

## **Chapter 2: Historical Perspectives on Canadian Families**

### **Demographic, Social, and Economic Origins and Trends**

#### **CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Chapter Two continues the previous chapter's introductory theme, with an emphasis on the historical development of diverse Canadian families. This chapter presents a selective chronological journey from the first contact between Aboriginals and Europeans and the impact of colonialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This chapter reveals the complex ways in which changes in society and economy affect family attitudes, values, and relationships, and shows that the myriad problems and issues facing families today are not unprecedented, but rather are part of a long tradition of challenges and struggles. It also exposes our idealizing myths and false beliefs about families of the past, suggesting instead that families throughout history have always been confronted with, and overcome, adversity.

By the end of this chapter, students should recognize that families are constantly evolving in response to changing attitudes, values, and customs in society. They should understand the importance of key historical developments, including changes to the family life course since the mid-nineteenth century, the first and second demographic transitions, and the significance of modern contraception and abortion.

#### **CHAPTER OUTLINE**

- A Historical, Cross-Cultural Perspective
- Aboriginals and Settlers: Contact and Conflict
- English and French Settlers
- The Transition to Industrialism
- The History of Immigration in Relation to the Family
- The History of Immigration Policies
- Wars
- Variation in the Family Life Course
- The Impact of Modernization on Family Changes, in Canada and Worldwide
- Changes in Sexual Attitudes and Courtship
- Changes in Attitudes toward Marriage
- Declining Fertility and the Value of Parenthood
- The First and Second Demographic Transitions
- Contraception, Child-bearing Choice, and Abortion
- Family and Household Size
- Social Support and Regulation: The Role of the State in Families
- Child Support and Welfare Reforms in Canada
- Changing Nature of Elder Support by the State and the Family
- The Regulation of Divorce
- Concluding Remarks

#### **KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS**

**abortifacients** Herbs or potions that bring on a miscarriage.

**cohort** A group of people who experience some major demographic event, typically birth, migration, or marriage, within the same year or period.

**demographic transition** The transition to low fertility in the West, which began around 1870, is called the first demographic transition. This brought births into line with a sharply reduced death rate. A second demographic transition, more contemporary, has brought birth rates to a low level and, it is theorized, into line with new lifestyle goals and family practices.

**demographers** Those who study population changes such as births, deaths, and migrations.

**family allowances** Monthly payments started in Canada after World War II as a way to give women compensation as well as recognition for child rearing. They are based on the number of children at home and went to all women with children, but not to men.

**gemeinschaft** A type of community typical of pre-industrial rural life; that is, one in which everyone knows everyone else and people share common values.

**“mechanization” of housework** The introduction of new home technologies. Home economists worked to elevate the esteem of homemakers by promoting the idea that the new home technologies required skilled operators.

**revenge of the cradle** An expression reflecting the belief that Quebec's long-standing sense of political injustice might be countered by having more (French-speaking) citizens.

**secularization** A move away from religion as an organizing principle of society.

## MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. Screen *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002; see Film and Video Suggestions, below), an Australian feature film about the Stolen Generation, the mixed-race Aboriginal children who were forcibly taken from their mothers and “reeducated” in white society up until the 1970s. Discuss the parallels between this dark period in Australian history and the treatment of Aboriginal children in Canada throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Expand conclusions to include the treatment of indigenous peoples by colonialists throughout modern history.
2. From our knowledge of relations between Aboriginals and early European settlers, and the presence of “country wives,” it appears that interracial “dating” and marriage has existed ever since Canada was born (even before that!). How has it changed in modern times? What are students' views of interracial dating? Interracial marriage? Does it still have the same controversy now as it did then? What cultural or familial influences are involved?
3. Non-Aboriginal Canadians have a shared immigration history. Poll the class to determine which country their parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, or great-great grandparents were from. What challenges did they face upon migration to Canada? In which ways has the immigration experience influenced their family lives?
4. Many of our ideas about family life in the past are embodied in television shows of the time, such as *The Brady Bunch* and *Leave It To Beaver*. How will people view family life in a hundred years' time based on the shows of today? Discuss the accuracy or inaccuracy of popular media portrayals using modern examples.
5. Do people still value children, based on declining fertility rates? Ask students whether they envision having children themselves one day. How many? Why?

