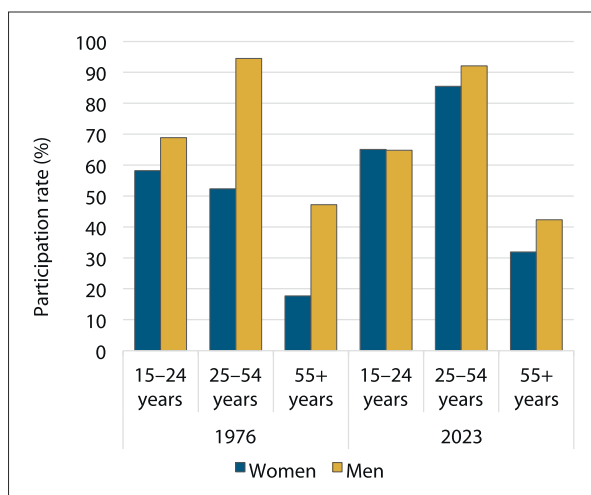
reflected in an equivalent increase of men's involvement in unpaid household work. This leaves women with a higher total work burden—that is, the average number of hours per day spent on paid and unpaid work combined. The most recent available data on the topic show that, among adults aged 25 to 54 in 2015, women spent an average 9.1 hours per day on paid and unpaid work, compared with 7.9 hours for men.<sup>2</sup>

**Labour force participation rates of population aged 15 and older, by gender, Canada, 1975–2023**



Source: Statistics Canada. (2024, January 5).  
Table 14-10-0327-01 Labour force characteristics by sex and detailed age group, annual.<sup>1</sup>

**Labour force participation rate, by age group and gender, Canada, 1976 and 2023**



Source: Statistics Canada. (2024, January 5).  
Table 14-10-0327-01 Labour force characteristics by sex and detailed age group, annual.<sup>1</sup>



# 16 Women are breadwinners in a growing percentage of couple families

Women's contributions to family income in Canada have increased over the last 30 years. This coincides and is intertwined with continued growth in the labour market participation of women. Between 1990 and 2023, the employment rate of all core working-age women aged 25 to 54 rose from 69.8% to 81.7%.<sup>1</sup> During the same period, the employment rate for mothers in this age group with children under age six increased from 58.2% to 75.9%.<sup>3</sup>

Data show that women provide more than 50% of total family income in a growing share of couple families. In 2022, women earned the majority of the couple's employment income in one-third (32.8%) of different-gender couple census families, up from 25.9% in 2000.<sup>4</sup> During the same period, the proportion in which women were sole breadwinners (i.e., receiving 100% of income) increased from 7.8% to 10.7% among different-gender couple families.

Across provinces and territories, the percentage of different-gender couple families in which the woman earned more than half of the couple's employment income in 2022 was highest in Nunavut (43.3%) and lowest in Alberta (29.4%).<sup>4</sup>

Among couples with children, women are less likely to be breadwinners than in couples without children. In 2022, women earned the majority of the couple's employment income in 36.8% of different-gender couples without children under 18, compared with 29.5% of those with children.<sup>4</sup> The likelihood of women earning the majority of the couple's employment income decreases with the presence of more children. In 2022, women earned the majority of couple's employment income in 32.1% of couples with one child, 29.3% of couples with two children, and in 25.0% of couples with three or more children. Similarly, women were twice as likely that year to be sole breadwinners in couple families without children (14.7%) than among those with children (7.4%).

The gap between the contributions of women with and without children to the couple's employment income varies by province and territory. The largest gap in 2022 was in British Columbia, where women brought in more than half of the couple's employment income in 28.4% of couples with children, compared with 37.5% of those without children (9.1 percentage points).<sup>4</sup> This was closely followed by Yukon Territory,





where women brought in more than half of the couple's employment income in 35.1% of couples with children, compared with 43.8% of those without children (8.7 percentage points). The smallest gap was observed in Nunavut, where there was only a gap of 1.5 percentage points: women received most of the couple's employment income in 43.0% of couples with children and 44.5% of those without children.<sup>5</sup>

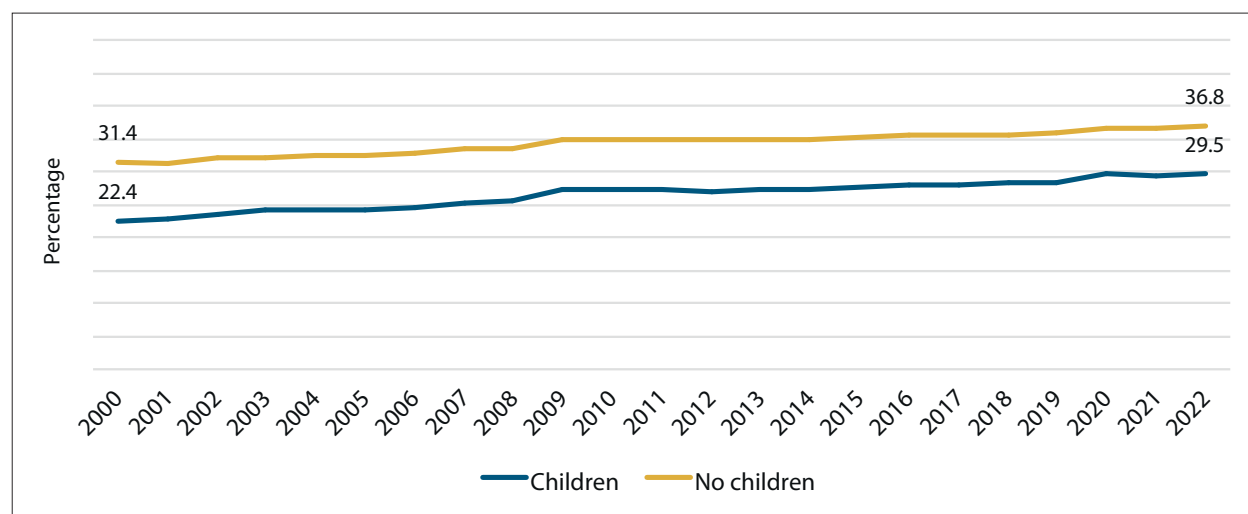
## Why this matters

Women contribute a larger share of family income than ever before,<sup>6</sup> which strengthens their economic wellbeing and the earning capacity of families.<sup>7</sup> This shift has taken place alongside other social and economic

changes. Some of these include a changing labour market, better availability of policies and supports facilitating women's employment, and increased expenses for families.

Despite this trend, women continue to earn less than men on average,<sup>8</sup> and are more likely to live with a lower income.<sup>6</sup> A 2024 report from TD Economics shows that the average family income of breadwinners was lower for women (\$116,600) than men (\$128,200) in 2019.<sup>9</sup> The report also found that average financial assets—which can play an important role in a family's financial resilience—were lower for breadwinning women (\$60,700) than breadwinning men (\$92,100).

**Percentage of different-gender couple census families in which the woman received more than half of the couple's employment income, by presence of children, Canada, 2000-2022**



Source: Statistics Canada. (2024, June 27). Table 11-10-0029-01 Couple census families by wife's contribution to couple's employment income and by number of children.<sup>4</sup>



# 17 Most mothers of young children are working for pay

Prior to the 1970s, women who were pregnant were expected to quit their job, if they had not already done so when they got married. Meanwhile, their partner was expected to provide financially for the family. Today, having a child no longer signals the end of a woman's career, but mothers of young children do not participate in the labour market as much as fathers or women without children.<sup>10</sup>

The gender gap in the labour force participation of parents with young children has narrowed since the 1970s, particularly among the core working-age group aged 25 to 54. In 2023, 79.7% of mothers in this age group and with children under age six participated in the labour market, up from 65.9% in 1994, and more than double the rate in 1976 (35.8%).<sup>3</sup> Among fathers with young children, the labour force participation rate remained stable between 1976 (97.2%) and 2023 (96.3%).

Mothers of older children are more likely to be in the workforce than those with younger children, but this gap has narrowed since the 1970s. In 2023, there was a difference of 8.6 percentage points between the labour market participation of mothers of children aged 13 to 17 (88.3%) and

children under six (79.7%).<sup>3</sup> This is down from a gap of 17.6 percentage points in 1976, when 35.8% of mothers of children under six and 53.4% of those with children aged 13 to 17 participated in the labour market.

