

WOMEN IN BRITISH COLUMBIA 1971-1981

WOMEN'S PROGRAMS, Ministry of Labour
with assistance from
The CENTRAL STATISTICS BUREAU, Ministry of
Industry and Small Business Development
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This document provides a statistical picture of women in British Columbia by comparing 1981 census data with 1971 census data. The decade of the 1970's was of special significance to women in Canada; during this period society's attitudes towards women as well as women's self-perceptions underwent a profound change. This was due to complex economic, social and cultural transformations which have been and are still being analyzed and debated by academic researchers, professionals and feminists. What can be definitively documented and illustrated is what happened to women as a group between 1971 and 1981 with reference to specific socio/economic variables which form a part of the census data.

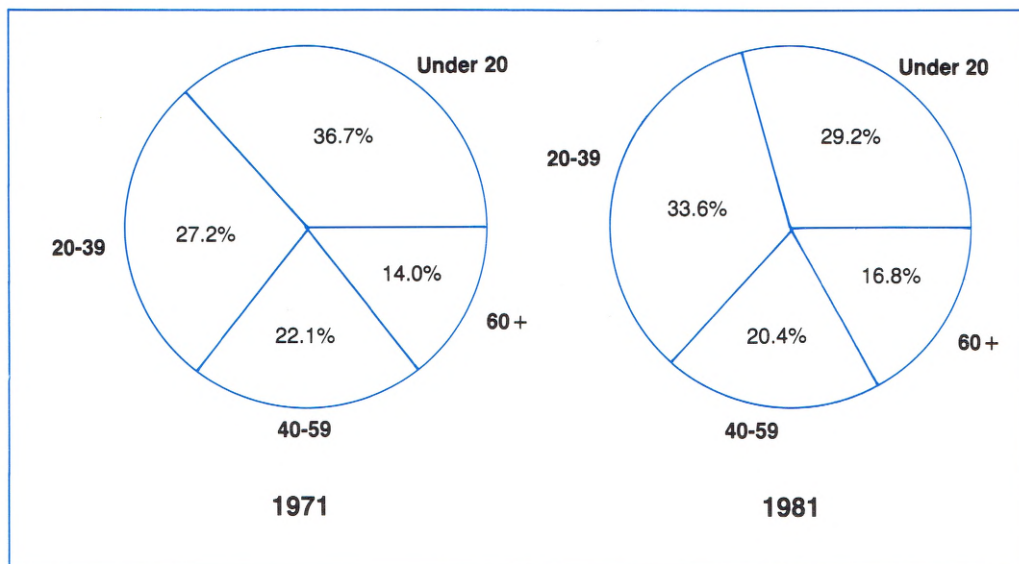
Every ten years the Government of Canada undertakes a major census of population which is administered by Statistics Canada. The census asks questions dealing with one's age, sex, marital status, ethnic origin, number of children at home, structure of the household, living arrangements, religion, school attendance and level of schooling, occupation, labour force activity, income, etc. Because of the great variety of data collected it is possible not only to produce aggregate figures but also to generate a variety of detailed cross-tabulations which link and compare several variables. The most recent census was conducted in 1981. In 1982, Statistics Canada began releasing initial estimates and the bulk of cross-tabulations was published in 1983. The remaining data are scheduled to be released by the end of 1984.

This report highlights changes in women's demographic and social characteristics, education and labour force activity which took place between 1971 and 1981. In many cases the relative status of women and men is compared and some Canadian trends are also illuminated. The information contained in this document is meant to provide a broad overview of the status of women in B.C. in order to highlight some of the challenges which will have to be met. Many trends which originated in the 1970's will continue throughout the 1980's as all indicators point to more social and economic changes for society as a whole, and particularly for women. Many of these changes will be documented again when data from the next census are released.

Median Age Rises

Another way to view the changing age structure of the female population is to compare its distribution by age group. Between 1971 and 1981, the proportion of women aged 60 and over grew 2.8 percentage points. Conversely, the proportion of women under 20 declined 7.5 percentage points. In 1971, one half of all British Columbia women were under 28.3 years of age, while by 1981, the median age had risen to 31.4. This age pattern is similar to that of the rest of Canada, except that B.C. shows a slightly higher concentration of females in the 60+ age group.

