

Article

Do older Canadians have more friends now than in 1990?

by Colin Lindsay

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Matter of Fact

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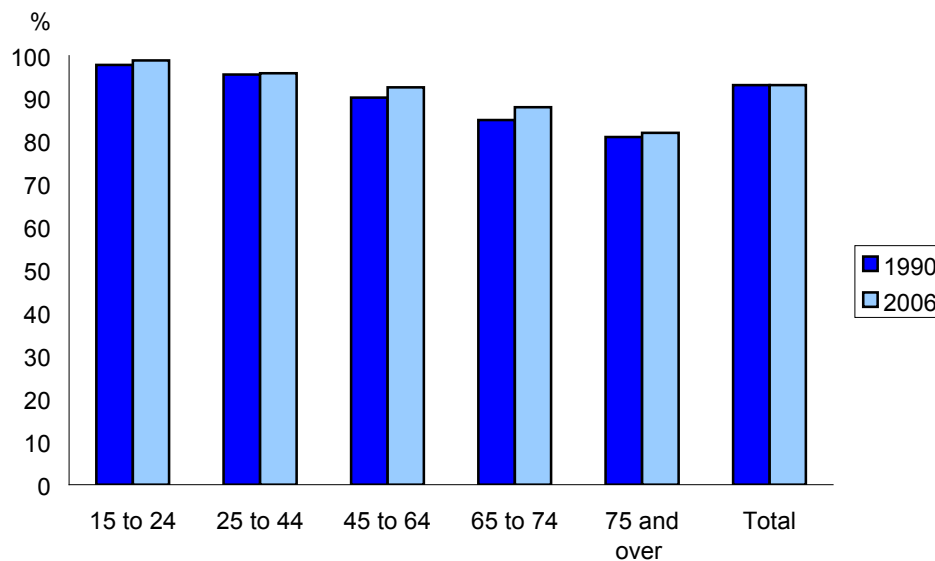
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Do older Canadians have more friends now than in 1990?

Having few satisfying or rewarding relationships can be a particular problem among older seniors, many of whom enjoy a reduced circle of friends after retirement that can be further reduced with the death of family and friends, loss of a spouse or partner, a move to a care facility, or activity limitations due to ill health. Although having a large network of friends may be desirable, the difference between having no friends and having at least one friend can be important for reducing isolation. Data from the General Social Survey (GSS) in response to the question asking Canadians how many close friends they have indicates that fewer women in the very oldest segments of the population are reporting that they still have close friends. This issue is of particular concern among senior women because they tend to make up the majority of those in the oldest segments of the population. At the same time, a large proportion of older senior women live alone.

Data from the General Social Survey confirms that older seniors are the least likely age group to have at least one close friend. In 2006, 82% of Canadians aged 75 and over reported having at least one close friend, compared with 88% of their counterparts aged 65 to 74, while the figure was over 90% among younger age groups. As well, as with the overall population, there has been little change in the share of Canadians aged 75 and over reporting they have at least one close friend since the early 1990s. While 82% of people in this age range indicated they had at least one close friend in 2006, the figure was 81% in 1990.

Chart 1
Percentage of the population with at least one close friend, by age, 1990 and 2006

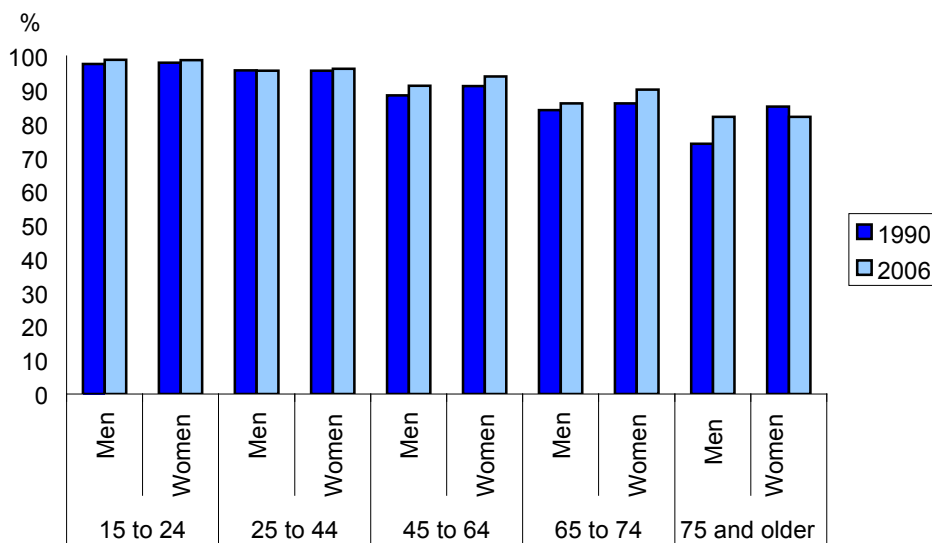


Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1990 and 2006.