6. With decreased government spending, cuts in social programs along with unemployment, lack of family and financial resources the elderly have found that they are responsible for caring for themselves and can no longer rely on programs and finances that were once available. Considering this lack of support for the elderly have the students discuss potential consequences (financial, personal and emotional) for the elderly, the family and the government.

## ANSWERS TO CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of the original contact and conflict between English and French colonizers and the Aboriginal peoples of Canada on today's society?

Page 30-33: Male explorers were the first to make the initial contact with Aboriginal peoples. Fur traders, missionaries and women with families followed afterwards.

Aboriginal families helped the settlers by showing them how to survive the new and harsh environment. They would sometimes adopt children that were born to unmarried settler women. Aboriginal families believed that marriage between the settlers and the Aboriginal women was a way to develop kinship alliances and as well as a path to building stronger trust and goodwill.

On the other hand, Aboriginal women were taken advantage of by being in short-term and exploitative relationships with the settler men. The Aboriginal women, also known as "country wives" were abandoned when the men eventually went back to Europe. These men reunited with wives that they already had or formed new relationships with European woman that they eventually married. The children of the settler men and Aboriginal marriages suffered. The boys were sent away with their fathers at young age to be educated while the girls stayed with their mothers and were raised with her cultural values.

As a result, in the 1820s efforts were made to "civilize" the families of mixed-race. Laws were made and missionaries worked towards sanctioning the marriages. This resulted in the children of mixed-race being controlled and regulated by others because of the desire to encourage discipline and order in their lives.

Another conflict between the Aboriginal peoples and the settlers was with regard to property. The Aboriginal people believed in kinship as a way to determine who would be eligible for benefits, (sharing in the benefits of the hunt, for example). The early settlers believed that land, money or goods were to be traded on the market economy. Because of this clash of values, the settlers outlawed the potlatch, which was a tradition of the Aboriginal peoples. The English and French brought with them their own laws (English Common Law and Custom of Paris). The Custom of Paris (in Quebec) governed marriage and family were much more egalitarian than the English Common Law. After the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in 1760, the English were unsuccessful in imposing their family law on to the French but the French did follow English criminal law.

Today there are many more common-law relationships in Quebec compared to the rest of Canada and the women in Quebec do not take on their husband's name when they marry.

2. As the "mechanization" of housework occurred, the standards for cleanliness and material goods in the family home increased, adding pressure for women, especially in the 1950s. Now that many more women engage in the job market and have increasingly less time to

spend doing housework, have these standards declined? If not, what are the implications? Consider the challenge, especially for women, to balance work and family responsibilities.

Page 33-34, 41-42: Women are seeking higher education and pursuing careers as well as continuing to be the main person responsible for housework within the household. Standards of housework have not declined and women now have even more pressure put on them to keep the home cleaner with the new and improved appliances. Martha Stewart promoted the "domestic goddess" movement while other campaigns such as women being responsible for health and wellness of their family ensured that she would feel pressure to maintain an high standard of cleanliness and beauty within the home.

Along with work pressures, role pressures and self-judgement, women feel that they may be may not get social approval if they are not capable housekeepers.

3. In the past, the primary reason for lone motherhood was widowhood. At the present, it is divorce. Why is this so? Why is this important when considering the nature of social support?

Page 40, 57-58: Life expectancy is now longer and divorce is more acceptable and accessible than it was in the past. In the past a widow would remarry after the death of her husband while today a divorced woman may remarry if she chooses.

At present single mothers continue to be vulnerable and face poverty the same way widows did in the past. They also are similar because they both rely on charity (family, friends, organizations) and state support to survive. Social support is one of and often the only way a lone parent is able to survive.

4. As we have seen, immigration has been a part of Canada since its foundation. Undoubtedly, immigration is still an important aspect of our country. What will be the impact of increasing immigration for Canada's future?

Page 37: Immigration continues to benefit Canada's economy which is important to Canada's future growth.