As the labour force participation rate of mothers has increased, so has the proportion of dual-earner couple families with young children. Data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS)<sup>a</sup> show that the proportion of couple families with children under six with two earners increased from 46.5% in 1991 to 68.3% by 2021.<sup>10</sup> This varies across the country, ranging from 60.0% in Alberta to 74.3% in Quebec in 2021.

Another change in women's workforce participation is that mothers in one-parent families and those in couples had similar labour force participation rates in 2023 (83.6% and 84.5%, respectively).<sup>11</sup> This was not the case in the late 1970s. At that time, many mothers were full-time homemakers who were not in the labour market. Mothers in one-parent families did not typically have that option, and the resources to support their continued participation in the workforce, like formal childcare, were more limited. In 1976, 59.9% of mothers



in one-parent families were in the workforce, compared with 44.1% of mothers in a couple relationship.

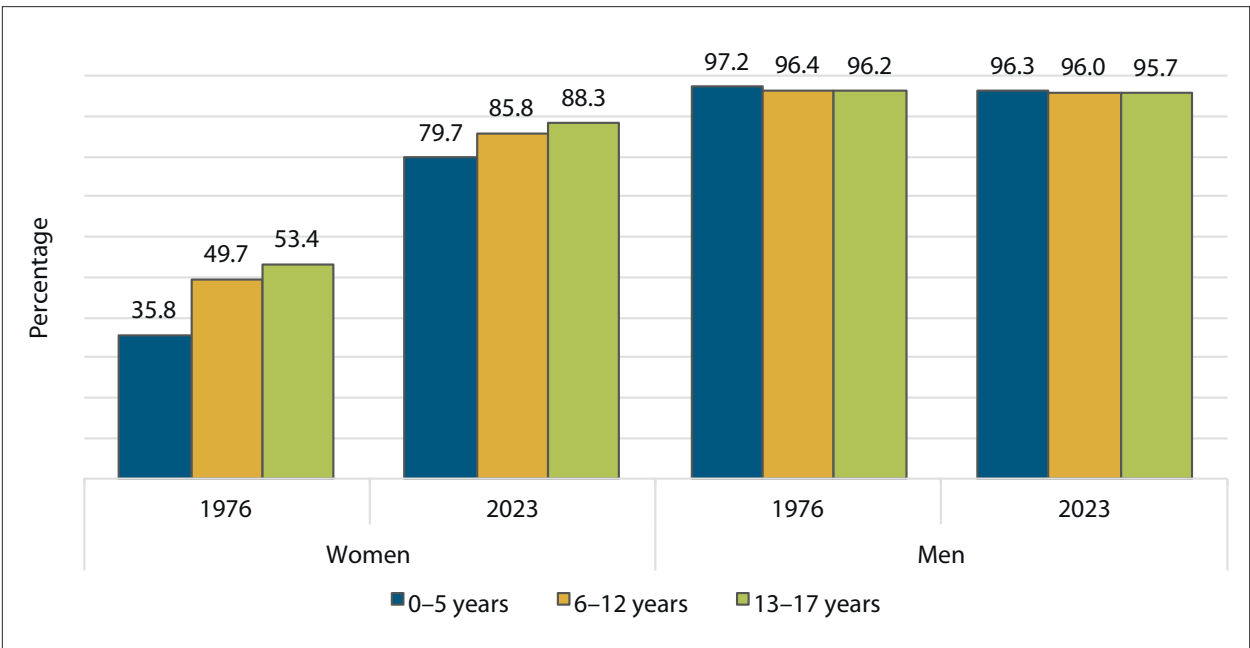
Why this matters

The increase in mothers’ labour force participation represents a substantial change from the traditional model of family life that was dominant in Canada since the Second World War. This shift strengthened the economic capacity and

independence of women and changed the economic structure of families with children. It also increased the need for non-parental childcare options.

Despite this change, having children often leads to a “motherhood penalty.”<sup>12</sup> This refers to the negative consequences women face in the workforce after they have children, such as lower employment rates and incomes.

Labour force participation rate of parents aged 25 to 54, by gender and age of youngest child, Canada, 1976 and 2023



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec. (2024, February 2). Labour market indicators, results by family situation and sex, 25-54 years, Québec, Ontario, Canada, 1976-2023 (in French only).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Data from the LFS excludes the territories, persons living on reserves, full-time members of the regular Canadian Armed Forces, and persons living in institutions.



# 18 Women are more likely than men to work part-time to care for children

Managing time and money, two basic resources for families, often involves a trade-off. Full-time workers earn more money but have less time for unpaid work and caregiving activities, including self-care. Part-time work can provide more personal and family time but offers less employment income. It can also affect access to workplace benefits and may have implications for career progression.

Statistics Canada defines part-time workers as those who usually work less than 30 hours per week at their main or only job.<sup>13</sup> In 2023, data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS)<sup>a</sup> showed that 18.0% of employees in Canada aged 15 and older worked part-time, up from 12.5% in 1976.<sup>1</sup> Larger increases were seen among young people and older adults. Nearly half (49.4%) of younger employees aged 15 to 24 worked part-time in 2023, more than double the percentage in 1976 (21.1%). Among employed adults aged 65 and older, 41.3% worked part-time in 2023, up from 31.4% in 1976.

Women are more likely to work part-time than men, today and in the 1970s, but the gender gap has decreased. The gap is largest among workers aged 25 to 44. The

percentage of women employees working part-time fell from 21.8% in 1976 to 15.6% by 2023.<sup>1</sup> During the same period, the percentage of male employees working part-time increased from 1.5% to 5.9%.

Research has shown that women with family care responsibilities are more likely than men to take on work that fits the schedule of those responsibilities.<sup>14</sup> Among part-time workers aged 25 to 44 in 2023, women (38.5%) were four times more likely than men (9.4%) to have cited “caring for children” or “other personal or family responsibilities” as their main reason for working part time.<sup>15</sup> Although this was approximately the same as the percentage of women who cited these reasons in 1997 (38.0%), this was nearly three times higher than the percentage of men who did so (3.2%).

Working part-time can be due to personal preference and choice, or to circumstances such as an inability to work full-time or a lack of full-time job availability. Among all part-time workers aged 15 and older in 2023, 15.7% were involuntary part-time workers, compared with 29.2% in 1998 (which is down from a peak of 31.2% in 1997).<sup>15</sup>



This declined for both women and men in all age groups, with the biggest shift being among men aged 25 to 54. The proportion of men in this age group working part-time who were doing so involuntarily dropped from 56.1% in 1998 to 31.6% in 2023.

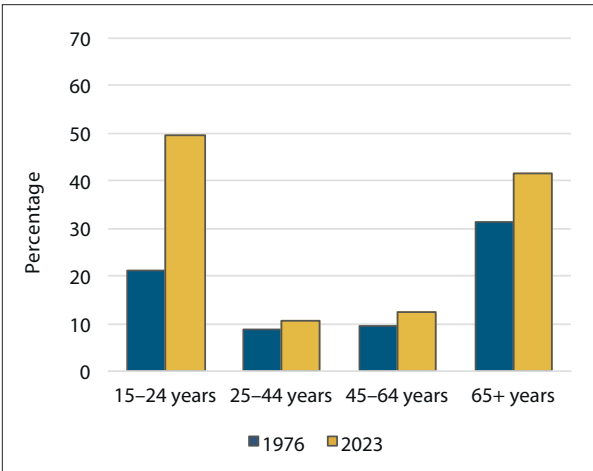
Why this matters

Working part-time can help parents allocate more time for their children, families, and other activities that are important to them. Studies show that it can also help to avoid work-family conflicts, as long as there is a supportive organizational culture at work.<sup>16</sup> At the

same time, part-time employment results in lower incomes, which can compromise families’ financial capacity and resilience.

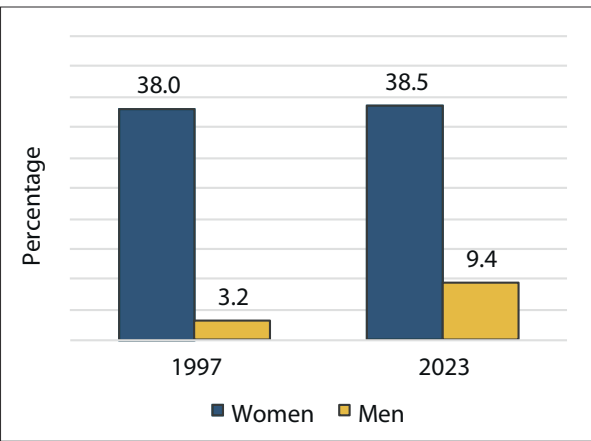
Working part-time and earning less as a result may add financial stress to the family, especially when part-time work is involuntary. In the long term, access to parental benefits and pension plans, as well as the level of benefits received, depends upon hours worked and previous earnings. Part-time workers can sometimes face disadvantages concerning both their direct income and their eligibility for social security programs that can contribute to their family wellbeing.