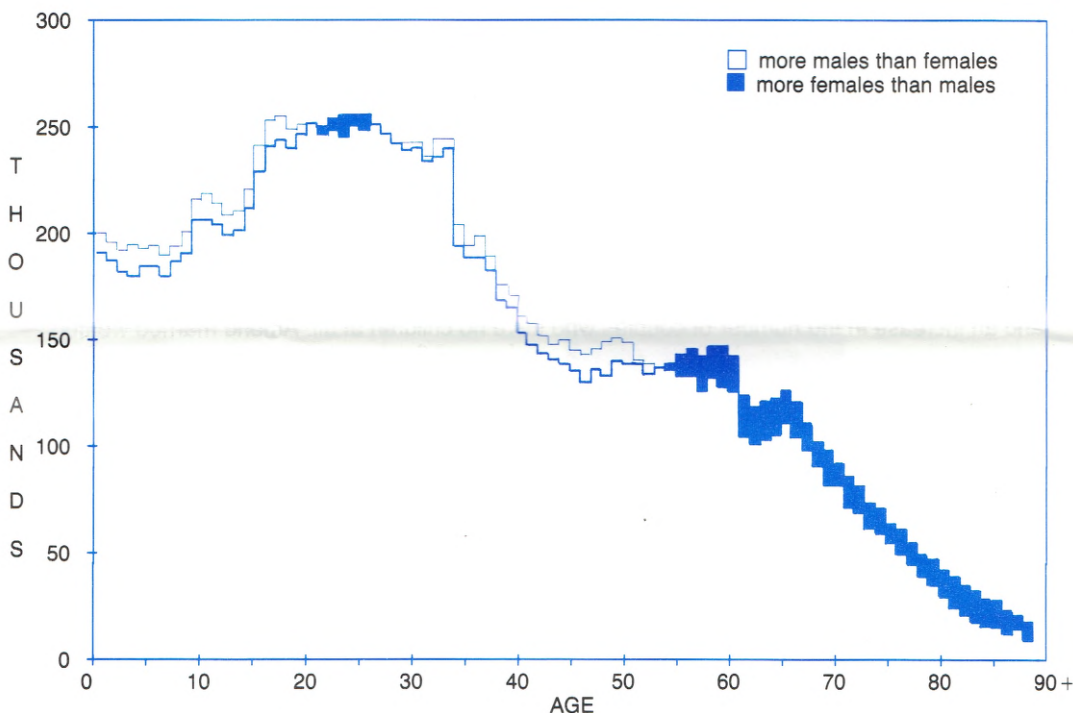
FEMALE AGE STRUCTURE BRITISH COLUMBIA



Women Outnumber Men

Between 1971 and 1981 the female population of B.C. grew at a slightly faster rate (27 percent) than did the male population (24 percent). By 1981, women outnumbered men overall and particularly in two distinct age groups: those in their early 20's and those over 55 years of age. In B.C., as in the rest of the world, more boys than girls are born which explains why in 1981, males outnumbered females among children and teenagers. In the 20-25 year age group women predominated primarily due to higher in-migration, whereas in the 30-55 year age group men once again outnumbered women. After age 55 there was a consistent majority of females, which can be explained by the fact that women live longer than men: in 1981, life expectancy at birth for British Columbia women was 79 years and for men 73 years.

