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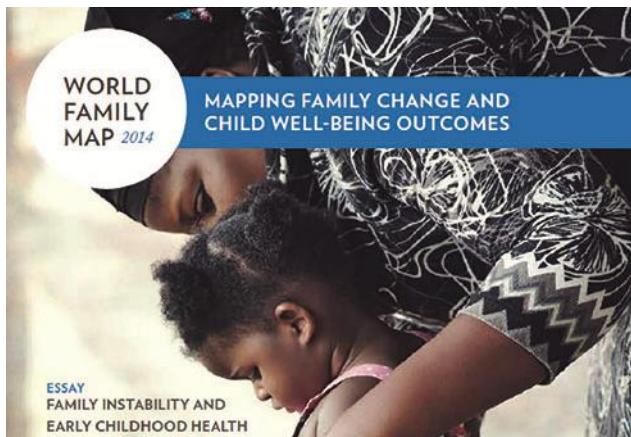


## The World Family Map

*Canadian families in the global context*

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The second annual World Family Map, published by Child Trends with international partners, tracks global family changes.<sup>1</sup>

Mapping global family trends is not merely an academic exercise. For example, a recent post from the Upshot at *The New York Times* speculates that family structure may contribute to Canada's relative prosperity among the middle class compared to the US.<sup>2</sup> The post shows that a greater proportion of Canadian kids live with two

parents than their American neighbours, whose middle class has fallen behind. A large body of research shows that children raised in stable two parent homes are more likely to achieve educational and financial success.<sup>3</sup>

So it makes sense for the World Family Map to highlight the relationships between family life and other important social and demographic factors while providing a global comparison.

The 2014 edition provides a special examination of correlations between family factors and child development as well as an essay on psychological distress among preteens and teens in EU countries.

<sup>1</sup> The World Family Map examines 16 indicators in 49 countries utilizing country-level and international data sources. The project is sponsored by the American non-profit *Child Trends* with assistance from global education and research institutions.

<sup>2</sup> Austen, I. and Leonhardt, D. (2013, April 30). Life in Canada, home of the world's most affluent middle class. *The Upshot, The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/01/upshot/canadians-have-plenty-of-concerns-but-also-a-sense-theyre-better-off.html>

<sup>3</sup> For example see Wilcox, B. (2013, October 29). Marriage makes our children richer. Here's why. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/10/marriage-makes-our-children-richer-heres-why/280930/>

As one of the forty-nine featured countries, Canadians are able to view our family trends in a global context. The report examines family structure, socioeconomic well-being, fertility and attitudes toward family.

## **Growing up with two parents**

**In Canada, 78% of children live with two parents compared to 76% in Mexico and 69% in the US.**

A significant portion of children in Asia and the Middle East live in two-parent homes. About 80% of children in these regions live with either both their biological parents or in step-parent families. A much lower percentage of children in Sub-Saharan Africa live with two parents, due in part to high HIV rates. A significant minority of children live with lone-parents in Oceanic, European and North American countries as well as South American nations.

## **Marriage and cohabitation**

**About 62% of Canadians ages 18 to 49 live in married or cohabiting relationships.**

The report uses ages 18 to 49 as a proxy for adult reproductive age. On the whole, most countries report that 50 to 75% of the population of reproductive age live in marital or cohabiting relationships.

While Canada may have a smaller proportion of lone-parent families than the US, the World Family Map shows that Canadians are more likely to live in cohabiting relationships.

**The report shows that 19% of Canadians of reproductive age live in cohabiting relationships compared to 9% of Americans.**

One reason for this difference is likely due to the significant percentage of Quebecers in common-law relationships. According to the 2011 Census, 31.5% of census families in Quebec were headed by common-law unions.<sup>4</sup> Countries with a significant proportion of cohabiting couples include France (26%), Netherlands (20%) and Sweden (25%). Rates of cohabitation were also very high among Central and South American countries reaching 38% in Peru.

**Conversely, formal marriage rates among Canadians of reproductive age are lower than their North American neighbours.**

Approximately 43% Canadians in this age group are married compared to 45% of Americans and 63% of Mexicans. The marriage rate among Canadians of reproductive age was lower than the countries in Eastern Europe, most countries from Western Europe, Australia, Asia, the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa with the exception of South Africa.

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<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada (2013). Table 2 Distribution (number and percentage) and percentage change of census families by family structure, Canada, provinces and territories, 2011, *Portrait of families and living arrangements*. Retrieved from <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-312-x/2011001/tbl/tbl2-eng.cfm>

## **Attitudes about family**

**Canadians are nearly divided in half when it comes to the approval of single women intentionally choosing to have children on their own.**

About 46% of Canadians approved compared to 52% of Americans in 2006, the latest year for which data is available.

Middle Eastern countries had lower approval rates of lone mothers by choice. Significant levels of approval were noted in France (62%) and Spain (80%).

The authors report that overall, affluent countries with high proportions of lone parents and low levels of religiosity were more likely to approve of single woman intentionally choosing to have children outside a stable relationship.

Despite the strong measure of acceptance of lone parents by choice in the Americas, Europe and Oceania, significant portions of the population agreed that the optimal living arrangement for children was with their mom and dad. About 65% of Canadians agreed in 2006 that kids are happiest in their homes with both a mom and dad.

## **Fertility**

**The Canadian fertility rate is 1.7 births per woman – lower than both the US (1.9) and Mexico (2.3).**

Fertility is directly connected to future national prosperity. The report states that birth rates are falling worldwide with below replacement fertility rates especially prevalent in East Asia and Europe. The Canadian fertility rate remains above the representative countries from Eastern Europe and Germany (1.4), Italy (1.4), Spain (1.5). Among the Asian countries, Malaysia, India, Philippines and Indonesia had replacement fertility rates or higher. Japan and South Korea posted a fertility rate of 1.4 births per woman and Singapore 1.3 births per woman. Taiwan posted a shocking fertility rate of 1.1 births per woman.

## **Conclusion**

Within the North American context, Canadians of reproductive age are a little less likely to be married, and little more likely to be living common-law and having fewer children. Despite this, children are more likely to be living with two parents than children in the US, according to the World Family Map.

Family is the primary institution for raising kids. The World Family Map project is a helpful tool for policymakers and the charitable sector in understanding the structural changes and developing attitudes about family. The value of the World Family Map will only continue to grow as more data is accumulated and trends identified.

*The 2014 World Family Map can be accessed at <http://worldfamilymap.org/2014/>*

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