

Demographic Change and Young Adults Living with Parents, 1981 - 1996

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Abstract

Special tabulations from the 1981, 1986, 1991 and 1996 Canadian censuses indicate temporal trends in the percentages of young adults, age 15-34, living with parents. Temporal shifts are decomposed to reveal three sources of change: alterations in age and marital specific rates; the aging of the young adult population over time and the growth in the percentages of young adults who are unmarried. The decomposition reveals that each factor is an important source of change, but that the relative importance varies over the fifteen year period. Among the empirical findings are: a) by 1996 the percentages of young adults co-residing with parents was at highest level observed during the fifteen year period; b) although the propensity to live with parents was highest for the unmarried segment of the young adult population, over time the percentages of married young adults who lived with parents also increased; c) compared to the 1980s, the young adult population living with parents is older.

Résumé

Certaines séries de données provenant des recensements canadiens de 1981, de 1986, de 1991 et de 1996 révèlent des tendances temporelles dans la proportion des jeunes adultes âgés de 15 à 34 ans vivant chez leurs parents. Ces tendances décomposées révèlent trois sources de changements : des modifications dans les taux liés à l'âge et à l'état civil, le vieillissement de la population des jeunes adultes au cours des années et l'augmentation de la proportion des jeunes adultes célibataires. La décomposition révèle que chaque facteur est une cause importante de changements, mais que l'importance relative varie au cours de la période de quinze ans. Parmi les résultats empiriques figurent les données suivantes : a) en 1996, la proportion des jeunes adultes vivant chez leurs parents était à son niveau le plus élevé jamais observé au cours de la période de quinze ans; b) même si la propension à demeurer au domicile familial était la plus élevée pour les jeunes adultes célibataires, au cours des années la proportion des jeunes adultes mariés vivant chez leurs parents a augmenté également; c) comparativement à 1980, la population des jeunes adultes vivant chez leurs parents est plus âgée.

Key Words: demographic change, co-residency, living arrangements, aging, marital status

Introduction

Leaving the family home and marriage are two important indicators of the transition to adulthood. In the orthodox script of the recent past, these steps to adulthood were sequential and irreversible. Young people left school, took jobs, became married and at some point early in this sequence, stopped living with their parents. Normatively young adults in their twenties and middle-aged parents could expect to live apart from each other.

This script partly reflects the assumptions of family sociologists, who viewed such behaviours and expectations from a "modernization" perspective, in which the family becomes less central in peoples lives in industrial and post-industrial societies (Goldscheider and Goldscheider, 1989). It also reflects the limitations of existing data to explore alternative living arrangement patterns (Goldscheider, 1997). But the script derives as well from actual demographic trends. In Canada, the average age of first marriages declined during the 1950s through the early 1970s, signifying new family formations (and implied independent residence) early in the life course. Among the unmarried, decreasing proportions

of young adults lived with parents in 1971 and 1981, following the more general twentieth century trend toward non-familial living arrangements among the young and the old.

However, between the 1981 and 1991 censuses, the percentages of young unmarried adults age 15-34 who were living with one or both parents increased, reversing the earlier pattern of decline (Boyd and Pryor, 1989b; Boyd and Norris, 1995; Ravanera, 1995). Increasing young adult-parent co-residency also occurred in European countries (Cordon, 1997) beginning in the mid-1980s. United States data show a downswing in the 1980s and early 1990s, but a recovery by 1994 in the percentages of all living arrangements that contained an adult child in a family (Goldscheider, 1997).