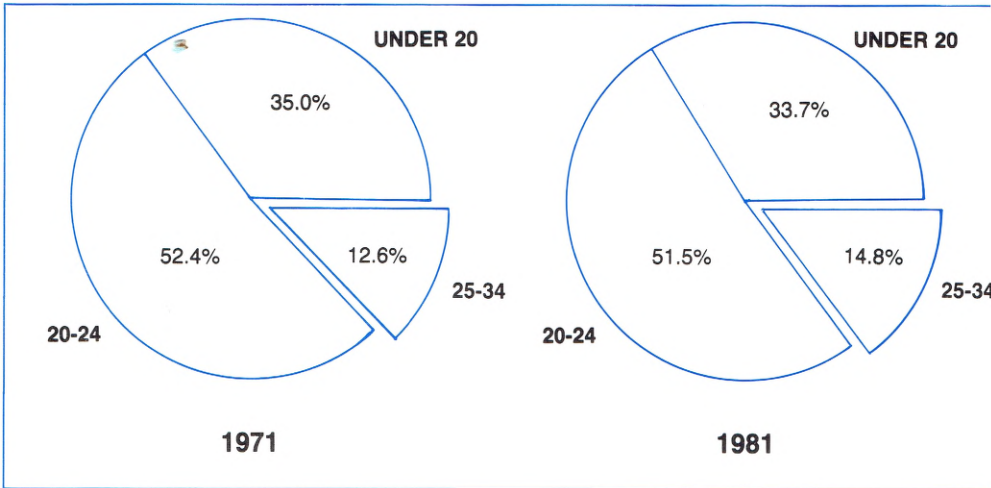
POPULATION BY AGE AND SEX BRITISH COLUMBIA, June, 1981



Teenage Marriages Less Frequent

The data further show that women who chose to marry did so at a later age, less frequently their teens and more often in their late 20's or early 30's.

**MARRIED WOMEN AGE 25-34
BY AGE WHEN FIRST MARRIED
BRITISH COLUMBIA**



Drop in Fertility Rates

In 1981, women bore fewer children than previously — for every 1,000 women of child-bearing age, there were 1,689 births. By comparison, in 1971, there were 2,284 births for every 1,000 women. This translates to 1.7 births for every British Columbia woman in 1981 and 2.3 in 1971. The 1981 fertility rate for Canada was also 1.7.

As well as bearing fewer children, women were having children later in life: in 1971 the highest fertility rate was among the 20-24 year olds, while by 1981 it had shifted to the 25-30 year olds.

**NUMBER OF BIRTHS
PER 1,000 WOMEN BY AGE GROUPS
BRITISH COLUMBIA**

AGE	1971	1981
15 - 19	270	145
20 - 24	747	501
25 - 29	716	597
30 - 34	366	341
35 - 39	145	90
40 - 44	40	15
Total Fertility Rate per 1,000 Women	2,284	1,689

Fewer Children in the Family

Reflecting the overall decrease in fertility is a decrease in the number of children per family and an increase in the number of couples who have no children at all. Among married women in 1981, 18.6 percent were childless, an increase from 16.9 percent in 1971. As expected, as women get older they have fewer children, but the table below shows that in 1981, fully 10.8 percent of married women in their late 30's were childless compared to 7.6 percent in 1971. This indicates that as well as delaying childbearing more couples were likely never to have children.

Among women who have had children, the average number of children dropped slightly from 2.9 in 1971 to 2.7 in 1981. The most dramatic difference was among women near the end of their child-bearing years (35-39 years) — for them the average number of children decreased from 3.2 in 1971 to 2.5 in 1981.

