

# SOCIAL POLICY TRENDS

June 2019

## MARITAL STATUS OF THOSE IN POVERTY

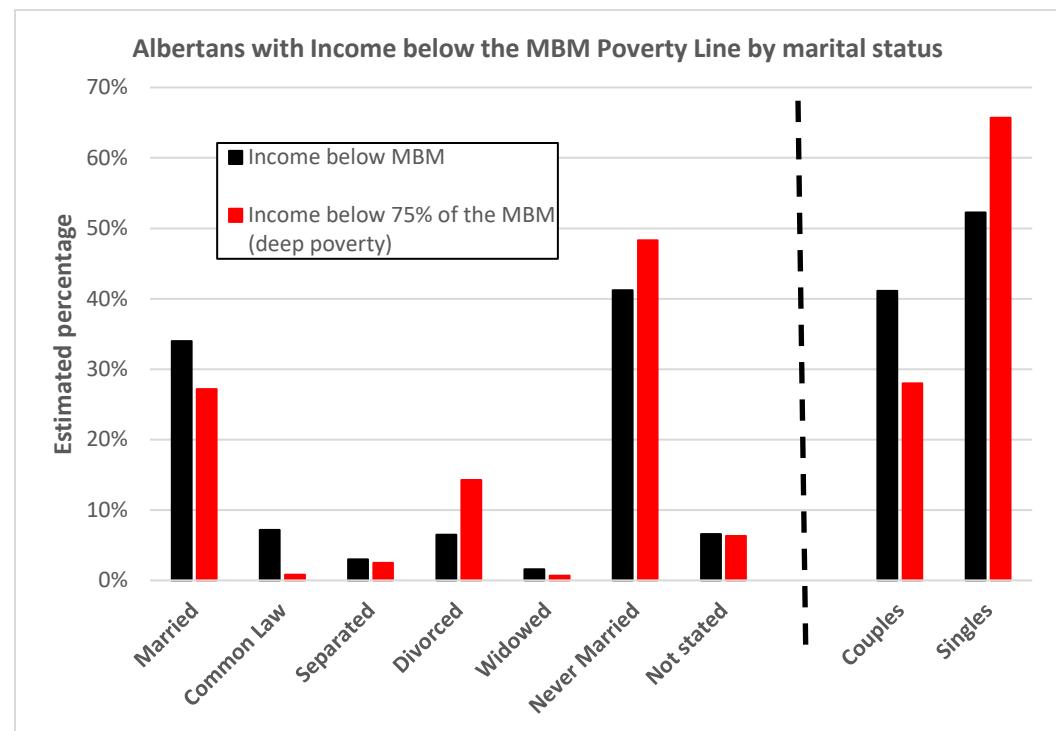
People experiencing deep poverty are far more likely to be single compared to the rest of the population.

The government of Canada has adopted the Market Basket Measure (MBM) as the preferred poverty line in its national poverty reduction strategy. In that same strategy, a practical definition of deep poverty is proposed: Individuals in deep poverty are those with incomes below 75% of the poverty line. 75% was chosen because individuals and families below that income are likely spending the entirety of their income on just clothing, food, transportation, and shelter.

The bar graph to the right shows data aggregated from five cycles of the Canada Income Survey (2012-2016) for working age individuals with incomes below the MBM poverty line in Alberta. The graph is divided into those who are in deep poverty (red bars) and those who are not (black bars) and by marital status. The height of the bars defines what percentage of Albertans with income below the MBM that are married, common law, single, etcetera.

Singles are the one group left over after successful targeting of other groups, like seniors or children, with poverty reduction tax credits, benefits, and subsidies.

Nearly 7 out of 10 Albertans experiencing deep poverty are single. This is important, because some successful policy initiatives cited in Canada's national poverty reduction strategy are tax credits and benefits related to family structure. The Canada Child Benefit, for example, is credited with lifting thousands of children out of poverty. A significant accomplishment, but of little value to those who remain in deep poverty and are childless.



Notes: Working age individuals, no students. Source: Canada Income Survey and author's calculations.

Provincial governments bear the costs associated with deep poverty among singles. For example, single males are at the highest risk of emergency homeless shelter utilization and there is a strong connection between health care utilization and people experiencing poverty. Most individuals experiencing deep poverty report social assistance as their main source of income. Except for the small GST/HST tax credit, the federal government provides no income support for people without children. As such, it makes sense for the provincial government to proactively intervene and reduce deep poverty among singles.

The approach of delivering poverty alleviation to specific groups (e.g., seniors, families with children) has left singles behind resulting in them dominating the demographic of people experiencing deep poverty.

