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# CANADIAN *Social Trends*



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# CANADIAN Social Trends

## Features

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# Time spent with family during a typical workday, 1986 to 2005

by Martin Turcotte

Over the last two decades, the idea that a healthy balance between work and family is a legitimate as well as desirable goal took hold and became an important value for many workers. A survey conducted in 2003 found that, according to Canadian workers, the main indicator of a successful career was achieving a work-life balance, which ranked far ahead of salary, job challenges and level of responsibility.<sup>1</sup>

Government policy makers also increasingly recognize the importance of work-life balance. Thus, according to Human Resources and Social Development Canada, "work-life balance has emerged as a critical public policy issue in Canada".<sup>2</sup>

For their part, some employers, in order to attract and retain good employees, offer their workers more latitude in choosing their hours of work, and the option of working from home or taking leave for family reasons.<sup>3</sup> In some workplaces, the desire to spend more time with family is no longer looked on as a weakness. The many anecdotes of employees who turn down promotions or prestigious positions for fear of having less time to spend with family attest to this.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these workplace changes and the establishment of work-life balance policies, many workers feel they have less and less time to devote to their loved ones.<sup>5</sup> Is this merely an impression, or are workers really spending less time than before

with family members? And is the length of the workday, that is, the number of hours worked, really *the* main factor influencing the amount of time workers spend with family members?

This study looks at the time workers spend with family members during a typical workday. Using data from four different cycles of the General Social Survey (GSS) on Time Use, it documents the evolution of the average time spent with family during the workday between 1986 and 2005. In particular, it accounts for factors that can contribute to an understanding of these changes.

Among those factors, the length of the workday is certainly a determining one. In general, the more time spent in paid employment on a given day, the less time there is remaining to devote to family. However, other factors may considerably influence time spent with family members; for example, time spent on family meals, watching television, on social activities, and so on. This study pays particular attention to these various factors which, while they have not been examined as often in previous studies, have nonetheless contributed to the changes in time spent with family over the last 20 years.

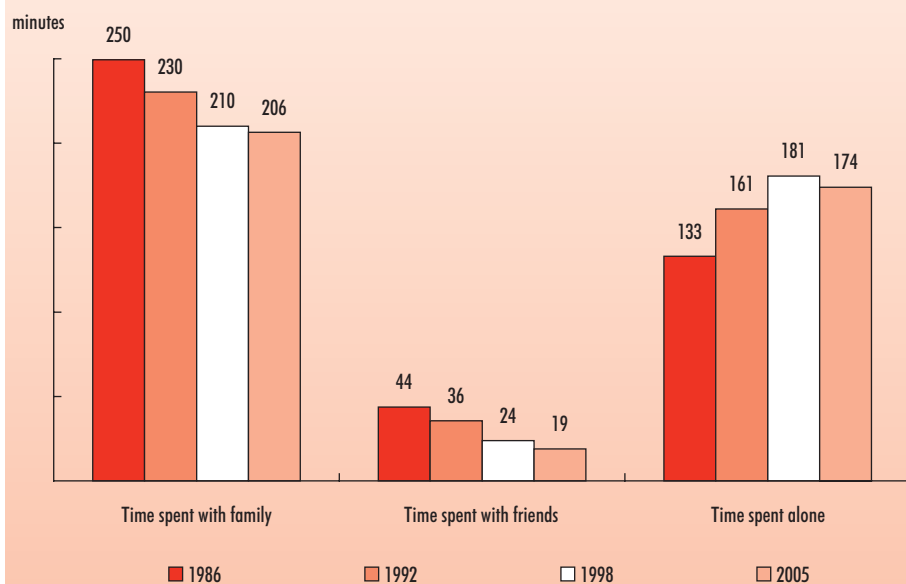
## **Workers are spending less time with family than they did 20 years ago**

In 1986, workers spent, on average, 4.2 hours, or 250 minutes, engaged

in various activities with their spouse, their children or other family members. The nature of these activities varied, and could have included helping the children with their homework, watching television with their spouse and having dinner as a family. Nearly 20 years later, by 2005, this average number of hours had dropped to 3.4 hours, or 206 minutes, an average decline of about 45 minutes (Chart 1).

Seen from another angle, namely, workers who spend a lot of time with their family (six or more hours) and those who spend little time (one hour or less), the findings are the same. Workers are spending less and less time with family during the workday. In 1986, 23% of workers spent 6 hours or more with family members, while this was true of just 14% of workers in 2005. And the proportion of workers who spent one hour or less with their family increased, from 9% in 1986 to 14% in 2005.

A number of studies have shown that in contemporary urban societies, friends increasingly make up part of people's social networks, sometimes at the expense of family members.<sup>6</sup> This might lead one to think that today's workers are "replacing" some of the time their predecessors spent with family members with time spent with friends. This, however, is not the case. In fact, the average time workers spent with their friends decreased by more than half between 1986 and 2005, from about



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1986, 1992, 1998 and 2005.

44 minutes on a typical workday to about 19 minutes.

If workers are not spending their time outside working hours with family members or friends, with whom are they spending it?

### Time spent alone has been continually increasing for the last 20 years

According to the data from four different cycles of the GSS on time use, the answer to this question is simple: workers are spending more time by themselves! In fact, in 1986, workers engaged in solitary activities on average 133 minutes, or 2.2 hours per day (excluding time spent alone during working hours). By 2005, this time had increased by just over 40 minutes to 174 minutes, or 2.9 hours.

These trends are consistent with those observed in a previous study about the time Canadians spend alone in an average day.<sup>7</sup> That study, which looked at the entire population

aged 15 and older, showed an increase in time spent alone on the order of 34% between 1986 and 1998 (from 4.4 hours to 5.9 hours).

