

Study: The COVID-19 pandemic takes a toll on life satisfaction

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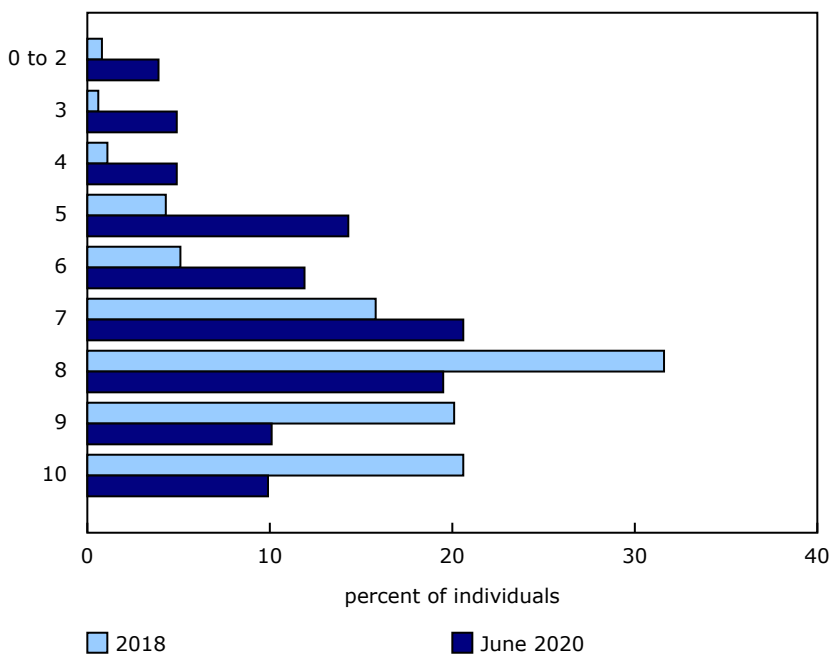
The COVID-19 pandemic has had unprecedented impacts on many aspects of life, such as health, social connections, mobility, employment and incomes. Statistics Canada continues to provide information in these areas. In addition, information continues to be collected on the life satisfaction of Canadians, capturing individuals' own assessments of their quality of life in light of the circumstances and experiences they face. A new study, "[Life Satisfaction in Canada Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)," uses data from 2018 and June 2020 to document changes in life satisfaction across the population as a whole and among different demographic groups. Institutional residents are not included in the study.

Life satisfaction hits lowest level during COVID-19

Individuals were asked how they feel about their life as a whole at the moment of responding, using a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means "very dissatisfied" and 10 means "very satisfied." In 2018, the average life satisfaction of Canadians was 8.09; by June 2020 average life satisfaction was 1.38 points lower, at 6.71. This was the lowest level of life satisfaction observed in Canada over the 2003-to-2020 period for which comparable data are available. Across the response scale, the share of Canadians rating their life satisfaction as 8 or above declined from 72% to 40%, while the share rating their life satisfaction as 6 or below increased from 12% to 40%.

Chart 1

Canadians' ratings of how they feel about their life as a whole at the moment of responding, response distributions, Canada, 2018 and June 2020



Note(s): Life satisfaction response: 0 means "very dissatisfied" and 10 means "very satisfied."

Source(s): 2018 Canadian Community Health Survey (3226); June 2020 Canadian Perspectives Survey Series (5311).



Life satisfaction declines more among younger than older Canadians

Life satisfaction has declined more among younger than older Canadians during the pandemic. The share of youth aged 15 to 29 rating their life satisfaction as 8 or above declined from 72% in 2018 to 26% in June 2020. This 46-percentage-point decline was far larger than the 30-percentage-point decline observed among individuals aged 30 to 59 and the 27-percentage-point decline observed among individuals aged 60 and older. By June 2020, average life satisfaction was lowest among youth, at 6.41, and highest among individuals aged 30 to 59 (6.72) and aged 60 and older (6.93).

Life satisfaction declines more among immigrants

Immigrant status is another dimension across which differences have emerged. In 2018, only small differences in average life satisfaction were observed between immigrants and individuals born in Canada. But by June 2020, life satisfaction had declined far more among immigrants, and in fact average life satisfaction was lower among immigrants from Asia, at 6.18, and immigrants from the United States, Europe and Australia, at 6.40, than among the Canadian-born, at 6.81.

When employment status and regional unemployment rates are taken into account, the difference in life satisfaction between immigrants and the Canadian-born narrows somewhat, indicating that labour market experiences during the pandemic were a contributing factor to the difference in life satisfaction.

Social factors may also have played a role in explaining the difference in life satisfaction between immigrants and the Canadian-born. For example, immigrants were more likely than the Canadian-born population to report fear of being the target of unwanted or intimidating behaviours during the pandemic, because people judge them as putting others' health at risk. Such fears were expressed by 17% of people born in Canada and by 41% of immigrants from Asia. Across all individuals, life satisfaction was almost 0.80 points lower among individuals who expressed such fears than those who did not.

Both before and during the pandemic, life satisfaction similar among women and men

There was little difference in life satisfaction between women and men either prior to or during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was unexpected, given male-female differences in employment, mental health and work-family balance during the pandemic documented in other studies. This is an important issue for further study as new data become available. While life satisfaction continues to vary across other demographic characteristics, such as education, household composition, and urban or rural residence, the differences observed were not significantly different in June 2020 than they were in 2018.

Household surveys that include the life satisfaction question continue to be fielded by telephone and online, providing the information needed to track wellbeing and the factors that improve or diminish it through the pandemic and beyond.

Note to readers

This study uses data from the 2018 Canadian Community Health Survey and the June 2020 survey from the Canadian Perspectives Survey Series. The target population of the study is all non-institutionalized persons aged 15 and older living in the provinces.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers [3226](#) and [5311](#).

The research article "[Life Satisfaction in Canada Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)," part of the *Analytical Studies Branch Paper Series* ([11F0019M](#)) and a shorter summary article "The COVID-19 pandemic and life satisfaction in Canada," part of the series *StatCan COVID-19: Data to Insights for a Better Canada* ([45280001](#)), are now available.

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