

Family incomes

6.1

Income distributions for families and individuals in Canada have been available since the first Survey of Consumer Finances was conducted in the spring of 1952. In the early years of the survey, the sample was restricted to non-farm families with the sample size ranging between 5,000 and 10,000 families. Because of this limited sample size, the amount of statistically reliable data which could be tabulated was severely restricted. Regional distributions could not be further broken down to give provincial distributions, and different personal or labour force characteristics could not be simultaneously cross-tabulated.

In 1966, coverage was extended to the farm population. Today the only individuals still excluded from the survey are residents of the Yukon Territory and Northwest Territories, persons living in institutions, on Indian reserves and in military camps. The survey was carried out every two years from 1966 until 1972 when it became annual. The sample gradually increased to 26,000 families in 1974 and now fluctuates between a large sample every second year and a small sample (12,000 or so) in the intervening years. Provincial distributions are still released only from the larger surveys. However, a much wider variety of tabulations is now published due to the advent of the computer and the increased scope of the survey. In addition, special tabulations can usually be provided on request. For a more detailed description of the survey and a much wider variety of tabulations than shown here, consult the annual report *Income distributions by size in Canada*, Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 13-207.

In addition to this main series of reports, a new annual series entitled *Income after tax, distributions by size in Canada* (Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 13-210) became available in 1971 and other reports have also been published on special topics related to the Survey of Consumer Finances (e.g. low income families in Canada, earnings and work experience, and assets and debts of families).

Family and income concepts

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Terms such as “family”, “unattached individuals”, and “income” can be subject to varied definition and are defined here as meant in the annual Survey of Consumer Finances.

Family. A family is defined as a group of individuals sharing a common dwelling unit and related by blood, marriage or adoption. This is often referred to as the “economic family” concept and is broader as a definition than that employed by most demographic studies and the census where a family is restricted to a married couple with or without unmarried children or a parent with unmarried children. Under the survey definition all relatives in a household, regardless of the degree of relationship, constitute a family. This definition differs also from the “spending unit” concept of a family used in Family Expenditure Surveys described in Section 6.2.

Unattached individual. An unattached individual is a person living alone or rooming in a household where he is not related to any other household member. The incomes of unattached individuals are quite different from those of families, particularly as a large portion of them are young entrants to the labour force or elderly persons living on pensions. Tabulations on unattached individuals are not included here but can be found in *Income distributions by size in Canada*, Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 13-207.