

Fewer single parents classified as poor

46% HAVE LOW INCOMES

BY ROSEMARY POOLE

Single parents with young children are earning higher wages, with Statistics Canada reporting that for the first time in 20 years the number of one-parent households considered low income has fallen below 50%.

Based on their before-tax income, 46% of lone parent families with children younger than 18 were classified as low income in 2000, compared with 55% in 1980. The 19% jump in the median income of lone parent families, translates to \$26,000, up from \$21,800.

That's still far less than the median income for a two-parent or nuclear family, which is \$36,000. But over the same period, the national median incomes for nuclear families only increased 6%, making the single parent stats even more interesting to researchers who follow national family trends.

Rik Skuterud, a senior research economist with StatsCan, says lone-parent families are doing better because of new government programs such as the new Canada Child Tax Benefit and, notably, an increase in their market income. But he would not say why.

It could be that lone parents who exist in 2000 have higher education than lone parents who existed in 1990, they might be older, as we know that older people, as they go on, you tend to increase your earnings. We just don't know."

Nearly three-quarters of lone-parents now report employment earnings, he says, compared with 65% in 1980.

The question that people think out is whether they're being shed into labour markets or maybe some difference in social assistance incentives as we saw in Ontario, or whether they're being lured by a strong economy and high wages?" Mr. Skuterud asked. "But when you break those numbers down by province, you see large increases in pretty much every province in the country."

StatsCan findings correspond with research that Rod Beaujot, a professor of sociology at the University of Western Ontario, conducted three years ago for his book, *Earning and Caring in Canadian Families*.

What we're finding is that

things are generally improving for single-parent or lone-parent families and elderly families," he said. "It's very good news."

But one single parent, who did not want to be named, said the most challenging aspects of raising a child alone can't be addressed by government assistance.

The 33-year-old single mother and her seven-year-old son have lived with her parents in North York since she separated from her husband four years ago.

"I think it's more of a struggle if you're not expecting it," she said, noting several of her friends have become single mothers by choice — which may also explain rising incomes among single parents.

Another significant jump in median family income in Canada was found in families in the highest income bracket. After adjusting for inflation, the average income of the 10% of Canadian families with the highest incomes increased 14.6%, bringing the average from \$161,460 in 1990 to \$185,070 in 2000.

That mirrored a finding from another recent report by the national statistics agency, that pointed to substantial gains in the number of people who earned \$100,000 or more during the 1990s.

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TOP 10 CITIES IN MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME

Eight are located in Ontario, remaining two are Calgary and Edmonton

1. Ottawa-Hull (now known as Ottawa-Gatineau)	\$69,518
2. Oshawa	\$68,800
3. Windsor	\$65,649
4. Calgary	\$65,438
5. Toronto	\$63,700
6. Kitchener	\$63,477
7. Hamilton	\$63,031
8. Edmonton	\$60,817
9. London	\$59,769
10. Thunder Bay	\$52,700

Top three cities with biggest increase:

1. Windsor	18.8%
2. Kitchener	6.4%
3. Calgary	5%

Top three cities with biggest decrease:

1. Sudbury	-7.7%
2. Toronto	-4.2%
3. Vancouver	-2.9%