5. Some of Canada's past immigration policies do not cast our country in a favourable light. In recent years, these policies have improved, shifting to a long-term perspective that considers future growth and prosperity. Is it likely that future circumstances can alter this new perspective? Do you think it is possible that Canada will resort to its traditional viewpoint?

Page 36-37: In the past immigration was used to fill voids in job market, (eg. Build CPR, fill vacancies left by aging baby boomers) and restricted during economic downturns. The current policies encourage immigration even during economic downturns because immigration is considered to be crucial towards the future economic growth of Canada. Restriction of immigration would be seen as a negative move on the government's behalf because of the close ties immigration has to economic growth in Canada.

6. As baby boomers age, Canada enters a phase in which a large portion of its population will be made up of seniors. What changes is our society already experiencing as a result of this situation, and what can it expect to experience in the future?

Page 60-61: Families do not care for their elders as much as they used to. Initially, caring for older individuals was shared by government, employers and family. Due to government cutbacks, changes in socio-demographics such as rising numbers of women in the workplace and an increase in single-parent families the older population affects the aging population. At one time families were able to care for families when government wasn't able to. Now the older population finds that they must care for themselves because family members are too busy to care for them.

7. Now that the typical life course of an individual is less predictable than in the past, what are the implications for sociologists? What must be considered when forming definitions, generalizations, and predictions?

Page 41: When making generalizations, predictions and forming definitions sociologists must take into account that the timing of sequences are too varied and complex to make any assumptions.

An example in the text shows that a woman can be a grandmother, mid-career professional at the same time or she can be a new mother at midlife while embarking on a new career.

8. How does modernization impact non-Western cultures? What is its significance for women and older individuals in particular? What conflicts are likely to result between men and women, different generations, and families as a whole?

Page 41-43: Modernization changes traditional customs and values. Filial piety is a value in Asian countries and because of recent modernization support to elders in the family is becoming difficult because the children in the family are pursuing education and are focusing on their own needs over others.

Gender roles are also changing and can create conflict within a family. Women in China, for example are finding more freedom through the government's control and restriction on the number of children allowed per family. In Trinidad and Turkey, women are able to pursue a higher education and better job opportunities, but are not likely to stay at home to care for family members as they once were.

When changes occur at such speed tension and conflict between the generations and family members can be felt.

## **GROUP ACTIVITIES**

1. Divide the class into two groups. One group will research family life in rural areas and the other group will research family life in urban areas. Have the groups come back to discuss the positive and negative aspects of family life in each of these areas. Is family life better in one or the other? How has urbanization changed family life? Is rural living as positive as it is often made out to be?
2. Traditionally, most people followed a predictable life cycle of going to school, getting married, having children, and then having grandchildren at a ripe old age. Today, life cycles are varied and unpredictable. Split the class up randomly into groups of five or six. Have each student compare, within their groups, the life cycles of their grandparents versus their parents or themselves in order to find generational differences. Have a vote to determine the classroom's most atypical life cycle.

3. In groups, have students discuss their thoughts and opinions of honeymoons. Do the motivations that led to their development (i.e., the consummation of the union) still apply in today's society?
4. Assign each small group one of the following topics/chapter subheadings: Aboriginals and early settlers; The Daughters of the King; The Transition to Industrialism; Contraception, Childbearing Choice and Adoption. Have each focus their discussion on the treatment of women and gender equality rights.
5. Divide the class into groups of ten. Within each group have half of the group take on the role of single parent family and the other half take the role of nuclear family. Compare supports from government, family and society.

### **DEBATE SUGGESTIONS**

1. Family life was better in the past vs. family life are better now
2. The white wedding ceremony is an outdated thing of the past versus Some traditions deserve to be kept alive
3. The government has normalized poverty and neglect of elderly by cutting services and payments versus the government has encouraged the family to be more supportive of elderly family members by reducing social spending