Percentage of employees aged 15 and older who worked part-time, by age group, Canada, 1976 and 2023



Source: Statistics Canada. (2024, January 5). Table 14-10-0327-01 Labour force characteristics by sex and detailed age group, annual.<sup>1</sup>

Percentage of part-time employees aged 25 to 44 who cited “caring for children” or “other personal or family responsibilities” as their main reason for working part-time, Canada, 1997 and 2023



Source: Statistics Canada. (2024, January 5). Table 14-10-0029-01 Part-time employment by reason, annual (x 1,000).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Data from the LFS excludes the territories, persons living on reserves, full-time members of the regular Canadian Armed Forces, and persons living in institutions.



# 19 Family caregivers are playing an increasingly important role

As people age or if they develop health conditions, they are likely to need care, and this care is commonly provided by family.<sup>17</sup> Driving a sibling to a medical appointment, cooking a meal for a grandparent, picking up a sick relative from school or work—caregiving includes a variety of activities. Many do not even think of these tasks as “caregiving” when they are being provided by family.

Caregiving is receiving growing attention from researchers and policymakers in Canada. This is partly due to the pressures and realities brought about by population aging, which is resulting in age-related needs and disabilities becoming more common.<sup>18</sup> Since couples today are having fewer children compared with previous generations, family households have also become smaller. This leaves fewer people in younger generations to provide care to family members when needed.

In the 2022 Canadian Social Survey (CSS), approximately one in seven people aged 15 and older (14.4%) provided unpaid care to care-dependent adults and/or youth aged 15 years or older during the past year.<sup>19</sup> An additional 5.6% did so while also providing care to a child aged 14 and under (including their own children), an arrangement known as “sandwich caregiving.” More than one in five (21.9%) people aged 15 and older provided care to children under the age of 15.

Women (44.1%) were more likely than men (39.8%) to have provided care in 2022.<sup>19</sup> They were also more likely than men to have been sandwich caregivers (6.6% and 4.5%, respectively). Slightly more women (14.7%) than men (14.2%) provided care to care-dependent adults. More than one-fifth of women (22.8%) provided care to children only, while 21.1% of men provided such care.

Families’ living arrangements may be chosen partially with providing care in mind. Almost two-thirds (65%) of those living in multigenerational households in 2022 provided unpaid care.<sup>19</sup> In households without a grandparent present, only 42% of adults provided care. People who lived in multigenerational households were more than twice as likely as those who did not to provide sandwich care (14% and 6%, respectively).

The effects of caregiving on the care provider can be wide ranging. Caring for children may be less challenging than caring for adults. In 2022, only 5% of those who provided care for children reported struggling with providing care compared with 15% who cared for adults and 17% of sandwich caregivers.<sup>19</sup> Further among those providing care only to adults, 18% reported having fair or poor mental health. For those caring for children and adults, the proportion was even higher at 21%, compared with 14% of those





who cared for children only or who were not caregivers.

Data from the 2018 General Social Survey showed that most caregivers reported that they found their caregiving experience to be rewarding. A similar proportion reported that their caregiving experience was rewarding among those who provided one to three hours of care per week (56%) and those who provided care for 20 hours or more per week (61%).<sup>20</sup> Not surprisingly, though, those who spent long hours during the week caring for adults were far more likely than those providing one to three hours per week to report having less time for their partner, children, and other family members (86% vs. 53%). They were also more than twice as likely to report that they found their caregiving responsibilities to be stressful or very stressful (54% vs. 19%).

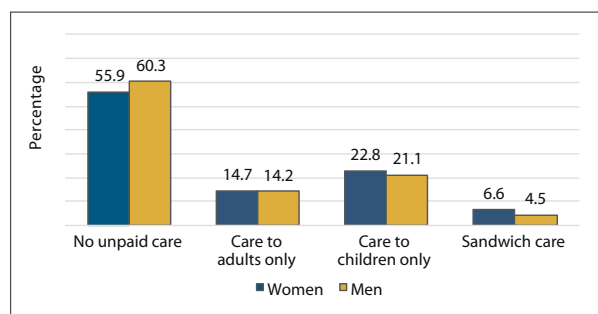
## Why this matters

Population aging will continue to increase pressure on health and home care services in the coming decades.<sup>18</sup> Pressure on family caregivers—who already play an important role in society—will likely increase as a result, with implications for their wellbeing. In addition to supporting the wellbeing of loved ones for no pay, family caregivers make valuable contributions by reducing the social

costs associated with health services and institutionalization (e.g., long-term care residences).<sup>21</sup>

Providing care for a loved one is often viewed as a positive experience that can increase one's sense of competence and purpose.<sup>22</sup> Young caregivers also report benefits such as a greater awareness of their abilities, feelings of satisfaction, the development of new skills, and enhanced family relationships.<sup>23</sup> But providing care can also have a negative impact on the wellbeing of family caregivers. This can include time costs, increased stress, and strain on family relationships.<sup>21</sup> Those who care for children while also providing care to adults with long-term conditions or disabilities face unique challenges and high demands on their time.<sup>24</sup>

**Percentage of population aged 15 or older, by gender and type of care, Canada, 2022**



Source: Wray, D. (2024, April 2). "Sandwiched" between unpaid care for children and care-dependent adults: A gender-based study. *Spotlight on Canadians: Results from the General Social Survey*.<sup>19</sup>



# 20 Reconciling family care with paid work is a struggle for many families

Caregiving is a common family experience and an increasingly important workforce issue in Canada as the population continues to age. According to the 2022 Canadian Social Survey, 12.6% of people aged 15 and older who provided care to adults that year reported being employed as their main activity in the last week.<sup>19</sup> This was the case for 24.0% of those who provided care to children only, and 5.6% of those who provided care to adults and children (i.e., “sandwich care”).

Earlier data from the General Social Survey (GSS) showed that, in 2018, employed caregivers were slightly more likely to be women (52%) than men (48%).<sup>25</sup> Employed women also spent more time per week providing care (13.8 hours) than men (10.0 hours). These numbers increased by almost 50% from 2012, when women spent 9.5 hours per week on average, and men spent 6.9 hours.

Research has shown that providing care can have a negative impact on the employment of working caregivers—particularly among women.<sup>21</sup> Data from the Canadian Social Survey showed that two-thirds of non-retired “sandwich caregivers” (66%) said in 2022 that their caregiving responsibilities affected

their employment or job-seeking activities in the past year.<sup>19</sup>

The most commonly reported employment impact resulting from caregiving in 2022 was having to adjust work schedules.<sup>19</sup> Sandwich caregivers (30.0%) were approximately twice as likely to report adjusting schedules than those who provided care to adults only (14.9%) or to children only (18.5%). Sandwich caregivers (7.3%) were also more likely to say that they were unable to work compared with those who provided care to adults only (5.8%) or to children only (5.4%). Sandwich caregivers (11.1%) were more than twice as likely as those providing care to adults only (3.3%) or to children only (5.1%) to say they gave up employment opportunities.

Although older, the 2018 GSS data provided additional insights on employment impacts. Among employed caregivers aged 19 to 70, women (17%) were more likely than men (12%) to report having reduced their paid work hours in 2018.<sup>25</sup> Women (55%) were also more likely than men (45%) to report that they missed part or full days of work because they were providing care. That year, 6% of all employed caregivers aged 19 to 70 left or intended to leave the paid labour force





altogether because of caregiving, 58.9% of whom were women.

