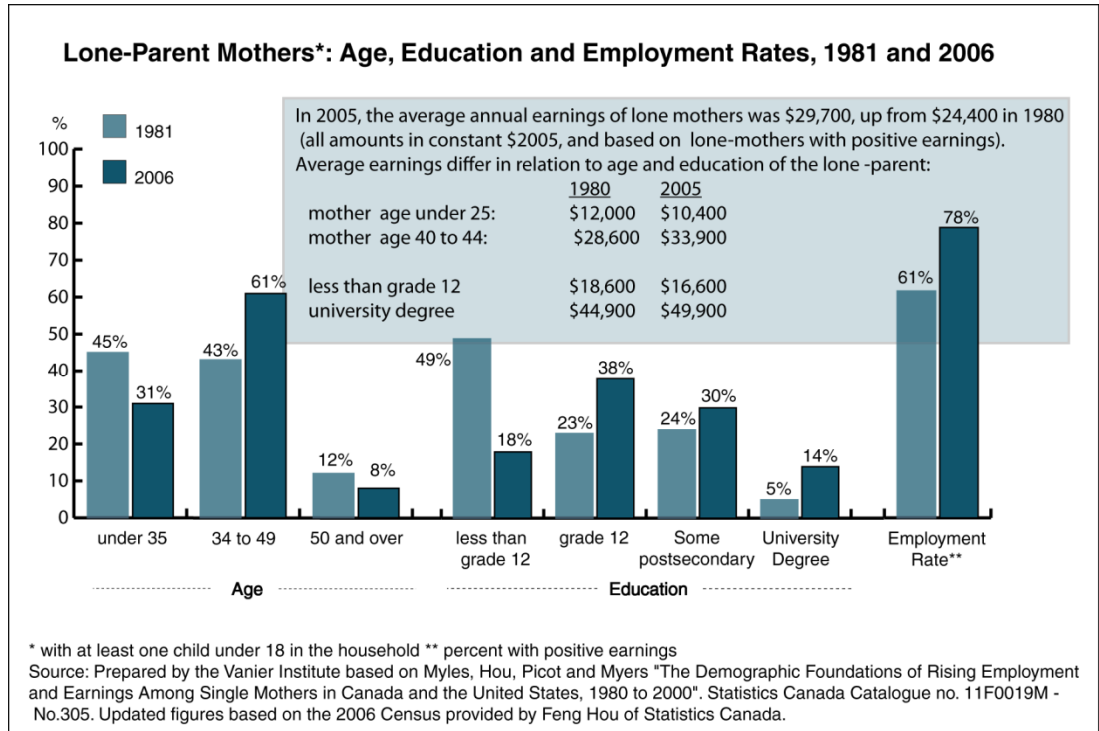


Becoming a “Lone-mother”

According to Statistics Canada, there were 1,132,290 female lone-parent families in Canada in 2006, representing 80% of all lone-parent families, and 12.7% of Canada’s 8.9 million families. Both the number and proportion of female lone-parent families is considerably higher compared to the count taken 25 ago in the 1981 Census. In that year, lone-mother families numbered 589,435. They accounted for 83% of all lone-parent families and 9.3% of all families.



In addition to their increased numbers, lone mothers “look” different than they did 25 years ago, at least according to their ages and education levels (see Chart). As a group, they are much more likely to be in their late 30s and 40s (61% in 2006 compared with 43% of the total in 1981). They also have much higher levels of educational attainment. The percentage of lone-mothers completing grade 12 increased from 51% in 1981 to 82% in 2006, and the percentage with at least some post-secondary education increased from 29% in 1981 to 44% in 2006.

FAMILY LENS

While the “snapshot” of family structure taken by the Census tells us much about families and their characteristics, it does not capture the many transitions that make up an individual’s *family life course*. Longitudinal surveys, which follow representative samples of the same individuals over a period of many years, tell us that the *experience* of living in a lone parent family is much more common – and complex - than the Census snapshot would suggest. Equally important are the *pathways* of becoming a “lone-parent”. The average earnings of younger lone mothers and mothers who have not completed high school are typically very low, and have actually decreased over time. In comparison, the earnings of older lone-mothers, or those with post-secondary education are considerably higher, and have increased.

¹ Myles, *et al.* Myles, Hou, Picot and Myers "The Demographic Foundations of Rising Employment and Earnings Among Single Mothers in Canada and the United States, 1980 to 2000". Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11F0019M - No.305
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2008305-eng.pdf>