### **ESSAY AND RESEARCH PROJECT TOPICS**

1. Explore in detail early Canadian settlers' treatment of Aboriginals. Discuss colonialism in general, and its view of native peoples.
2. Research Quebec's unique position in Canadian history, particular in the political and social aspects of family life.
3. A clear understanding of the Industrial Revolution and the resultant changes in the economic responsibilities of the family will go a long way in understanding the issues and problems, discussed in detail in the chapters ahead, that close relations face today. To this end, research the roles and responsibilities of families prior to, during, and immediately after the arrival of the Industrial Era, focusing on the division of labour and the function of children.
4. The technological advancements of the Industrial Revolution introduced great conveniences for, but also tremendous demands and expectations of, the woman at home. Research and discuss the real lives of domestic homemakers in the age of modern convenience.
5. Multiculturalism is a paradox: on the one hand, immigrants seek to preserve their own cultural heritage; on the other, they wish to learn the customs of their new homes. Discuss.

6. How accurate are our perceptions of families in the past? Are they clouded by nostalgia, or was domestic life really the stuff of *The Brady Bunch* and *Leave it To Beaver*? Conduct a historical review of close relations in the first half of the twentieth century.
7. How large a role should the state play in governing and assisting families? Discuss with past and present examples.
8. In 1989 the Canadian Government announced that child poverty would be erased by the year 2000. Assorted policy and tax benefit reforms occurred. Has child poverty been eradicated? Why is this difficult to measure?

## FILM AND VIDEO SELECTIONS

*The Invisible Nation* (2007, documentary, 93 minutes). This film chronicles the history of Algonquin families and the changes they experienced as a result of colonization since the 16th century. Modern-day Algonquin families number about 9,000 and the families live in poverty and face many social challenges as a direct result of colonialism and its policies. This film is available online through the National Film Board of Canada at [nfb.ca](http://nfb.ca).

*Shepherd's Pie and Sushi* (1998, documentary, 45 minutes). A story that chronicles the early history of Japanese-Canadians and the struggle of immigrants with their identities in their new but foreign homeland. This film is available online through the National Film Board of Canada at [nfb.ca](http://nfb.ca).

*Ikwe* (1986, docudrama, 57 minutes). This dramatic film is about a young Ojibwa girl *who marries a Scottish fur trader in 1770*. She leaves her home and relocates to Georgian Bay. The union is supported by her tribe, but she experiences isolation and alienation. She experiences values and cultural clashes which lead to tragic consequences. This film is available online through the National Film Board of Canada at [nfb.ca](http://nfb.ca).

*In the Shadow of Gold Mountain* (2004, documentary, 43 minutes). This film features stories from older Chinese immigrants who experienced the Chinese Head Tax of 1885 and the Chinese Exclusion Act. These laws were designed to discourage Chinese immigration to Canada. The stories are told as a historical and poetic narrative. This film is available online through the National Film Board of Canada at [nfb.ca](http://nfb.ca).

*Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002, feature film, 95 minutes). The story of three mixed-race Aboriginal girls, taken from their homes to be raised in white-run training schools, who escape and undertake an epic journey across the Australian outback to their families. Based on the true story of the Stolen Generation.

# Chapter 2

## Historical Perspectives on Canadian Families



# Contact & Conflict

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- Aboriginal families were diverse
- Early aboriginal contact with foreigners included
  - Fur traders
  - Missionaries
  - Colonists

# Contact & Conflict

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- Aboriginal women married/cohabited with traders and explorers
  - Relationships varied
    - Committed and long lasting
    - Short term and exploitative
    - Supported by aboriginal relatives but frowned upon by trading companies, the church and European relatives

# Contact & Family Issues

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- Children of Aboriginal/European unions suffered strain
- Efforts made to “civilize” mixed race unions
- Kinship viewed more flexibly by aboriginal peoples

# Contact & Family Issues

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- Gender roles varied
  - Women had more power in aboriginal families
- Differing viewpoints on family/community ties, and rights to property
  - Resulted in a clash of values
    - Potlatches (ritual exchanges) were viewed negatively by Europeans.