## Why this matters

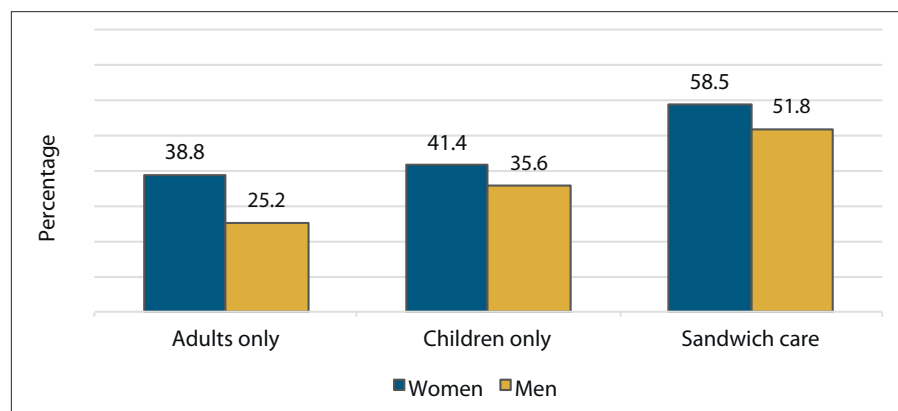
Employed caregivers make sacrifices for the wellbeing of their family and friends. Many reduce work hours or leave the paid labour market so they can provide care. This sometimes results in the loss of benefits, pension, and insurance.<sup>26</sup> Career development can be affected, with many having to turn down or not pursue promotions or new jobs because of their caregiving responsibilities. Ultimately, these caregivers are left feeling like they must choose between the wellbeing of a loved one and themselves.

Canada's legal system has started to recognize the rights of family caregivers. In 2013, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruled that employers have a "duty to accommodate" the family caregiving

responsibilities of their employees who are unable to make alternate arrangements and have exhausted all other reasonable options.<sup>27</sup> Those who fail to do so may be taken to court for discrimination based on "family status" as long as the accommodation does not cause "undue hardship" for the employer's operations.

As unpaid caregiving has received growing attention, some new benefits have been made available to employed caregivers. Three family caregiver and compassionate care benefits were introduced by the federal government to provide financial assistance and job protection to employed caregivers when they need time off to care for or support a critically ill or injured person or someone needing end-of-life care.<sup>28, 29</sup> These include the family caregiver benefit for children, the family caregiver benefit for adults, and compassionate care benefits, all of which are a part of Employment Insurance (EI) benefits.

### Percentage of unpaid caregivers who reported that their caregiving had an impact on their employment, by gender, Canada, 2022



Source: Wray, D. (2024, April 2). "Sandwiched" between unpaid care for children and care-dependent adults: A gender-based study. *Spotlight on Canadians: Results from the General Social Survey*.<sup>19</sup>



# 21 Most children receive some form of non-parental childcare

The availability, cost, and quality of non-parental childcare have been long-standing issues. To address this, the federal government committed to building a publicly funded childcare system to offer affordable, licensed childcare to families through the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan in 2021.<sup>30</sup> Provisions for fee reduction were a central part of the multi-pronged plan. Provinces and territories agreed to cut parent fees by 50% on average by December 2022 and reduce fees to an average of \$10 per day by 2025–26. A different agreement was signed with Quebec, where childcare spaces were already being offered below \$10 per day under its own family policy.

In 2023, the majority (56.1%) of children in Canada under the age of six were in some form of licensed or unlicensed non-parental childcare.<sup>31</sup> This is down slightly from 59.9% in 2019. Just over one-third (34.3%) of children in this age group were in a licensed childcare centre, preschool, or *centre de la petite enfance* (or CPE, the name used for non-profit early learning and child care centres in Quebec).<sup>32</sup> This proportion was up slightly from 31.0% in 2019. The use of family childcare homes<sup>a</sup> fell from 12.2% in 2019 to 9.0% in 2023.

In 2023, children under age six in Quebec have the highest likelihood of being in some form of non-parental childcare (75.0%).<sup>31</sup> Outside Quebec, children under six living in Yukon Territory were the most likely to be in non-parental childcare in 2023 (65.6%), followed by those in New Brunswick (60.7%). Conversely, children in Nunavut (32.2%) and Ontario (47.8%) were the least likely to be in non-parental childcare. In 2023, children were most likely to be in a daycare centre, preschool, or childcare centre (CPE) in Yukon Territory (56.7%) and Quebec (49.5%), and least likely in Nunavut (14.0%).<sup>32</sup>

Across Canada, infant spaces were the least common kind of licensed and regulated space and remain the most expensive. For example, in 2023 the median infant childcare fees (for children under age two) were the highest in Richmond (British Columbia) and Toronto (over \$900 per month), followed by Markham (Ontario) at \$818.<sup>33</sup> Across all age groups, cities in Quebec offer the most affordable childcare, but other cities (St. John's, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina, and Iqaluit) are following closely. Quebec has had its own family policy separate from the rest of Canada since the late 1990s, which includes affordable childcare.



Why this matters

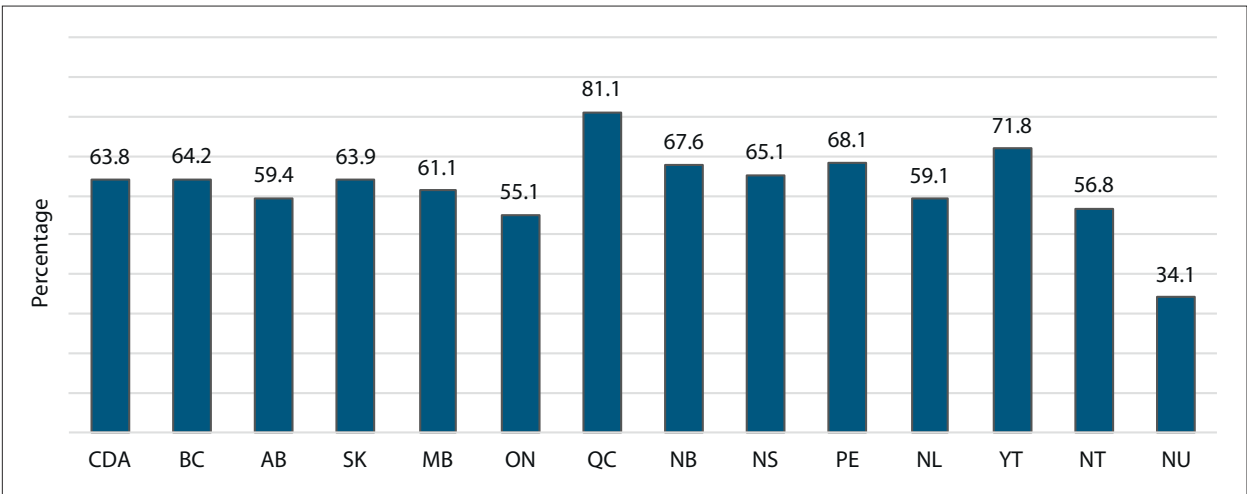
Although family still provides much of the care children in Canada receive, licensed non-parental childcare has played an important role in helping families manage their work and family responsibilities. The Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan has been successful in reducing childcare costs.

Reduced fees have increased the demand for regulated childcare. Shortages of licensed spaces is an ongoing issue, with the percentage of parents who used childcare and reported having difficulty finding it increasing between 2019 (36%) and 2023 (49%).<sup>34</sup> Among parents with children under age six who were not using

childcare, more than one-quarter (26%) said that their child was on a waitlist. Parents' difficulties in finding care has a negative impact on their working life, including having to change their work or study schedules (34%), work fewer hours (33%), or postpone their return to work (31%).

The quality of care is also an ongoing concern, especially when services are provided by for-profit childcare centres. For example, in 2022-23, 58.3% of commercial childcare centres in Quebec failed the educational quality evaluation prepared by the Ministry of Families, compared with a failure rate of 12.3% in non-profit centres.<sup>35</sup>

Percentage of children under age six who received childcare from someone other than their parent or legal guardian, Canada and provinces and territories, 2023



Source: Statistics Canada. (2023, December 5). Table 42-10-0004-01 Use of early learning and child care arrangements, children aged 0 to 5 years.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>a</sup> This refers to care provided in a caregiver's private residence. Finding Quality Child Care. (n.d.). Types of child care. <https://findingqualitychildcare.ca/child-care-in-canada/types-of-child-care>



# 22 Parental benefits are used by a growing percentage of fathers

Maternity, paternity, and parental leave and benefits provide parents with job security and financial support following the birth or the adoption of a child. Parental leave refers to the time that employees are entitled to take off work. Parental benefits are income payments provided to some parents while on leave. The amount received varies based on the recipient's income, the duration of the benefits, employer policies (i.e., top-ups), and their province or territory of residence.

