

Two-parent families affiliated with better education outcomes in Canada and other high income nations

A new annual international report compares families around the world

January 15, 2013 (Ottawa) – The World Family Map Project – a new, annual initiative to study family well-being around the world – [releases its first report today](#).

There is an urgent need to assess family outcomes with an eye to the well-being of children because family dynamics are changing rapidly. For example, in Canada, statistics show fewer people are getting married and more children are being raised by single parents. This is happening in a time of increased financial pressures on Canadian families.

Today's report provides global context for how Canadian families fare in categories such as family structure, family socioeconomics, family processes and family culture. There is also a special essay dedicated to comparing children's outcomes in education. The essay topic will change annually, while the indicator comparison will remain the same, creating annual benchmarks.

While the data shows trends in lower income nations are often completely different than those in higher income nations, comparisons can be made of higher income nations such as Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom.

Social science research has shown substantive benefits accrue to children living in two-parent homes. The education focal point in this report adds to the existing body of research by highlighting that children in two-parent families have higher scores for reading literacy as compared with children living with one parent, even after accounting for socioeconomic differences. More Canadian children live in households with two parents (78%) than their counterparts in the United States (69%) or the United Kingdom (76%).

Interestingly enough, the same cannot be said of low income countries, where children in single-parent families often do just as well or better than those living with two parents. The authors speculate that significant barriers to education might render family structure less relevant to educational performance in low income nations. Also, children in low income countries are more likely to live in the presence of extended family.

Bradford Wilcox, Director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia, is a co-author of new report. He comments on the results. "In the vast majority of the developed world, children are more likely to thrive academically when they have two parents in the home," says Dr. Wilcox. He goes on: "This pattern is also found in Canada, where children from two-parent homes are more likely to excel in reading, and to avoid being held back in school, compared to children raised in single-parent families. Fortunately, based on The World Family Map, most children in Canada are growing up in a two-parent family. On average, these Canadian children are more likely to benefit from the love, attention, and financial resources that a two-parent family can deliver."

The World Family Map Project is an initiative of Child Trends, an independent, nonpartisan research center. The goal is to generate research that sheds light on how to strengthen families and thus children's outcomes, the critical cornerstone on which our communities and economy are based. The Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, an Ottawa-based think tank, is proud to be a partner on this initiative.

"The World Family Map Project places Canada in international comparison, revealing striking differences between families across the globe," says Andrea Mrozek, Manager of Research at the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada. "We aim to use this data to help policy makers strengthen Canadian families because the strength of our communities and economy depends on the strength of our marriages and families," she says.

Some of the data in the report include the following:

- More Canadian children are growing up with two parents in the home (78%) as contrasted with the United States (69%) and the United Kingdom (76%)
 - This statistic does not account for whether these are biological parents or step-parents
- Fewer Canadian children live with extended family in the home (15%), as compared with the United States (27%). By contrast, 70% of children in South Africa live with extended family. In Nigeria, that number is 59%
- Canada's cohabitation rate for adults age 18-49 (19%) is higher than in the United States (8%)
- Fewer Canadian children are being raised by single parents (20%) as compared with the United States (26%)
- Canadian births outside of marriage are lower (27%) than the United States (41%) and the United Kingdom (47%)
- A large proportion of Canadian children (73%) eat a main meal with their families several times a week. In the United States 66% say the same, in the United Kingdom, it's 65%. By contrast, in France 90% of children do, in Sweden, 84% of children eat a main meal with family
- 65% of Canadians believe children need a mother and a father in the home to grow up happily. 63% of Americans say the same. (91% of South Africans believe this to be true, but only 36% of South African children are growing up with two parents in the home.)

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[For more information, please click here.](#)

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