Interest in young adults at home is piqued not only by rising percentages of young adults in the parental nest but also by two demographic trends, notably the aging of the baby boom generation and changing union formation patterns. Born during the high fertility years between 1948 and 1964, the baby boom cohorts were either reaching mid-adolescence during the 1980s and/or marching through their twenties into their early thirties. As a result of these sizable cohorts, the actual numbers of young adults at home were larger by 1991 than in earlier years. These numbers fuelled public perception that fundamental changes had occurred in the living arrangements of young adults and their middle aged parents. Alteration in the marital behaviour (either legal or common-law) of young adults also revised past depictions of the transition to adulthood and increased the likelihood of young adults at home. Older average ages at marriage indicated postponement of marriages by the young, potentially enlarging the population most likely to be residing in the parental home. Divorce and union dissolution also contributed to the dismantling of a script that linked marriage with the permanent exodus of young adults from the parental home. As a result, the young adult population residing with parents included not only those who had never left, but also those who had returned.

The census of Canada is a cross-sectional survey, and it does not ask retrospective questions that permit distinguishing between those young adults in the parental home have resided there continuously, and those who have returned. However, with the release of 1996 census data, it is possible to address the question of whether the increases in the percentages of young adults at home after 1981 has continued into the mid-1990s. In our examination of 1981, 1986, 1991, and 1996 census data, we find increases over time in the propensity to live with parents for young adults of all ages and marital statuses. In addition to these fundamental changes in age and marital specific "rates," temporal increases in living at home for the entire young adult population reflect the contradictory influences of two additional demographic factors, notably changes in the marital status composition of Canada's young adult population and the aging of the baby boom and "X" generations. We find that the aging of young adults between 15 and 34 did depress overall percentages living with parents

during the early 1980s, but that the influence of this demographic factor waned after the mid-1980s. Shifts in the marital composition of young adults constitute a final explanation for the increasing percentages of young adults at home.

At Home in the 1990s

By 1996, young adult-parental co-residencies were at the highest levels recorded since the 1970s. For those age 15-34, nearly four in ten women (38 percent) and five in ten men (48 percent) were living with one or both parents in 1996 (Table 1, columns 1 and 2). These 1996 levels of young adult child-parental co-residencies continue what may be termed the "bumpy line" trend in living arrangements of young adults during the past three decades in Canada. Percentages of young adults living at home declined between 1971 and 1981 (Boyd and Pryor, 1989a, 1989b), but rose slightly between 1981 and 1986 only to drop back between 1986 and 1991.

Economic conditions appear to be partly responsible for the fluctuating percentages of young adult at home over the most recent fifteen year period. Residing with parents can be one of the ways that young adults respond to unemployment, or low incomes during periods of economic downturns (see: Boyd and Norris, 1995; Card and Lemieux, 1999 forthcoming). The upswing in young adults living at home between 1981-1986 followed a severe recession in the early 1980s. A recession also occurred in the early 1990s, with the decline in youth unemployment rates lasting longer than in the previous recession of the 1981-1982 recession. Relatively large increases in the percentages of young adults at home in 1996 followed this recent economic downturn. Changes in economic conditions also are linked to young adults staying in school longer or returning to school. Since the early 1980s school attendance rates have risen dramatically for young adults in their early twenties (Sunter, 1994). Young adults who attend school are much more likely than those not attending school to be living with parents (Boyd, 1998; Boyd and Norris, 1998; Boyd and Pryor, 1989), with the most likely explanation being that co-residency permits reducing expenses and conserving money during the schooling years.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, young women were less likely to reside with parents than were young adult men. The lower percentage of young adult-parental co-residency for women compared to men has been a consistent finding of Canadian studies based on census data (Table 1, also see: Boyd and Pryor, 1989a, 1989b; Boyd and Norris, 1995; Ravanera, 1995). Census data cannot determine why this is so, but other studies suggest gender roles and related cost benefits may underlie such findings. Compared to men, women may be more closely supervised by their parents when living at home and they may assume greater responsibility for household tasks (see: DaVanzo and Goldscheider, 1990; Ward and Spitze, 1992, 1996). As well, women predominate in the lone parent population. Unpublished tabulations from the

1991 Public Use Micro-file show that the presence of children dampens the propensity of young women to live with parents.

