

## Modern Families

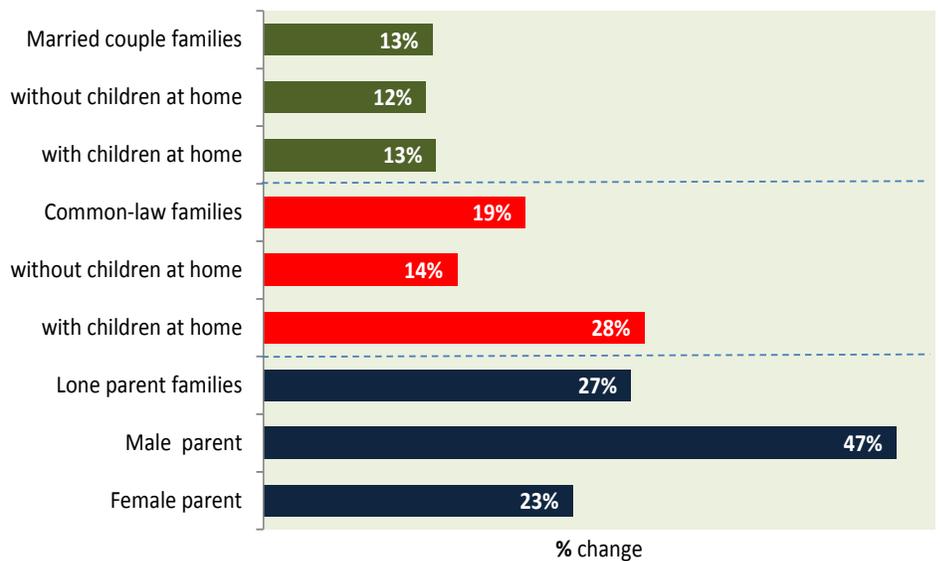


The structure of the Canadian family has been changing over the last few decades. In 1961, the majority (91%) of families consisted of married couples. By 2011, the proportion of married couple families dropped to 67%. One in three families in 2011 is either a common-law couple family or a lone parent family. The growth of common-law families is most significant. Between 1981<sup>1</sup> and 2011, the number of common-law couples has increased more than four times (+340%).

The composition of families with children is also altering. Although there was no prior national data on stepfamilies, the 2011 Census, for the first time, counted over 450,000 stepfamilies which represents more than 12% of families with children. There are two types of stepfamily. In simple stepfamilies, all children are the biological or adopted children of only one of the married spouses or common-law partners. There are also complex stepfamilies, most of which are comprised of at least one child of both parents as well as at least one child of one parent only.<sup>2</sup>

Currently, the data on stepfamilies are available at the Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) level and not at the municipal level. Most of Halton Region is located within the Toronto CMA and Burlington is in the Hamilton CMA. Stepfamilies account for 7.8% and 11.4% of all families with children in the Toronto CMA and Hamilton CMA respectively. In the Toronto CMA, about 3% of all families with children are complex stepfamilies compared to 4.8% in the Hamilton CMA.

### Change in family structure Halton Region (2006-2011)



Source: Statistics Canada, 2006 and 2011 Censuses

<sup>1</sup> Data on common-law families was first collected in the 1981 Census.  
<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, *Portrait of Families and Living Arrangements in Canada*, 2011 Census of Population, Catalogue No. 98-312-X2011001

There are about 144,000 families in Halton. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of families has increased by 14.4%, more than twice the population growth rate of 5.9%. Among the three types of families (married couple, common-law and lone parent), lone parent families grew the fastest (27%), double the rate of married couple families (13%). This growth pattern differs from the national trend where common-law families grew fastest at 14%. In Halton, male parent families, although comparatively small in size, experienced a rapid growth rate of 47%.

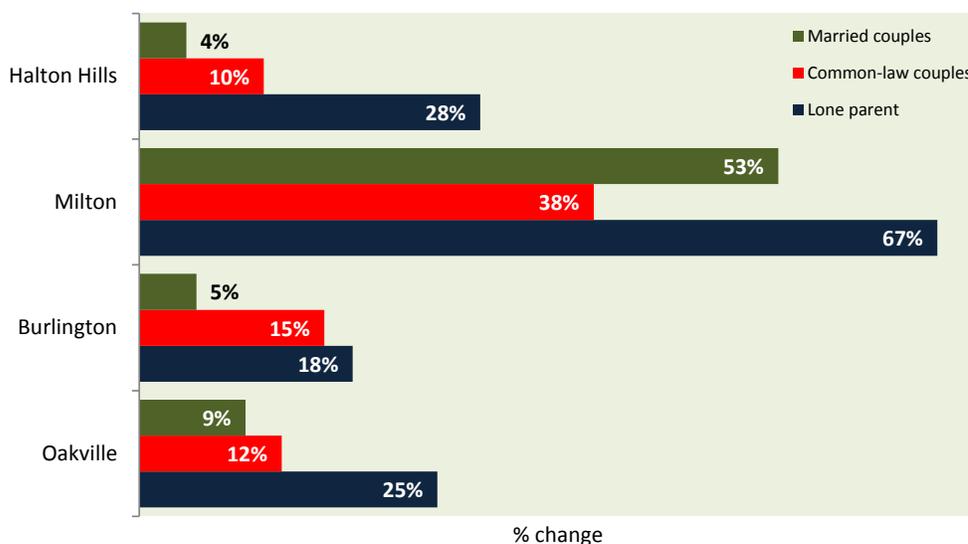
On the other hand, the married couple family is still the dominant family type despite its declining share. Halton's percentage (78%) is higher than both the national average (67%) and provincial average (72.3%). In Halton, about 37% of the married couple families were without children at home. This proportion has not changed since 2006. The proportion of common-law families in Halton is about 9%, slightly below the provincial average of 10.9%. About 60% of Halton's common-law families are childless.

Single parent or lone parent families represent about 13% of all families. Eight in ten lone parent families are headed by single mothers. However, the growth rate of male lone parent families continues to accelerate and are now double that of single mother families (47% versus 23%). This change can be attributed to growing joint child custody arrangements following a divorce.

To a certain extent, the family structure at the local municipality level mirrors that of the region. Of particular interest is the growth pattern of the three family types in Milton. Among the three other municipalities (Oakville, Burlington and Halton Hills), lone-parent families experienced the greatest growth, followed by common-law families and then by married couple families. In Milton, married couple families grew faster than common-law families by 15 percentage point. In fact, Milton is the only municipality where its proportion of married couple families experienced a slight increase.

Oakville continues to have the lowest proportion of common-law families. They represent about 6% of all families as compared to 10% experienced in the other three municipalities.

### Change in family structure by municipality Halton Region (2006-2011)



Source: Statistics Canada, 2006 and 2011 Censuses



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