Introduced in 1971, maternity benefits have been offered to employed mothers across Canada who meet the eligibility criteria. To this day, maternity and parental benefits (the latter introduced in 1990)<sup>36</sup> are provided through the Employment Insurance (EI) program. The only exception is Quebec, where maternity, paternity, and parental benefits have been offered through the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) since 2006. Since then, access to benefits has been easier in Quebec than anywhere else in Canada. To receive parental benefits through the EI program, parents need to accumulate 600 hours of insurable employment during the previous year.<sup>a</sup> In Quebec, an income of \$2,000 in the previous year provides access to benefits. Under both EI and QPIP, benefits

are paid as a percentage of the applicant's income over the past year.

In 2022, nearly eight in 10 (79.8%) parents outside Quebec<sup>b</sup> with a child aged 18 months or under had employment for which EI premiums were paid before the birth or adoption of their child (i.e., "insurable employment").<sup>37</sup> Among these new parents, 92.4% had claimed and received maternity or parental benefits, up from 89.3% in 2021.<sup>38</sup> In Quebec, nearly all insured parents (99.3%) received benefits that year.

Parents who were not active in the paid labour market during the qualifying period are excluded from both EI and QPIP. In 2022, they represented about one in six (20.2%) of all parents with a child under 18 months (the other 79.8% had insurable employment).<sup>37</sup>

A different picture emerges when examining the situation of all new parents, regardless of whether they have insurable employment or not. For instance, in 2022, 74.0% of new mothers outside Quebec received maternity.<sup>c</sup> In Quebec, that number was 87.8%.

In 2006, Quebec introduced "take-it-or-leave-it" paternity benefits (also available to the non-birthing mother in same-gender



couples). This change was followed by a major increase in the proportion of fathers with insurable employment who claimed or intended to claim benefits, from 27.8% in 2005<sup>39</sup> to 92.9% by 2022.<sup>40</sup> In 2019, the EI program also introduced incentives for fathers outside Quebec to take parental benefits. Although access to additional benefits is more restrictive under the EI program than QPIP, this change was followed by an increase in the number of fathers outside Quebec who wished to claim benefits. In 2022, three in 10 fathers (31.3%) outside Quebec with insurable employment claimed (or intended to claim) parental benefits, nearly triple the percentage in 2017 (11.9%).<sup>c, 41</sup>

Not all fathers who reported that they “intended to claim” benefits actually did so. The actual uptake rates are lower than these figures from the Employment Insurance Coverage Survey. For example, the actual uptake rate in Quebec in 2020 was 70.0%,<sup>42</sup> compared with the 78.1% of fathers who reported that they had claimed or intended to claim benefits that year.<sup>43</sup> When fathers take paid leave, it is typically for a much shorter period than women.

Employers may choose to offer their employees a supplement to EI maternity and parental benefits. These “top-ups” are intended to compensate for some or all of the

difference between what parents receive from EI/QPIP and their regular earnings.<sup>44</sup> In 2019, 30% of mothers of children younger than one year in Canada received top-up payments from their employer, up from 26% in 2009.<sup>45</sup>

### Why this matters

Parental benefits play an important role in facilitating the transition to parenthood. Researchers have even linked parental use of QPIP with lower likelihood of relationship dissolution, suggesting that parental benefits can have a positive impact on the stability of couple relationships.<sup>46</sup>

Parents who are not in the labour force receive little financial support from government programs when they welcome a new child, especially outside Quebec. Indigenous, immigrant, and racialized mothers have been shown to have lower uptake of maternity benefits.<sup>47</sup> Beyond this, little is known about the characteristics of parents who are not well served by the EI and QPIP programs. What is clear is that accessible benefits, high replacement rates, and “take-it-or-leave-it” paternity benefits that are not transferable to the mother are key elements that encourage more parents to use parental benefits.

<sup>a</sup> These eligibility criteria were changed during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, making access to benefits easier for many parents.

<sup>b</sup> Data from the LFS excludes the territories, persons living on reserves, full-time members of the regular Canadian Armed Forces, and persons living in institutions.

<sup>c</sup> Statistics Canada. Employment Insurance Coverage Survey, 2022. Custom tabulation.



# 23 Men are more involved in unpaid work at home, but the gender gap persists

Gender roles have been gradually changing over the last several decades regarding family and work. While women are spending an increasing amount of time on paid work, they are spending less time on unpaid work at home. At the same time, survey data suggest that men are increasingly participating in certain household tasks. Regardless of their labour force participation and changes in recent years, women continue to do the majority of household work in Canada.<sup>48</sup>

In 2020, less than half (47.5%) of people aged 20 and older who were part of a different-gender couple said that meal preparation was mostly done by women,<sup>49</sup> down from 62.0% in 2011.<sup>50</sup> Approximately one-third (35.5%) said that meal preparation was shared equally,<sup>49</sup> up from 27.8% in 2011.<sup>50</sup> Survey participants were less likely to report that men prepared most of the meals, although there was an increase from 10.2% in 2011 to 16.1% in 2020.<sup>49</sup> It is important to note that the survey data measured *perceptions*, not the actual time spent doing the household work. In addition, the 2020 data were collected in June, after the COVID-19 pandemic had been declared and

most employees were working from home. As such, the figures may reflect this unique context rather than a broader shift.

Just over half (55.9%) of participants said in 2020 that laundry was mostly done by women,<sup>49</sup> down from 66.6% in 2011.<sup>50</sup> More than one-quarter (27.4%) said that doing laundry was shared equally,<sup>49</sup> which was similar to 2011 (26.6%).<sup>50</sup> Participants were much less likely to report that laundry was mostly done by men, although the proportion saying so more than doubled from 6.8% in 2011 to 15.8% in 2020.<sup>49</sup>

The 2022 Time Use Survey provides information about how time is *actually* spent on daily activities. Among people who worked from home, women spent 40.4 minutes more per day on unpaid housework than men (102.9 minutes vs. 62.5 minutes).<sup>a, 51</sup> Women who did not telework also reported spending more time per day than men in the same employment arrangement on unpaid housework (87.3 minutes vs. 48.5 minutes, respectively).

Data from the 2022 Time Use Survey also show that among parents who worked from home, mothers spent an average of





51.5 minutes more per day with children than fathers did (323.5 minutes in total vs. 272.0 minutes, respectively).<sup>51</sup> Mothers who did not telework spent less time per day with children (252.7 minutes) but more than fathers who did not telework (200.9 minutes).

Most participants in the 2016 General Social Survey (GSS) reported that childcare tasks such as supervising children (58.8%), taking children to activities (55.2%), and performing children's bedtime activities (55.8%) were shared equally.<sup>50</sup> When childcare tasks were not shared equally, this work was done primarily by women.

### Why this matters

Although data show that some household tasks are perceived to be distributed more equally between women and men in couples, time use data reveal that the pace of change has been slow and women continue to do substantially more unpaid work than men. The division of tasks

remains gendered: women continue to do most meal preparation, laundry, and indoor housework in family homes. In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that among couples in 2016, women (76.3%) were less likely than men (88.4%) to report being satisfied with the division of housework, and more likely than men to report being dissatisfied (9.7% and 2.6%, respectively).<sup>50</sup> Women reported higher satisfaction when their spouse did most of the housework or when it was shared equally.<sup>49</sup>

The “double burden” of paid and unpaid work can affect the wellbeing of women, who are left with a greater overall workload and less time to rest.<sup>52</sup> Those who also provide caregiving to family or friends have a “third shift” that brings greater complexity and potential cost to wellbeing.<sup>53</sup> In addition to affecting their wellbeing, multiple workloads can also affect the labour force participation of women.

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<sup>a</sup> This includes both *co-present time* (time reported as “with” a household child of any age, not including time in sleep, personal care, or childcare activities) and *childcare time*, in which caring for children is the primary activity.



# 24 The percentage of employees working from home has more than doubled since 2016

In recent decades, there have been many changes regarding where, when, and how people in Canada work. This shift has been driven by multiple factors, including technological advancement (i.e., Internet, mobile phones), shifting labour market needs, and changing worker preferences and expectations. More recently, many workers had to work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic when public health measures were in place to prevent the spread of the virus.

