

# Two Decades of Poverty Reduction on Canada's Political Agendas: Are Single Parent Households and Single Adults Less Likely to Experience Poverty

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Single parent households and single adults of working age are much more likely to experience poverty than most other Canadians. In 2017, 30 percent of persons living in single parent households and 33 percent of single adults were poor according to the Low-Income Measure (LIM) whereas the overall poverty rate was 13 percent. Over the past two decades, poverty reduction entered and often stayed on the agenda of policymakers in many of Canada's jurisdictions. In this paper we assess progress on poverty reduction by examining whether the position of these two disadvantaged groups has improved over time (1999-2017) in Canada and its 10 provinces. This perspective presents a stronger test than examining overall poverty trends in a jurisdiction as improving conditions for such groups is often more challenging and / or more costly. Prioritizing or, at minimum, developing policies with those who are worse off in mind, is also defensible on grounds of fairness.

This paper uses the Canadian Income Survey (CIS) and its predecessor surveys to analyze poverty using two income poverty methods, the LIM, and an anchored LIM, and calculates two poverty measures for each, namely the headcount and the average poverty gap experienced by the poor. This combination of statistics allows us to analyze progress on poverty reduction in an absolute sense (purchasing power) and a relative sense (compared to the typical Canadian). We further study (changes in) poverty for these two groups in comparison to that of the lowest risk group while controlling for demographic, geographic and economic factors. The analysis is done at the federal level and at the level of Canada's 10 provinces. The lowest risk reference group are households that have no dependent children or adults above the age of 65.

Our results indicate that poverty reduction has been stronger for those living in Canada's highest poverty risks households. The evidence for single parent households is particularly strong suggesting improvements in an absolute sense and, for some provinces and poverty measures, also in a relative sense. Improvements are smaller in magnitude for single adults of working age, and

they are less consistent across provinces and poverty measures. While it is good news that the gap is closing, the poverty levels faced by these households are still very high.

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