Postponing Marriage, Getting Old and Living with Parents

During the 1980s and 1990s the trend in young adults living with parents co-existed alongside the enhanced propensity to be unmarried rather than legally married or in a common-law relationship. Vital statistics data confirm that young Canadians are marrying for the first time at later ages than was true in the 1970s. Since 1969 when new divorce laws were legislated, the rates at which divorces occur also have increased. While a shift to common-law unions partially counterbalances the delays in legal marriage, overall there has been an upward trend in the proportion of young adults who are unmarried. In 1981, for example, 50 percent of young adult women age 15-34 were unmarried compared to 57 percent in 1996 (Table 1, columns 3 and 4). Likewise, the percentage of young men who were unmarried increased from 59 percent to 67 percent between 1981 and 1996. The "unmarried" population in this paper includes all persons except those who are living with a spouse or partner (either legally married or common-law). It therefore includes persons who are single (never married), divorced, separated and widowed.

In a society such as Canada where nuclear families are the norm, marriage usually means residence independent from that of parents. It is the unmarried segment of the young adult population that is most likely to live at home. Yet over time, the unmarried segment of the young adult population has been increasing, as young Canadians either delay forming unions or experience union dissolution at relatively young ages. Because of the association between marital status and living arrangements, these changes in marital status composition have the potential to increase the overall percentages of young adults living with parents, simply because the subpopulation most likely to co-reside with parents has grown.

During the same fifteen year time frame, the young adult population was also aging. The impact of the large birth cohorts of the 1950s and early 1960s and their succession by smaller cohorts is evident from the changing percentages of young adults age 25 and older (Table 1, columns 5 and 6). In 1981 slightly less than half of young women and men age 15-34 were in their late twenties or early thirties. The zenith was reached in 1991 when 57 and 55 percent of all young adult women and men were between 25 and 34. However, 1996 percentages still remained higher than those observed in 1981 and 1986 (Table 1). Age is inversely related to the propensity to live with parents, with percentages being highest for persons in their late adolescent years or in their early twenties. As a result, the aging of the young adult population has the potential to depress the tendency of young adults to co-reside with parents over time. This potential is

Table 1. Percentages of All Young Adults Age 15-34 Who are Living with Parents, or Who are Unmarried or Who are Age 25 and Older, Canada: 1981 - 1996

Time Period	Percent of All Young Adults Living with Parents		Percent of All Young Adults Who are Unmarried		Percent of All Young Adults Who are Age 25-34 Years	
	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Census Years						
1981	33.9	43.0	49.8	58.9	48.0	47.4
1986	34.2	43.9	51.8	61.1	52.7	51.7
1991	33.7	42.9	52.4	62.3	56.5	55.3
1996	38.3	47.7	56.9	66.6	54.6	53.1
Difference						
1981-1996	4.4	4.7	7.1	7.8	6.6	5.7
1981-1986	0.3	0.9	2.0	2.2	4.7	4.3
1986-1991	-0.6	-1.0	0.6	1.3	3.9	3.7
1991-1996	4.6	4.9	4.5	4.3	-1.9	-2.3

Source: Unpublished tabulations, Statistics Canada, 1991, 1986, 1991 and 1996 Censuses of Population.

evident when examining the declining percentages for the total unmarried population, age 15-34 (Table 2, columns 1 and 6). Age standardization procedures confirm that such declines reflect the aging of this young adult population. If the young unmarried population had the same age distributions as the 1981 female and male population, the (age standardized) percentage living with parents in 1996 would be 70.8 for women and 75.5 percent in 1996, up from the 66.6 and 72.0 percent observed in 1981 for women and men.