However, the overall stability in the share of Canadians in older age ranges reporting they have at least one close friend masks some quite sharp differences in trends among older women and men. In 2006, for example, 82% of both women and men aged 75 and over indicated they had at least one close friend. The current figure among women in this age range, though, is down from the early 1990s when 85% of women in this age range reported they had at least one close friend. In contrast, the share of men aged 75 and over with at least one close friend rose from 74% to 82% in the same period.

The share of women aged 65 to 74, though, is better than the one of their male counterparts of the same age. Between 1990 and 2006, the proportion of those having at least one close friend rose from 86% in 1990 to 90% in 2006, while the figure among men aged 65 to 74 rose from 84% to 86%. In fact, women aged 75 and over were the only population cohort to have experienced a decline in the share reporting they had at least one close friend in the past decade and a half.

Chart 2
Percentage of men and women with at least one close friend, by age, 1990 and 2006

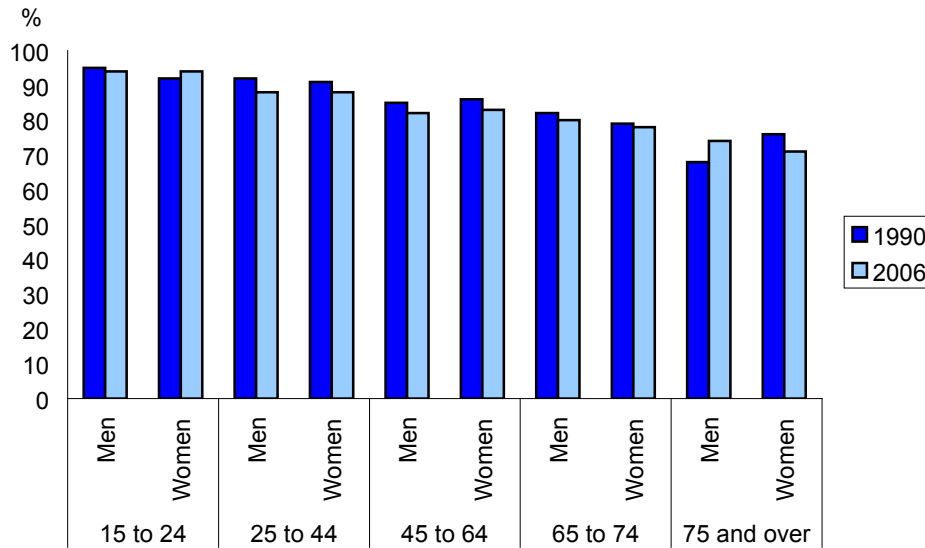


Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1990 and 2006.

When looking at older senior women having two or more friends, the decline in the proportion has been even sharper in the past decade and a half. In 2006, 71% of women aged 75 and over reported they had two or more friends, down from 76% in 1990. In contrast, the percentage of men in this age range with two or more friends rose in this period from 68% in 1990 to 74% in 2006. Indeed, men in this age range are now more likely than their female counterparts to have two or more friends, whereas the opposite was the case a decade and a half ago.

In fact, other than men aged 75 and over, the proportion of Canadians reporting they have more than one friend declined in all groupings over the age of 25 between 1990 and 2006, although in no other age grouping was the drop as large as that for women aged 75 and over. Among women aged 65 to 75, for example, the share reporting they had more than one friend declined only marginally from 79% in 1990 to 78% in 2006, while the figure for men in this age range dropped from 82% to 80% in the same period.

Chart 3
Percentage of the population with two or more friends, by age, and sex, 1990 and 2006



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1990 and 2006.

How to obtain more information

Specific inquiries about this product and related statistics or services should be directed to: Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division, Statistics Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0T6 by telephone: 613-951-5979 or by e-mail at sasd-dssea@statcan.ca.

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