Data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS)<sup>a</sup> show that in May 2024 nearly one-quarter of employees aged 15 to 69 in the 10 provinces worked from home at least some of the time, either exclusively (13.2%) or in a hybrid arrangement (10.3%).<sup>b, 54</sup> Although the percentage of those working most hours from home has declined since a record of 41.1% was recorded in April 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic,<sup>55</sup> it is more than double the percentage recorded in May 2016 (7.1%).<sup>56</sup>

Although LFS data excludes workers living in the territories and those on reserves, earlier data from the 2021 Census showed

that those in Nunavut (7.3%), Northwest Territories (9.7%), and Yukon Territory (11.4%) had the lowest proportion of employees aged 15 and older who worked from home.<sup>57</sup> The highest proportion that year was in Ontario, where nearly three in 10 (29.7%) employees aged 15 and older worked from home. The census data also showed that working from home was most common for workers aged 75 and older (38.0% of women and 34.6% of men), and least common among the youngest workers, aged 15 to 24 (13.3% of women and 11.5% of men).<sup>58</sup>

Some people prefer to work from home to better manage their work and family responsibilities and commitments.<sup>59</sup>

Among surveyed employees aged 15 to 69 working from home in February 2021 who had usually worked outside the home before the COVID-19 pandemic, 38.9% said that they would like to work most or all of their hours at home after the pandemic.<sup>60</sup> A similar proportion (40.9%) said that they would like to work at least half of their hours from home, while only 20.2% wanted to return to working most or all of their hours outside the home.





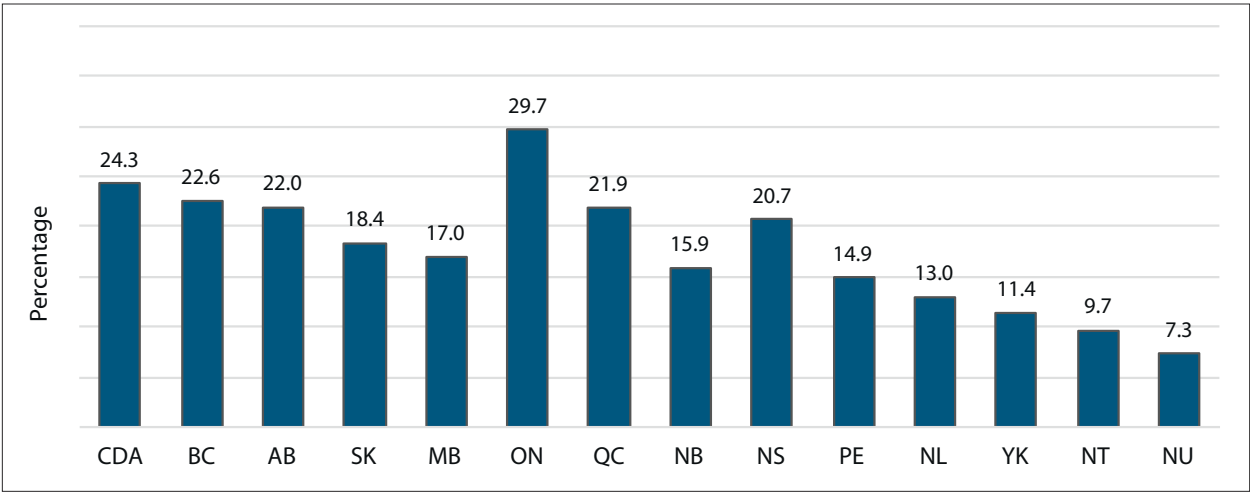
Why this matters

The growing proportion of jobs that can be done from home can provide workers and their families with a greater degree of flexibility, and can help them integrate work and family responsibilities. Working from home can also open doors to employment options at a distance without requiring families to relocate from their home communities, where job options may be limited. However, recent estimates show that most jobs (60%) cannot be performed from home,<sup>61</sup> and many will likely never be able to be performed from home due to the nature of the sector or job.

On the positive side, working from home limits or even eliminates commuting for workers. Long commutes, particularly by

car, can be detrimental to workers’ health and negatively affect their ability to maintain work-life balance.<sup>62</sup> Research has also shown that working from home can lead to negative outcomes. In families with children, working from home can strengthen stereotypical gender differences. Some studies indicate that mothers who work from home increase their time spent on care-related activities more than fathers.<sup>63</sup> Data from the 2022 General Social Survey show that fathers working from home did more childcare and spent more time with children than fathers not working from home, but still less than mothers who worked from home.<sup>51</sup>

Percentage of employees aged 15 and older who worked at home, Canada, provinces and territories, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada. (2022, November 30). Table 98-10-0456-01 Place of work status by industry sectors, occupation broad category and gender: Canada, provinces and territories, census divisions and census subdivisions.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Data from the LFS excludes the territories, persons living on reserves, full-time members of the regular Canadian Armed Forces, and persons living in institutions.

<sup>b</sup> Note that this figure includes people who telework, as well as those in employment sectors where work normally takes place at home, such as agriculture.



# 25 More older adults are working for pay and retiring later

In 2023, data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS)<sup>a</sup> showed that a record high 15.0% of adults aged 65 and older in Canada participated in the labour market, up from 6.6% in 1994.<sup>1</sup> Among adults aged 65 and older, women (11.2%) were less likely than men (19.3%) to have participated in the labour market in 2023.<sup>1</sup> Both rates were up from 4.2% and 15.4%, respectively, in 1976.

The average age at retirement has fluctuated since the late 1970s but has increased since the 1990s.<sup>64</sup> After falling from 64.9 years in 1976 to a low of 60.9 years in 1998, the average age at retirement then reversed course and has since steadily increased to its current high of 65.1 years in 2023.

In 2022, approximately one in five people aged 65 to 74 were employed (21%).<sup>65</sup> These workers were more likely to report working primarily by choice (12%) than necessity (9%). But these factors are not mutually exclusive; both can play a role. Many older adults continue to work productively in their primary career, while others take on different jobs, also known as “bridge employment,” near the end of their time in the labour market.<sup>66</sup>

Since more than eight in 10 adults aged 65 and older are grandparents,<sup>b</sup> it is not

surprising that there is a higher percentage of grandparents working for pay than in past decades. In 1995, the proportion who reported “working at a paid job or business in the last 12 months” as their main activity was 29.2%.<sup>c</sup> By 2011, this had increased to 34.1%.<sup>d</sup> In 2017, the most recent year for which data is available on the topic, grandparents were asked whether they had work at a paid job or business in the past year. More than four in 10 grandparents in Canada (40.3%) reported having done so.<sup>e</sup>

## Why this matters

Increasing life expectancy and the declining share of physically demanding jobs in the Canadian labour market have contributed to more older adults being able to work past traditional retirement age.<sup>65</sup> In addition, mandatory retirement at age 65 was prohibited federally in 2012.<sup>67</sup>

Other factors have “pushed” many into working past age 65. Some factors include changes in their financial status and obligations; the 2008–2009 recession and global financial crisis, combined with the decline in pension coverage; and changes to pension plans in the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>68</sup>



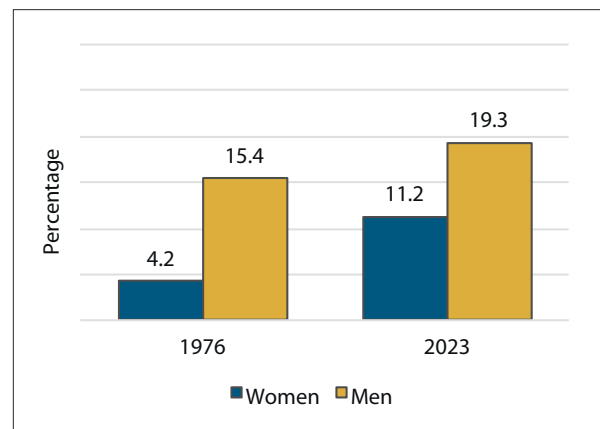
Some older employees may work past age 65 to retain access to employer-sponsored health insurance and retirement benefits, which can help to ensure or support their wellbeing. Beyond the financial benefits, employment can contribute to a sense of identity, social contacts, regularly scheduled activity and time structure, and a sense of meaning or purpose.<sup>69, 70</sup>

Some older adults continue to work past age 65 to provide financial support to their children or grandchildren.<sup>71</sup> More than one in five (21%) grandparents surveyed in April 2024 said they are currently supporting at least one adult child aged 25 or older.<sup>72</sup> The growing proportion of older workers earning income may affect intergenerational transfers of wealth. Being able to access financial support from parents may make it easier for the younger generations to finance house purchases or other substantial expenditures.<sup>73</sup>

Still, previous research on older workers found that not having enough time for family was one of the most commonly

cited reasons for dissatisfaction with their work-life balance.<sup>74</sup> Also, many older adults are actively engaged in unpaid work with their families and communities, such as caregiving and volunteering.<sup>68</sup> Time spent on paid work may result in being less available for these activities and other interests or obligations that are important to their wellbeing.

