

Study: Women in Canada: Female population, 2014

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Since 2011, there are slightly more senior women aged 65 and over in Canada than girls aged 14 and under. According to data from the first chapter of the publication *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*, now available online, this is a reversal from historical trends.

On July 1, 2014, 17% of the female population was composed of senior women, while 16% were girls.

That was not the case nearly a century ago, in 1921, when senior women represented 4.8% of the female population, a much lower proportion than the 14-and-under age group, which accounted for 35%. It is projected that by 2031, the proportion of senior women could reach close to one-quarter of the overall female population, according to a medium population growth scenario from Statistics Canada's most recent population projections.

Canada, like many industrialized countries, is characterized by an aging population because of an increasing life expectancy as well as sustained below-replacement fertility, but also to the movement of the large baby-boom cohort—born between 1946 and 1965—through the age structure. As a result, the distribution of both females and males has been shifting to older ages.

As of July 1, 2014, 17.9 million of the 35.5 million people in this country were females, accounting for 50.4% of the total population, a proportion projected to remain relatively stable for the next 50 years. That slight majority began in the late 1970s with the growing differences in life expectancy in favour of women. As a result, the older the age group the more women outnumber men. On July 1, 2014, women represented 50.1% of the 50 to 59 age group, 63% of 85- to 89-year-olds and 72% of those aged 90 and over.

From the beginning of the 20th century until the late 1970s, gains in life expectancy were faster for women than men. For the 1920 to 1922 period, life expectancy at birth was 60.6 years for females and 58.8 years for males, a difference of 1.8 years. Maternal mortality rates in particular have fallen since the early decades of the 20th century, contributing to increased longevity for women.

The differential in life expectancy between females and males peaked in the late 1970s at more than seven years. It has since been reduced, however, as increases in longevity have been more rapid for men than for women during the last three decades with the convergence in health-related behaviours, such as smoking and work-related stress. For the 2009 to 2011 period, life expectancy was 83.6 years for females and 79.3 years for males, a difference of 4.3 years, a gap that may further converge in the future.

The shrinking gap in life expectancy between men and women has affected the likelihood of remaining in couples until increasingly older ages. Among women aged 75 to 79, for example, 45% were either married spouses or common-law partners in 2011, up from 30% in 1981. In comparison, the proportion of men in their late seventies in couples also increased, but more modestly, from 70% in 1981 to 76% in 2011.

The age and sex structure of the population differs across the provinces and territories. While the Atlantic provinces account for a relatively small share of the overall Canadian population, the population is older in this region and consequently has proportionally more females than males compared with the territories and Alberta. For example, on July 1, 2014, the share of the total population composed of females was the highest in Prince Edward Island (51.3%) and the lowest in Nunavut (48.2%).



Note to readers

In this study, data from the censuses of population, the 2011 National Household Survey, demographic estimates by age and sex and population projections by age and sex are used to examine patterns related to the female population in Canada.

Below-replacement fertility refers to fertility that is less than replacement level. **Replacement level fertility** is the number of children per woman necessary for the population to replace itself taking into account mortality between birth and age 15, and in the absence of migration. Replacement level fertility is currently 2.1 births per woman.

For more information on the assumptions and growth scenarios of the population projections, see "[Population Projections for Canada \(2013 to 2063\), Provinces and Territories \(2013 to 2038\)](#)" (91-520-X).

The publication *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report* is a collaborative effort of Status of Women Canada and Statistics Canada.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers 3602, 3604, 3608, 3901, 4502 and 5178.

The chapter "Female population," which is part of the *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*, seventh edition (89-503-X), is now available online. From the *Browse by key resource* module of our website choose *Publications*.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; infostats@statcan.gc.ca).

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