# English & French Settlers

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- English Common Law differed from the Custom of Paris
  - For English settlers
    - power and property rights were vested in the male head of household
  - For French settlers
    - property was shared by husband and wives, even when controlled by husbands
    - Children (regardless of gender) could share inheritances

# Transition to Industrialism

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- **Gemeinschaft** communities were typical of pre-industrial life
  - Everyone knows each other and people share common values

# Transition to Industrialism

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- The mid-1850s saw a paradigm shift from agricultural to industrialism
  - Families were driven to urban settings
  - Men left the house to work in factories
  - Family caregiving became women's work
  - Children were more independent

# Immigration & the Family

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Immigration is a significant part of Canadian history

- During the American Revolution
  - American Empire Loyalists and African Americans settled in Nova Scotia and southern Ontario
    - African American families varied from the expected family model and faced discrimination



# Immigration & the Family

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- In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century
  - African American homesteaders settled in Alberta
    - Settlers of all ethnicities banded together in families and communities to make a new and happy life
- Immigration from Europe has a long history in Canada
- Today South Asian families form a large portion of new immigrants to Canada

# Changing Immigration Policy

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- Canadian immigration policy
  - Has varied with the need for labour power
    - Chinese workers were hired to build railroads
      - They were excluded from bringing in wives and children
  - Focused on short term labour needs and then on long term economic prosperity
- Research on migrants has changed
  - from a focus on males to one that focuses on the gender specific nature of migration

# Wars

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- During WWII
  - Canadian government encouraged both single and married women to join the labour force
- Post WWII
  - Women had to give up their job and resume domestic roles
  - Media emphasized the role of the father in the household

# Wars

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- Japanese Canadians
  - Were seen as threat to national security
    - forced to leave their homes and deprived of their rights
    - Some were deported to Japan
    - Others were geographically dispersed to encourage assimilation into the dominant culture

# The Family Life Course

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- The timing and sequencing of family life events is changing
  - Families spend less time having and raising children
  - A woman can be
    - A grandmother and a mid-career professional at the same time
    - A new mother at midlife while starting a new career

# Impact of Modernization

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- Changes to family in Canada and elsewhere
  - Women's roles and responsibilities are changing
  - Marriages are showing more egalitarianism
  - In modern Arab societies modernization with smaller family sizes, a higher literacy rate and a better economy

# Impact of Modernization

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- In India traditional family related customs have changed positively and negatively
  - Many have been marginalized
  - Women have more opportunities but these clash with cultural values
    - Can lead to violence against women
- In China state planning of family life has resulted in dramatic social and economic change
  - Smaller families and increased gender equality
  - Loss of personal liberty

# Sexual Attitudes and Courtship

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Pre 1800s sex was associated with the wedding night and virginity was highly valued

- 1800s – the Victorians de-sexed the honeymoon
  - Banishing sex from public view reached its peak; pregnancy was disguised or hidden
- Late 1800s
  - Sex seen as a central part of marriage and sexual attraction as a crucial part of courtship



# Sexual Attitudes & Courtship

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- 1920s
  - Sex and sexual attraction began to occupy a more central in modern ideas about personality and identity
- Contemporary weddings
  - Remain focused on “fairy tale” images and patriarchal rituals

# Attitudes Toward Marriage

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- Traditionally marriage was viewed in terms of
  - Rights, duties and obligations to each other's families
- A major shift has placed greater emphasis on
  - Personal or emotional aspects of marriage
- Both an increase in cohabitation and an increase in later marriage have occurred

# Declining Fertility & Parenthood

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- Since the 1870s fertility rates in the West have declined steadily
  - Birthrates in Canada hit a record low in 2000
  - Canada is still showing population growth, but largely through immigration
  - The post-war “baby boom” was a result of compressing two decades of births into a decade and a half.

# Family Size and Birth Rates

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- Quebec's historically high birth rates
  - Revenge of the cradle: the idea that having more Quebec citizens might be a counter to Quebecer's sense of political injustice
- Aboriginal people's birth rates
  - Were high historically, declined in the 1970s and 1980s and have since increased
  - Now the fastest growing in Canada

# Demographic Transitions

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- Demographers – family researchers who study birth rates
- The transition from high mortality and fertility to low mortality and fertility
  - Transformed the social meaning of children, child-rearing and women's place in the family
- First demographic transition
  - Transition to low fertility in the West (circa 1870)