**Labour force participation rate of adults aged 65 and older, by gender, Canada, 1976–2023**



Source: Statistics Canada. (2024, January 5). Table 14-10-0327-01 Labour force characteristics by sex and detailed age group, annual.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Data from the LFS excludes the territories, persons living on reserves, full-time members of the regular Canadian Armed Forces, and persons living in institutions.

<sup>b</sup> Data from the 2011 General Social Survey showed that 79%–84% of women and 72%–84% of men aged 65 and older were grandparents. Margolis, R. (2016, June). The changing demography of grandparenthood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 78(3), 610–622. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12286>

<sup>c</sup> Statistics Canada. (2024). General Social Survey, 1995. Custom tabulation.

<sup>d</sup> Statistics Canada. (2024). General Social Survey, 2011. Custom tabulation.

<sup>e</sup> Statistics Canada. (2024). General Social Survey, 2017. Custom tabulation.



# 26 Commuting rebounds after having declined during COVID-19

In May 2023, data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS)<sup>a</sup> showed that 15.9 million workers aged 15 to 69 in Canada's 10 provinces commuted to work.<sup>56, 75</sup> Over the last 30 years, the number of people who commuted to work increased in every census except in 2021, partly due to public health measures and work-from-home policies in place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data from the 2021 Census show that, on average, commuters aged 15 and older spent 23.7 minutes per day travelling one-way to work, down from 25.4 minutes in 2011.<sup>76</sup> Men had a longer average commute time (25.6 minutes) than women (21.6 minutes).<sup>77</sup> Men (8.5%) were also more likely than women (5.4%) to report commuting 60 minutes or more each day after they left for work. This gap was partly the result of gender differences in the workforces of industries and occupations in which longer commutes are more or less common, for example, construction, mining, and fishing.<sup>76</sup>

The most common form of commuting in 2021 was with a car, truck, or van (83.9%), followed by public transit (7.7%), and

active transportation (6.2%) such as walking or biking.<sup>77</sup> The remaining 2.2% of commuters travelled to work via motorcycle, scooter, moped, or with some other form of transportation. Those taking public transit had the longest average one-way commute time of 42.9 minutes.<sup>76</sup> This was approximately double the time spent by those travelling by car, truck, or van (22.8 minutes) and bicycle (20.0 minutes).

The longest average one-way commute times in 2021 were in Canada's most populous cities. In Toronto it was 29.8 minutes, followed by 27.3 minutes in Vancouver, and 27.0 minutes in Montreal.<sup>76</sup> That year, 7.1% of workers across the country had daily commuting times exceeding 60 minutes per day, ranging from 2.3% in the territories to 9.1% in Ontario.<sup>77</sup>

In 2021, employees without a fixed place of work (e.g., construction, transportation, salespersons) were nearly three times as likely as those with a usual place of work to commute for 60 minutes or more every work day by car (14.6% and 5.6%, respectively).<sup>75</sup> Approximately one in eight commuters (16.9%) had no fixed workplace



address in 2021, more than double the percentage in 1996 (the earliest year for which this data is available), when it stood at 7.6%.<sup>78</sup>

Patterns of commuting can change over time for a variety of reasons. These include population shifts (e.g., urbanization, increased mobility), evolving business practices, the availability and effectiveness of infrastructure, and economic considerations.<sup>56</sup> Historical population growth in recent years may also contribute to patterns of commuting, since most newcomers to Canada settle in cities,<sup>79</sup> where long commutes are more common.

### Why this matters

For most workers, commuting is an unavoidable part of earning family income. For some, it can occupy a substantial part of their day. It is worth emphasizing that the commuting data are for one-way trips, so they only reflect half of the commuting journey.<sup>80</sup> Family life can be affected when

workers face difficulties integrating work and family responsibilities or other activities due to lengthy commute times.<sup>81</sup> Long commutes have a well-documented negative impact on workers' health and their ability to maintain work-life balance.<sup>62</sup> Time spent commuting has been linked to lower levels of life satisfaction and increased feelings of time pressure.<sup>82</sup>

Along with better health outcomes, lower commute times also contribute to lower greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants. Between 2019 and 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions began, emissions from road transportation dropped by 14.4%.<sup>83</sup> A large and growing body of research has associated traffic-related air pollution, which is prevalent in urban centres and near many highways, with a wide range of adverse effects on population health and socioeconomic costs.<sup>84</sup> For example, one 2023 study estimated that one-fifth of new cases of childhood asthma in Canada are caused by traffic pollution.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> Data from the LFS excludes the territories, persons living on reserves, full-time members of the regular Canadian Armed Forces, and persons living in institutions.



# 27 Working far from home separates but also supports many families

Employment-related geographical (or “extended”) mobility has always been a part of the labour market in Canada. Travelling far from home allows many families to find work that is not currently available in or near their communities, or to find higher-paying employment. As a result of extended mobility, however, many of these workers are often separated from their families for varying periods, which can affect their wellbeing, as well as that of their families and home communities.

This working arrangement is sometimes known as “supercommuting.” This has been defined as “short-term labour mobility that allows workers to be transported from areas of high unemployment to employers looking for skilled workers.”<sup>86</sup> These periods can consist of arrangements such as relatively short periods of work (e.g., 14 days on and 14 days off), or longer rotations that can last six weeks, or one week off on a “fly-in, fly-out” (alternatively, “drive-in, drive-out”) arrangement. Or, there might be shorter rotations with just a few days off and long commutes each way. For many jobs, it is an inherent part of the work, e.g., ice road construction, seasonal work in hunting

camps, tree planting, and some tourism employment. Regardless of the specific arrangement or label applied to it, a shared trait is that they often result in workers being separated from their loved ones for prolonged and sometimes uncertain periods.

Changing economic conditions in different regions and jurisdictions may lead employees to work far from home.<sup>87</sup> This can include declining opportunities in the workers’ home region (e.g., the collapse of the cod fisheries in Newfoundland and Labrador in the 1990s, mine or mill closure, or the end of a large industrial construction project), prospects for better paying employment in another province or territory (e.g., the oil sands in Alberta in the early 2000s) sometimes with employer support for travel and accommodations, or some combination that leaves the benefits outweighing the costs for families.

According to recent estimates, 14.2% of the employed labour force in 2021 was engaged in extended or complex work-related mobility.<sup>88, 89, 90</sup> This included those with long commutes of at least an hour per way (5.4% of the employed labour force<sup>88</sup>),





transportation workers (4.8%<sup>90</sup>), temporary residents with work permits that are part of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program or the International Mobility Program (3.1%<sup>91, 92</sup>), interprovincial commuters (0.6%<sup>93</sup>), and those who worked outside Canada (0.3%<sup>58</sup>).

### Why this matters

Travelling far from home to work has always been part of the Canadian economy. Mobility plays an important role in sustaining economies while helping workers to support their families without themselves having to uproot and move to where work can be found.

Working far from home creates challenges for these employees and their families. For the workers, research has found that mobile and long-distance labour commuting can lead to personal burnout (i.e., physical and mental fatigue and exhaustion).<sup>86</sup> In addition, when one family member starts working far from home, it can limit the employment options of others in the

household by increasing their childcare and other family responsibilities.<sup>94</sup>

Research exploring the impact of long-distance “mobile work” highlights the flexible approaches taken by family and friends to support these workers. “Circuits of care” help workers to manage their family networks, stay in touch, and parent from a distance. Many workers receive support from extended family, friends, neighbours, and other community members.<sup>95</sup>

Interjurisdictional employees tend to rely on their work for most of their income. This leaves their families more vulnerable to fluctuations in interjurisdictional employment opportunities.<sup>87</sup> This was seen in Alberta after oil prices dropped in the mid-2010s, and across the country during the COVID-19 pandemic. Regions with economies that have become supported by or dependent on labour mobility, such as in Atlantic Canada, can be particularly affected by these shifts.<sup>96</sup>



# 28 Women are more likely than men to choose self-employment for work-family balance

Self-employment is diverse, ranging from solo self-employment, where one person operates a business or works as a consultant on their own, to a larger, incorporated business with many employees. The overall rate of self-employment within the labour force has seen little change over the last half century. In 2023, for example, 13.2% of workers in Canada aged 15 and older were self-employed compared with 15.5% in 1994.<sup>97</sup> This was only slightly higher than the rate of 12.2% in 1976. Nearly two-thirds (62.9%) of the self-employed workforce were men in 2023, down from 73.7% in 1976.