**WOMEN EVER MARRIED
NUMBER OF CHILDREN EVER BORN BY AGE GROUP
BRITISH COLUMBIA**

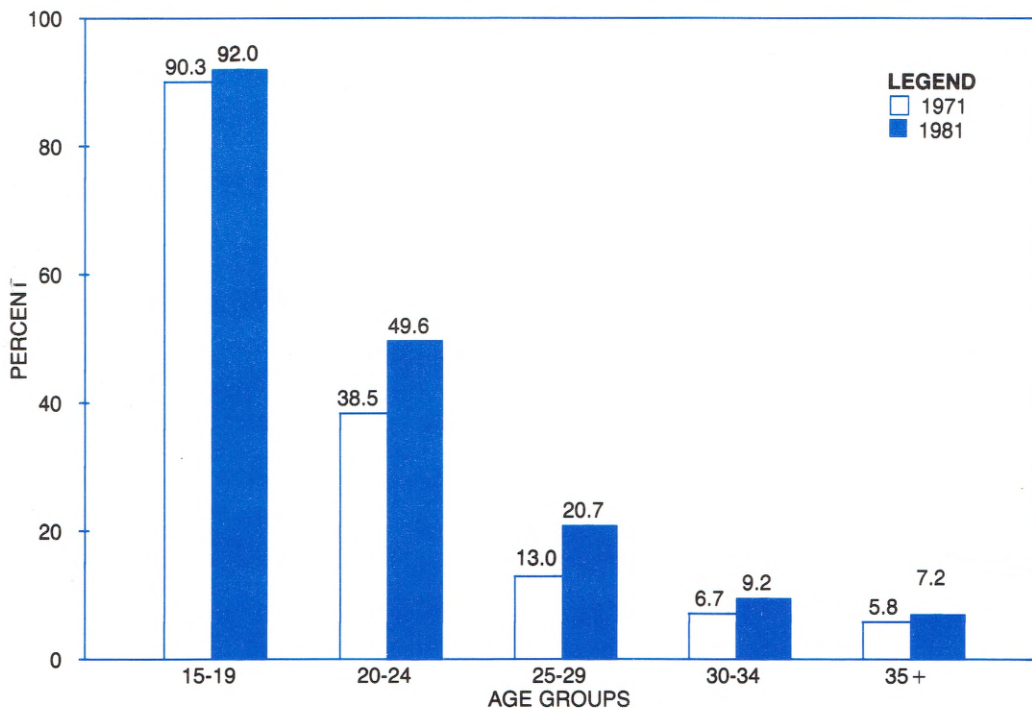
SELECTED AGE GROUP	PERCENT OF EVER MARRIED WOMEN WITH NO CHILDREN		AVERAGE NUMBER OF CHILDREN PER WOMAN WITH CHILDREN	
	1971	1981	1971	1981
15 - 19	50.6	68.8	1.2	1.2
20 - 24	42.6	55.7	1.6	1.2
25 - 29	22.3	34.2	2.2	1.9
30 - 34	9.7	17.2	2.8	2.1
35 - 39	7.6	10.8	3.2	2.5
All age groups	16.9	18.6	2.9	2.7

SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Deferral of Marriage

Many social characteristics changed dramatically in the 1970's. For example, remaining unmarried was an option chosen by a larger number of women. In 1981, 9.2 percent of B.C. women in their early 30's had never been married as compared with only 6.7 percent in 1971.

PROPORTION OF FEMALES NEVER MARRIED BY SELECTED AGE GROUPS BRITISH COLUMBIA, 1971 and 1981



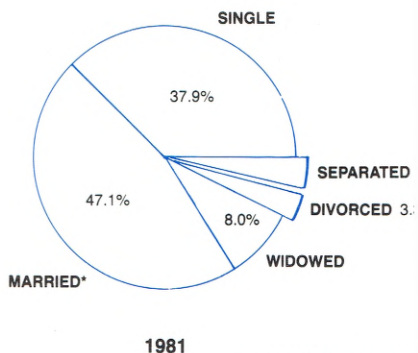
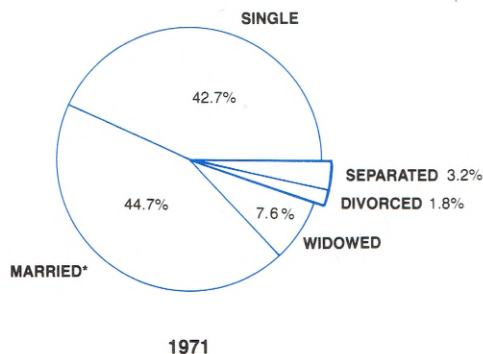
WOMEN EVER MARRIED NUMBER OF CHILDREN EVER BORN BY AGE GROUP BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Increase in Marriage Breakdown

A greater proportion of B.C. women over the age of 15 were married in 1981 than in 1971 due to the fact that in 1981 a greater proportion of the population was of prime marriageable age. Similarly, the proportion of widowed women rose slightly because of the greater concentration of women over 60 years of age in the population. The rate of marriage breakdown increased in the ten-year span. In 1981, 7.0 percent of women over 15 years of age were separated or divorced as compared to 5.0 percent in 1971.