# Demographic Transitions

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- Second demographic transition
  - A new force for lower fertility in the west (circa 1965)
  - Effects are profound and subtle
    - An aging population
    - Many generations alive at once
    - Domestic lives are becoming more varied and complex

# Reproductive Choice

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- Historically, child-bearing and childrearing were the major source of meaning for women
- There have always been attempts to control conception
  - Herbs to bring on miscarriage (abortifacients) were used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

# Reproductive Choice

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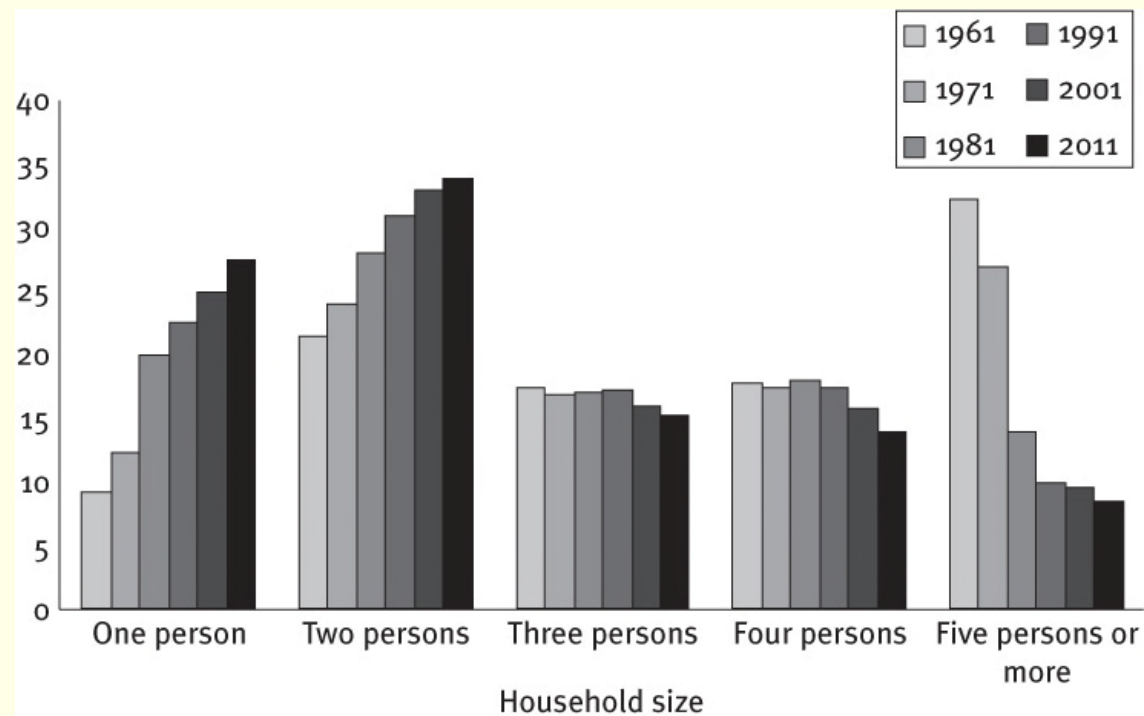
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- Pre 1890s – Abortion was tolerated
- In 1890 – Abortion became illegal
- 1960s – More liberal interpretations of abortion law began
  - Safe, reliable and easily available methods of contraception were also invented



# Family & Household Size

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# Child Support & Welfare Reform

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- Family Allowances began following WWII
  - Monthly payments, recognizing the state's role in supporting children and youth
  - Child Tax benefit replaced the family allowance in 1992
  - In 1990 parental benefits were added to UI benefits
- Government policy and tax changes have not altered Canada's high rate of child poverty.

# Elder Support

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- Post Industrial society brought changes to the traditional sources of support
- Resources available from state, the market and family became more limited
- More seniors must now take responsibility for their own care

# Regulation of Divorce

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- Until 1968 access to divorce was quite limited in Canada
  - Desertions and agreed upon separation occurred
  - With the 1968 divorce Act, divorces increased 5 fold
- Divorce was illegal in Ireland until 1995
  - Discussions of a move away from law based on church doctrine (secularization) continue there