Age and Marital Status Variations in Living with Parents

Notwithstanding the potential consequences of demographic trends in age and marital status composition, the likelihood of living with parents also grew during the past fifteen years. Percentages living with parents increased over time with few exceptions for all five-year age groups and for the unmarried as well as married groups (Table 2). By 1996, two thirds and nearly three-quarters of unmarried women and men age 20-24 were living with one or both parents. Although percentages decline with age, even in their early thirties, one in five unmarried women and nearly one-third of unmarried men were living in the parental home in 1996. Percentages living with parents are far lower for the married population. Nonetheless, by 1996, one in seven (14 percent) and one in five married women and men, respectively, under age 20 are living with parents. For those age 20-24, one in fourteen (7.2 percent) married women and one in eleven (8.8 percent) married men are in a parental home.

These age and marital status specific percentages also highlight two additional features regarding temporal changes in young adults at home. First, the "bumpy line" trajectory observed for temporal variations in the overall percentages of young adults at home (Table 1, columns 1 and 2; Table 2, panel 1) describes the experience of the unmarried population but it does not hold for the married population. Unlike the unmarried population where age specific percentages rose between 1981-1986, generally declined between 1986-1991, and then rose again between 1991-1996, percentages living with parents steadily grew for the married population through the fifteen year period (the only exception is the age group 15-19 females between 1981-1986). Even though the percentages of young married adults who co-reside with parents is small and considerably less than observed for young unmarried adults, ratios of percentages in 1996 to those in 1981 show that the magnitude of change is more pronounced for this segment of the young adult population. Living at home is not the domain of the unmarried. Indeed one implication for young married adults and their parents is that they may increasingly be under the parental roof. As noted earlier, this is most likely to occur when married offspring are young.

Second, temporal increases are not uniform across all age groups. Among the unmarried young adult population, the largest increases in living with parents occurred for young women in their twenties and young men in their late

Table 2. Percentages of All Young Adults Living with Parents, by Sex, Age and Marital Status for Canada: 1981-1996

Marital Status	Females					Males				
	Total (1)	15-19 (2)	20-24 (3)	25-29 (4)	30-34 (5)	Total (6)	15-19 (7)	20-24 (8)	25-29 (9)	30-34 (10)
Percent Living with Parents										
Total, Unmarried and Married										
1981	33.9	85.9	33.7	8.3	4.1	43.0	91.7	51.4	15.6	6.6
1986	34.2	88.8	41.5	11.5	4.9	43.9	93.3	58.8	20.8	8.5
1991	33.7	88.2	44.0	13.2	5.5	42.9	92.6	59.5	23.0	9.9
1996	38.3	90.4	50.4	17.2	6.8	47.7	93.7	64.3	28.2	12.7
Ratio, 1996/1981	1.13	1.05	1.50	2.06	1.65	1.11	1.02	1.25	1.80	1.91
Unmarried										
1981	66.6	91.1	59.9	27.4	17.9	72.0	92.7	69.1	40.4	28.4
1986	64.6	92.2	64.1	32.0	18.2	70.7	93.9	72.3	45.4	29.7
1991	62.2	91.4	63.3	32.8	18.7	67.2	93.2	70.5	43.9	29.4
1996	64.5	93.0	66.7	36.4	19.4	69.7	94.3	73.6	47.6	31.8
Ratio, 1996/1981	0.97	1.02	1.11	1.33	1.09	0.97	1.02	1.06	1.18	1.12
Married										
1981	1.4	5.2	2.5	1.2	0.6	1.6	7.0	3.3	1.6	0.9
1986	1.6	5.1	3.2	1.6	0.8	1.9	6.8	3.8	2.1	1.1
1991	2.2	8.4	4.8	2.4	1.0	2.6	13.3	5.9	3.1	1.5
1996	3.5	14.0	7.2	3.9	1.9	4.0	20.1	8.8	4.9	2.6
Ratio, 1996/1981	2.48	2.67	2.84	3.35	2.93	2.52	2.88	2.66	3.07	2.98

Source: Calculated from unpublished tabulations, Statistics Canada, Family, Housing and Social Statistics Division.

twenties and early thirties (Table 2). Ratios indicate that change was greatest for the married population in their late twenties or early thirties.