Among those aged 25 to 54, 10% of women and 15% of men were self-employed.<sup>98</sup> Workers aged 55 and older were the most likely to be self-employed, and the only age group that saw a notable increase since 1976. Between 1976 and 2022, the percentage of women workers in this age group who were self-employed increased from 14% to 18%, compared with an increase from 23% to 27% among men.

Many workers are “pulled” to self-employment, choosing this work arrangement because of the independence and perceived flexibility it can provide. Others are “pushed” due to negative economic conditions, difficulties finding suitable employment, or for other reasons.<sup>99</sup> In 2023, the most common reason for being self-employed was to have autonomy and control over work hours, wage rates, or location (36.5% for women and 39.2% for men). Women (5.2%) were less likely than men (11.8%) to view self-employment as a way to earn more money.

Women (12.4%) were also more likely than men (8.9%) to cite being self-employed for better work-life balance, to experience less stress, or for health reasons.<sup>99</sup> Earlier (2018) data showed that self-employed women, aged 15 and older, were more than three times as likely as men (15.4% vs. 4.6%) to have cited work-family balance as their main reason for having this type of work arrangement.<sup>100</sup> Research has shown that families may coordinate periods of self-employment for childcare reasons.<sup>101</sup>





## Why this matters

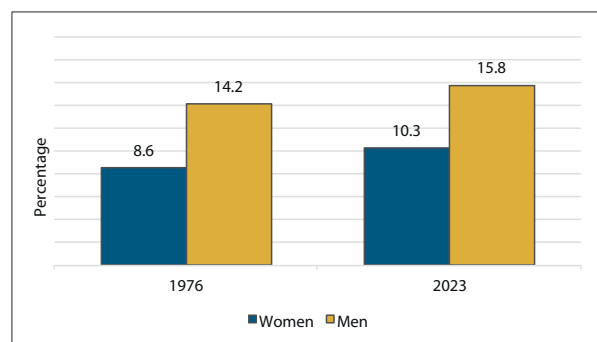
Self-employment can offer some advantages and greater flexibility for workers and their families compared with wage and salary contracts. Even so, there can be some challenges for families. Data show that self-employed workers are far more likely to work long hours than employees. In 2021, more than one-quarter of self-employed workers aged 15 and older (26.4%) reported working more than 49 hours per week, compared with 5.3% of employees who regularly did so.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, the long work hours of self-employment may contribute to less time available for family, leisure, and health-related activities.

Solo self-employment (one person operating a business on their own) is considered to be precarious.<sup>103</sup> There may be challenges related to the work-family interface, such as lack of access to programs and policies that can support family responsibilities,<sup>104</sup> including health benefits, paid sick days, and vacation time. Further, the lack of work stability means lower levels of income stability, which can undermine the material wellbeing of families.

Many self-employed workers share employment characteristics with those

who engage in “gig work,” such as having less employment stability; having no employees, partners, or premises dedicated to their business; and either working short hours or having an unstable client base. “Gig work” is defined by Statistics Canada as “a form of employment characterized by short-term jobs or tasks which does not guarantee steady work and where the worker must take specific actions to stay employed.”<sup>105</sup> Statistics Canada estimated that in December 2023 more than one-quarter (26.6%) self-employed people in Canada aged 15 to 69 were gig workers.<sup>99</sup>

**Percentage of employees aged 15 to 69 who were self-employed, by gender, Canada, 1976 and 2023**



Source: Statistics Canada. (2024, January 5). Table 14-10-0027-01 Employment by class of worker, annual (x 1,000).<sup>97</sup>



# 29 Irregular and non-standard work schedules create challenges for many families

Various aspects of family life are typically structured around schedules and routines that are beyond the control of family members, such as taking kids to school, extracurricular activities, or volunteering. But family members' degree of flexibility are often constrained if they have a non-standard or irregular work schedule.

Although there is no universally accepted definition, non-standard schedules are those in which the employees' work hours fall outside "standard" 9-to-5, Monday-to-Friday schedules. These work shifts may occur during days, afternoons, evenings, and/or on weekends. The schedules may also be relatively predictable, or rotating, or irregular, or they may also be "on call" (i.e., scheduled at short notice). Reconciling these non-standard hours with the schedules and routines of family life is a challenge for many families.

Data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS)<sup>a</sup> show that more than one in five workers (22.6%) aged 15 to 69 surveyed in February and March 2020 reported having an irregular work schedule in their current or last job.<sup>106</sup> More than six in 10 (62.3%) faced variation in both the schedule and the number of hours they worked.

In 2015, the most recent year for which there is publicly available data, more than one-third of employed women (39.4%) and men (36.5%) without children worked an irregular schedule.<sup>b</sup> This changed little from the rates observed in 1998 (39.6% and 37.3%, respectively). Just over one-quarter of mothers and fathers worked an irregular schedule in 2015 (25.3% each), only slightly lower than in 1998, when 26.2% of mothers and 26.1% of fathers worked an irregular schedule.<sup>c</sup>

In 2017, at least one parent worked a non-standard schedule in 39% of families with one or more children aged 5 and under.<sup>107</sup> Mothers with non-standard schedules have a higher degree of precarious employment. They are more likely to report having temporary, seasonal, or contract work and/or to work part-time hours than fathers with non-standard hours.

### Why this matters

Managing time is an essential part of how people fulfill family responsibilities and obligations—in other words, how families "do family." Central to this is aligning or reconciling work schedules with the



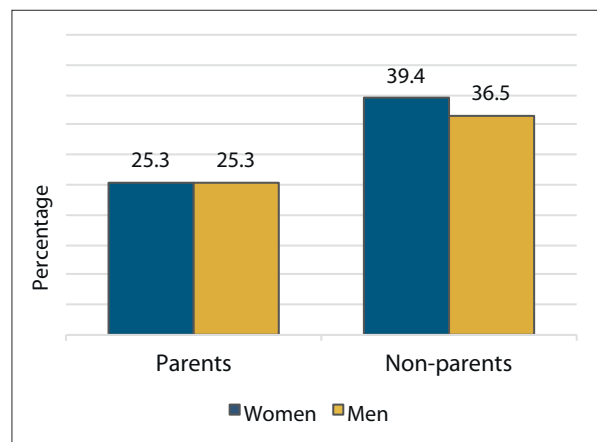
rhythms and routines of family life. But those who have work hours that fall outside the standard 9-to-5, Monday-to-Friday routines are more likely to have difficulties participating in regularly scheduled activities outside of work.

Unpredictable work schedules have been associated with increased levels of work-family conflict (particularly among women) and lower levels of family and social wellbeing.<sup>107</sup>

Irregular and non-standard work schedules can make it challenging for workers to schedule health care appointments, participate in holiday celebrations, and engage in leisure activities with family and friends.<sup>108</sup> Arranging for family needs such as childcare can be greatly complicated, since few care providers offer enough flexibility to accommodate irregular schedules. In this situation, parents are often left to create a patchwork of childcare arrangements that can include family care, non-family care (i.e., friends

and neighbours), regulated and/or unregulated childcare centres, and tag-team parental care in which parents work different but complementary schedules to manage childcare needs.<sup>107</sup> The lack of schedule predictability and stability adds an additional layer of complexity and stress that can impact the wellbeing of all family members.

**Percentage of employed parents and non-parents aged 15 and older who worked an irregular schedule, by gender, Canada, 2015**



Source: Statistics Canada. (2024). General Social Survey, 2015. Custom tabulation.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Data from the LFS excludes the territories, persons living on reserves, full-time members of the regular Canadian Armed Forces, and persons living in institutions.

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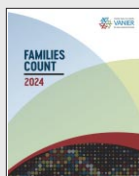
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