

# Study: Life satisfaction among Canadian seniors, 2016

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Life satisfaction goes hand-in-hand with many circumstances, events and attitudes. Studying these factors can shed light on how people assess their lives and what they consider important.

Earlier studies have shown that seniors typically report higher levels of satisfaction than those in younger age groups. What factors are associated with life satisfaction in this fast-growing segment of the population?

A new study published today in *Insights on Canadian Society*, entitled "[Life satisfaction among Canadian seniors](#)," uses data from the 2016 General Social Survey (GSS) on Canadians at Work and Home to shed light on these factors.

It finds that while perceptions of economic wellbeing can be related to the life satisfaction of seniors, it is far from the only factor. Other factors such as health, marital status, perceived social class, time spent with family, religious beliefs and stress also play an important role.

In the survey, respondents were asked to report the extent to which they were satisfied with their lives, on a scale from 0 to 10. In addition, they were asked to rate their satisfaction with nine other aspects of life, ranging from their personal health to the quality of their local environment.

Among Canadian seniors who were aged 65 and older in 2016, the average score obtained for satisfaction with life as a whole was 8.2 (out of 10). In general, senior women had higher levels of life satisfaction than senior men.

However, this figure varied across different aspects of life. Seniors were more satisfied with their safety (8.4), the quality of their local environment (8.3) and their personal relationships (8.2), but less so with their health (7.2).

## **Family income is not associated with life satisfaction among seniors, but subjective measures of economic well-being are**

In 2016, men and women who were in their 60s, 70s, and 80s had higher life satisfaction scores than those aged 20 to 59. The higher life satisfaction of seniors, relative to that of people in their prime-age years, has been noted in other studies.

Contrary to younger age groups, there is no significant association between family income and life satisfaction among seniors.

However, subjective measures of economic well-being are associated with life satisfaction for seniors. For instance, those who reported that their retirement income was insufficient and those who stated that financial concerns represented their main source of stress had lower life satisfaction scores.

Perceived social class also played a role. Seniors who perceived themselves as being part of the "lower class" were less satisfied with their lives than those who classified themselves as belonging to the "middle class" or "upper class."

Social factors also matter in the life satisfaction of seniors. Those who reported that they were satisfied with time spent with family and those who reported that religious or spiritual beliefs played an important role in their lives also had higher levels of life satisfaction.

Seniors who were in their 60s, who perceived that their health was excellent or very good, or who were married or living in common law, or were born outside Canada also reported higher levels of life satisfaction.



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## Being resilient brings greater life satisfaction

The 2016 GSS also included a set of questions dealing with resilience, a concept that measures people's ability to rebound from difficulties.

For example, more than three-quarters of seniors stated that they were "always" or "often" confident in their abilities, even when faced with challenges. Almost 70% said that they "always" or "often" had enough energy to meet life's challenges, and had a hopeful view of the future.

Being resilient is positively associated with life satisfaction. For example, among seniors who reported that they "always" had enough energy to meet life's challenges, the average life satisfaction score was 8.9, compared with 5.9 among those who answered "never" to the same question.

### Note to readers

*This study uses data from the 2016 General Social Survey on Canadians at Work and Home. The survey takes a comprehensive look at the way Canadians live by incorporating the realms of work, home, leisure and overall well-being.*

*In this cycle, a number of new questions were added to complement those previously asked on subjective well-being. Included are questions on purpose in life, opportunities, life aspirations, outlook and resilience. The main variable of interest in the study is life satisfaction.*

*In the survey, respondents were asked the following question: "Using a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means 'Very dissatisfied' and 10 means 'Very satisfied', how do you feel about your life as a whole right now?" Similar new questions were asked for satisfaction with the following domains of life: standard of living; health; current life achievements; personal relationships; feeling like a part of the community; time available to do things you like doing; quality of local environment; personal appearance; and feelings of safety.*

### Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5221](#).

The article "[Life satisfaction among Canadian seniors](#)" is now available in *Insights on Canadian Society* ([75-006-X](#)).

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