What Accounts for the Trends In Living With Parents?

What impact did the aging of the young adult population have on the propensities of young adults to live with parents? Did changes in the marital status composition of young adults underlie the observed increases between 1981 and 1996 in young adult-parental co-residencies? What was the net result of these countervailing trends? And how do such demographic changes combine with the trends in age-marital specific rates to explain the temporal increases in young adults living at home? These questions are answered by decomposing differences between time points in the percentages of young adults living with parents into three factors. These components of change indicate the magnitudes of the effects due to changes in the age and marital status profiles of the young adult population as well as the effect of changes in the propensity to live with parents, specific to age and marital status categories (Das Gupta, 1991).

Over the fifteen year period between 1981 and 1996, the percentage of young adults at home increased four and five points for women and men respectively (Table 1, Table 3). As suspected, shifts in the marital composition of the young adult population, notably the growth in the percentages of the population that was unmarried, had a positive effect on the propensity to live with parents. The effect was almost equal in magnitude to the inter-censal change in percentage points (Table 3, row 1). The aging of the young adult population between 1981 and 1996 exerted a slightly smaller depressant effect on the percentages of young Canadian adults living with parents. Notwithstanding the contradictory influences of these two demographic trends, there also was a real increase between 1981 and 1996 in the percentages of young adults of all ages and marital status living with parents. One conclusion is that while marital status shifts had the greater absolute impact on the temporal increases in living with parents, the aging of the young adult population and changes in rates were also important sources of change.

Examining the sources of change during the three five year periods between 1981 and 1996 show the changing influences of demographic factors and rate changes over time on living with parents. At the beginning, between 1981 and 1986, the aging of the baby boom cohort had the largest impact on the percentages of young adults in the parental home. The negative and relatively large depressant impact of age distribution changes also influenced the overall change between 1986 and 1991 in the percentages of adult adults living with parents. However, by the early 1990s most of the baby boomers were in their mid-thirties or older. Between 1991 and 1996, the changes in the percentages of young adults living at home was fueled not by shifts in the age composition.

Table 3. Decomposition of Differences between Census Years in the Percentages of Young Adults Age 15-34 Who are Living with Parents for Canada: 1981-1996

Time Period	Females				Males			
	Difference Between Years (1)	Rates (2)	Decomposition of Difference Due to Changes in Marital Composition (3)	Age Composition (4)	Difference Between Years (5)	Rates (6)	Decomposition of Difference Due to Changes in Marital Composition (7)	Age Composition (8)
1981-1996	4.4	3.5	4.5	-3.7	4.7	3.4	5.1	-3.7
1981-1986	0.3	1.4	1.8	-2.9	0.9	1.6	2.0	-2.8
1986-1991	-0.6	0.2	0.7	-1.4	-1.0	-0.4	1.1	-1.7
1991-1996	4.6	1.9	2.1	0.6	4.9	2.1	2.1	0.8

Source: Calculated from unpublished tabulations, Statistics Canada, 1991, 1986, 1991 and 1996 Censuses of Population.

Instead, the increases in young adults at home reflected the growth in the unmarried segment of the young adult population and increases in the propensities of young adults in most age and marital status groups to reside in the parental home (Table 3).

Conclusion

Decomposition techniques generate two general conclusions regarding increases between 1981 and 1996 in the percentages of all young Canadian adults who live with parents. First, demographic trends in aging and union formation are important factors underlying these temporal increases. Second, "rate" changes also matter - over time the propensity of young adults to live in the parental home rose quite independently of shifts in the age and marital status composition of the young adult population.