MARITAL STATUS OF THE 15+ FEMALE POPULATION BRITISH COLUMBIA

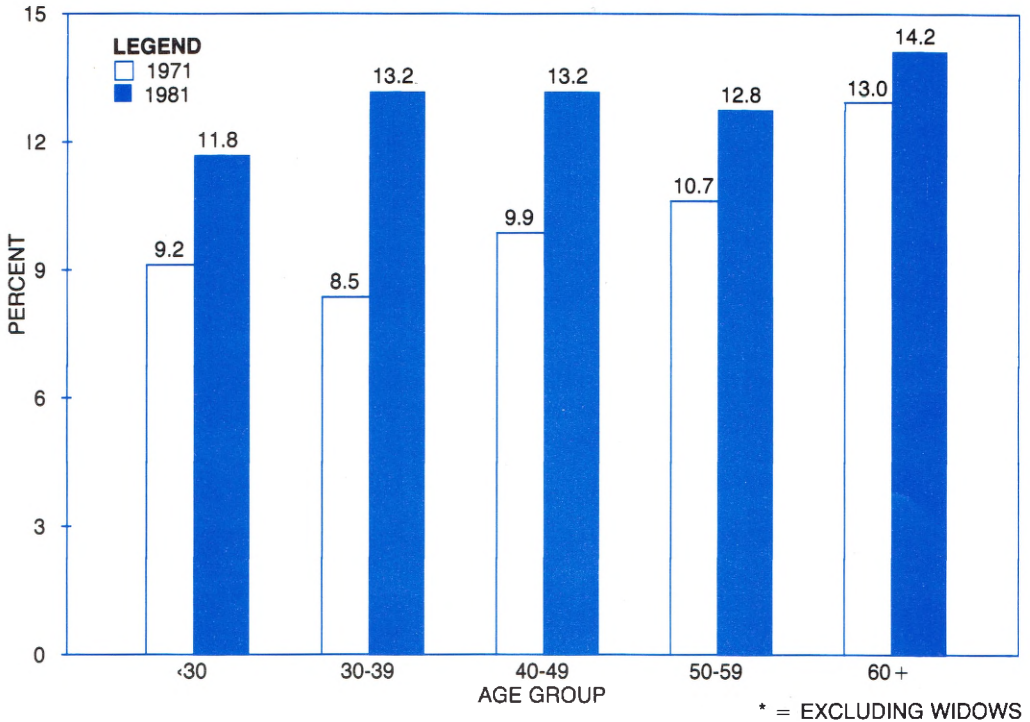


* = LIVING WITH HUSB

Thirty Year Olds Divorce And Separate More Often

The greatest increase in separation and divorce was among women in the 30-39 years age group: 13.2 percent of them were not living with their husbands in 1981 as compared to only 8.5 percent in 1971. Illustrated below is a detailed comparison of marriage breakdown by age group for 1971 and 1981.

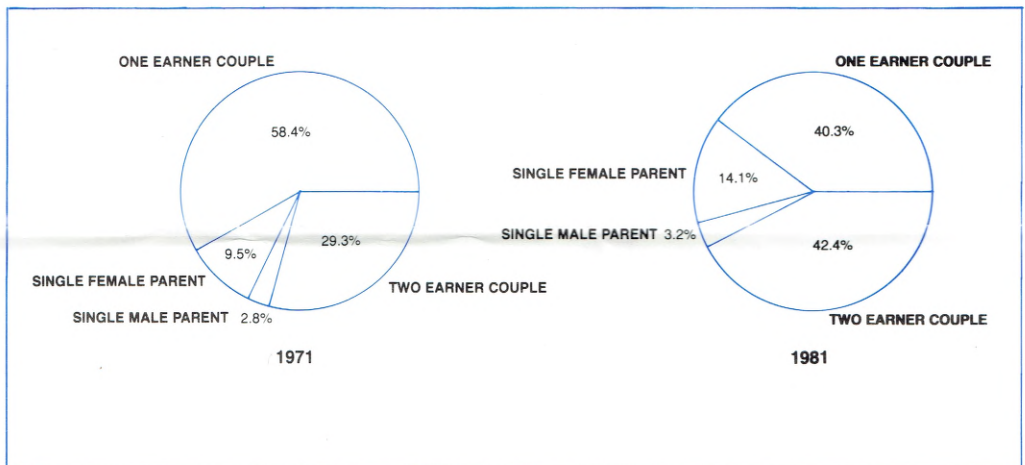
PROPORTION OF EVER MARRIED WOMEN NOT LIVING WITH THEIR HUSBANDS* BY AGE GROUP, BRITISH COLUMBIA