When combined with the aging of the young adult population since the early 1980s (Table 1), a related empirical finding is that the young adult population in the parental home is older than in earlier decades. Of the young unmarried adult population currently residing with parents, percentages who are age 25 and older have nearly doubled between 1981 and 1996 (Table 4), rising to over 14 and 20 percent for women and men, respectively. Of those married young adults living with parents in 1996, 64 percent and 76 percent of women and men, respectively, are age 25 and older. These data suggest living with parents is stretching out over the life course to a greater extent today than in postwar times. A final empirical finding is that residing with parents is not the sole domain of the unmarried in the 1990s. Although the unmarried are the vast majority of young adults living with parents, percentages also have increased for young adults who are in legal or common-law marriages.

These data on young adults living with parents provide a demographic skeleton for many social issues regarding young adults at home. Not surprisingly, temporal change in young adults living with parents generates intense interest. For the public-at-large, the upswing in the percentage of young adults living at home confirms personal experiences in which people either have experienced parent-young adult co-residence or know others who did. Often described metaphorically as "the cluttered nest" or "the crowded nest," the phenomenon of young adults either staying longer or returning home after an initial departure in turn elicits media discussion and academic research on parent-child relationships, with emphasis on the interpersonal conflicts and benefits associated with such living arrangements (see: Kingsmill and Schlesinger, 1998: chapter 2; Mitchell, 1998; Veevers and Mitchell, 1998; White and Rogers, 1997; Wister, Mitchell, and Gee, 1997).

For family experts more generally, increases in young adult-parental co-residency focus attention on two additional areas: the transition patterns from

Table 4. 1981-1996 Changes in the Age Distributions of Young Adults Age Living with Parents, by Sex and Marital Status for Canada

Marital Status	Females					Males				
	Total (1)	15-19 (2)	20-24 (3)	25-29 (4)	30-34 (5)	Total (6)	15-19 (7)	20-24 (8)	25-29 (9)	30-34 (10)
Changes in the Age Distribution of Young Adults at Home										
Total, Unmarried and Married										
1981	100.0	64.8	26.3	6.1	2.8	100.0	56.3	31.2	8.9	3.6
1996	100.0	53.8	29.9	11.0	5.3	100.0	47.6	30.6	14.1	7.7
Change, 1981-1996		-11.0	3.5	5.0	2.5		-8.8	-0.7	5.3	4.2
Unmarried										
1981	100.0	65.9	26.0	5.6	2.5	100.0	57.2	31.2	8.4	3.2
1996	100.0	55.7	29.9	10.0	4.4	100.0	48.9	30.8	13.4	6.9
Change, 1981-1996		-10.2	3.9	4.4	1.9		-8.3	-0.4	5.0	3.6
Married										
1981	100.0	11.3	42.9	29.1	16.7	100.0	3.4	35.1	37.5	24.0
1996	100.0	6.8	29.3	37.0	26.9	100.0	2.9	21.1	39.3	36.7
Change, 1981-1996		-4.4	-13.6	7.9	10.1		-0.5	-14.0	1.9	12.6

Source: Calculated from unpublished tabulations, Statistics Canada, Family, Housing and Social Statistics Division.

youth to adulthood, and the likely causes of living at home. Our analysis of the changing percentages of young Canadian adults at home between 1981 and 1996 is relevant to both topics. In commenting on the transition to adulthood, social scientists have described the period of young adulthood as demographically dense - that is, decisions and behaviours over schooling, home-leaving, marriage, childbearing and living arrangements are made within a relatively short time period (Hogan and Astone, 1986). However, our results suggest that the time span of such decisions has been enlarged, at least in comparison to transitions occurring in the recent past. . Certainly young adults in their twenties and even early thirties are more likely to be living with parents, and from that perspective the period of the transition to adulthood has been elongated. Our study also augments the list of explanatory factors underlying young adult-parental co-residency. Social science research generally stresses variations in preferences, constraints and economic resources as explanations for why young adults do, or do not, reside with parents(Goldscheider and Goldscheider, 1989). Our analysis illuminates the role of two demographic trends at work, notably the cross-influences of the postponement of marriage and the aging of the population of young adults.

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