More Single Female Parents

As a result of the increase in marriage breakdown and other social trends, there has been a significant increase in the number of families headed by single female parents. The number of these families almost doubled in number from 33,395 in 1971 to 64,180 in 1981. The proportion of single female parents totalled 14.1 percent of all British Columbia families with children in 1981. Illustrated below is the change in family structure between 1971 and 1981: it shows that over the decade, the frequency of the once-typical family (two parents — one wage earner) declined approximately 18 percentage points, while the frequency of two earner couples increased by approximately 13 percentage points.

STRUCTURE OF FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN AT HOME BRITISH COLUMBIA



More Women Living Alone

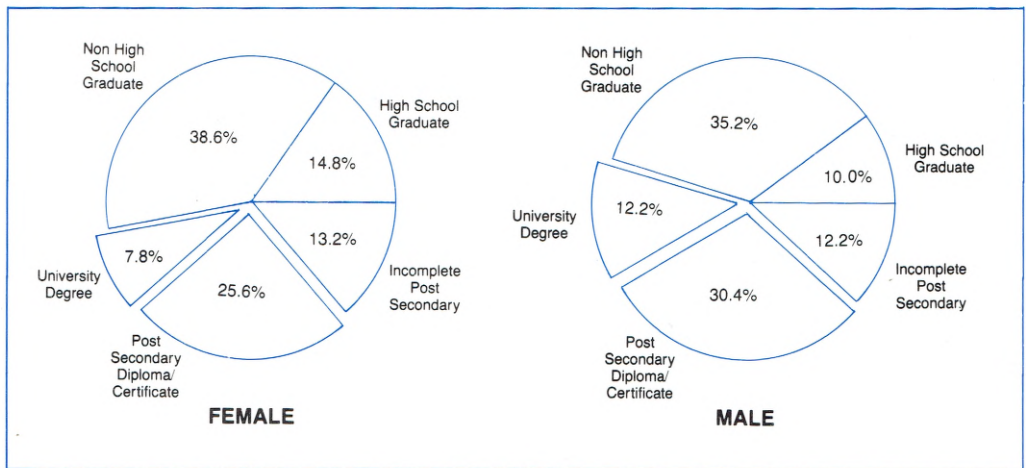
The large increase in divorced, separated and widowed women has also meant that the number of women living alone has increased dramatically. While the mature female population (15 years of age and over) of British Columbia increased by 36.9 percent over the ten-year time span, the number of women living by themselves increased by almost 100 percent, from 67,405 to 133,455.

EDUCATION

Women/Men And Post-Secondary Education

Direct comparisons between all educational levels in 1971 and 1981 are not possible because data were not collected on a comparable basis in each census year. However, it is possible to compare educational attainment between women and men in 1981, and between university graduates in 1971 and 1981. In 1981, among the B.C. population aged 20-64 years, 33.4 percent of women and 42.6 percent of men had completed some form of post-secondary education, i.e., obtained a trade certificate, a community college diploma, or a university degree. The preponderance of male graduates reflects past trends which favoured male rather than female participation in post-secondary education.

DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AGE 20-64 BY HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND SEX, BRITISH COLUMBIA, 1981



DEMOGRAPHY

Growth and Aging of the Female Population

In 1971, there were 1,084,245 females in British Columbia; they constituted slightly less than half of the province's population (49.6 percent). By 1981, their number had increased to 1,379,310, and they outnumbered males by a small margin and constituted 50.3 percent of the population. The graph below compares British Columbia's female age profiles for 1971 and 1981. It shows that in 1981 there were more women in each age category except for young females aged 5-15. This decrease in the number of young females parallels that of young males and can be explained by a dramatic decline in the number of children born in the late 1960's and early 1970's. By far the greatest concentration of women in 1981 was in the 20-35 years age group — a result of the post-War baby boom. The increase in the number of older women, those born before the Great Depression, is also worthy of note. In general, the graph depicts the overall aging of the female population.

**BRITISH COLUMBIA FEMALE AGE PROFILE
1971 and 1981**