Spending time alone is not necessarily a bad thing. Some people actually appreciate having time for themselves, whether for reflection, to listen to music they enjoy, or to spend time on their favourite hobby. Some authors even go so far as to extol solitude in books devoted entirely to the subject.<sup>8</sup> In addition, researchers and philosophers of different stripes champion (or have done in the past) the idea that time spent alone, provided it is desired, can have substantial benefits in terms of creativity, spiritual quest, freedom of action and thought, and overall well-being.<sup>9</sup> A number of Canadian workers would probably agree with some of these observations. Despite the fact that time spent alone had increased since 1986, about 33% of them reported in 2005 that they would like to spend *more* time alone.

This being said, obviously the more time one spends alone, the less time one can spend with other family members or with friends.<sup>10</sup>

### Average family time is declining for nearly all subgroups of workers

A number of studies on time spent with family from a work-life perspective look at the impact on family life of various methods of work organization, including the number of hours worked, whether or not flexible hours of work are possible, and organizational culture.<sup>11</sup> They also look at the relationships between the characteristics of parents (their level of education, their gender, and so on), those of families (father and mother's employment status, number and age of children, and so on) and time spent with the children or spouse. For example, a number of researchers have studied the link between the hours worked by mothers and fathers and the time they spend with their children.<sup>12</sup> Others have assessed the influence of the parents' level of education on the time they spend with their children, in various national contexts.<sup>13</sup>

This study also examines the links between time spent with family, on the one hand, and, on the other, hours worked, worker characteristics and family characteristics. But it also analyzes additional factors to which previous studies have devoted little or no attention, such as the nature, duration and context of the various activities in which workers participate in their personal life outside working hours. For example, it looks at the connection between time spent at family meals and the total time spent with family members — be it the spouse, the children or other members of the household or family.

Table A.1 presents statistics on the average time spent with family members, grouped according to these three broad categories of factors: time spent at work, the characteristics of workers and families; the duration of

## **CST** What you should know about this study

This study looks at the situation of workers who live with a spouse or child. It does not include workers who live alone or with other individuals, for whom time spent with family may mean something different.

The workers are individuals whose main activity, in the 7 days preceding the day of the interview for the General Social Survey (GSS) on time use, were working at a job. Only those respondents who had worked at least 3 hours during the reference day, not including commuting time, are included in the analysis. The purpose is to avoid confusing those workers who were on leave, who were far more likely to spend long hours with family members, with those who had worked during the reference day. In addition, because the study is interested in the connection between hours worked and time spent with family, it was important to consider only those workers who, on the day for which they were asked to provide details of all their activities, had worked a minimum amount of time.

The analysis included only the number of minutes that were spent with family members, friends or alone outside working hours. A number of workers spend time alone at work, and this time is not to be confused with the time available outside working hours.

Time spent with family means the total time during which the workers, while engaged in various activities (other than their work or personal care, including sleep), were in the presence of their spouse, child or other family members. For purposes of comparison among the four GSS cycles, unpaid work done for a family business or farm was not considered work time. Also, because the information gathered differed slightly over the four cycles of the GSS on time use, it was impossible to compare the data for certain more specific categories (such as changes in the time respondents spent with their children generally, including the youngest, the oldest and those living or not living at home).

The results shown in the table incorporated into the text are taken from an ordinary least squares regression. This statistical analysis simultaneously takes into account the various factors that influence time spent with family. Thus, the results show the association of a given variable, such as family status, independent of the influence of any other factors considered in the analysis (time spent at work, watching television, and so on).

The decomposition analysis uses the Oaxaca-Blinder approach. Thus, two additional regression analyses were done: one for 1986, and one for 2005. As the attempt was to determine how the situation would have evolved between 1986 and 2005 had the characteristics of the 2005 workers been identical to those of the 1986 workers, time spent with family was weighted using the 2005 regression coefficients. Using the reverse procedure, i.e., the 1986 regression coefficients to weight the changes in time spent with family, the study's qualitative findings remained the same. It is worth noting that in both models used for the decomposition analysis, time spent involved in various activities, such as paid work, was treated as a continuum (and not in categories, as in the models shown in the text). The purpose here was to simplify the interpretation of the results. A decomposition analysis was done with the duration variables classified into categories, but the main qualitative findings of the study remained the same.

In this study, the different factors associated with time spent with family were quantified. Unfortunately, it was impossible to determine whether the average "quality time" spent with family members followed a similar trend. In this study, we can only report that the average time workers spent with family, whether considered quality time or not, declined between 1986 and 2005.

the activities in which workers engage; and the nature of those activities.

### **Decrease in time spent with family involves several categories of workers**

As Table A.1 shows, the number of hours of paid work is among the

factors most strongly correlated with time spent with family. Not surprisingly, as the workday increases, time spent with family decreases. In 2005, for example, people who had spent 11 hours or more of their day in paid employment had spent 1.8 hours on average with members

of their family. In contrast, people who had worked between 8 and 9 hours had spent 3.7 hours with family members.

Looking at family characteristics, workers living with one child under age 5 spent the most time with family, while lone parents living with



a youth or young adult spent the least amount of time participating in family activities. Age, area of residence, time spent at meals, personal care (including sleep), watching television, reading and so on are also factors associated with time spent with family. Other characteristics, however, such as level of education and gender, seem to be less strongly associated.

Table A.1 also shows that time spent with family members decreased between 1986 and 2005 for most subgroups of workers. For example, while women spent an average 248 minutes with their family members in 1986, this average was just 209 minutes in 2005. For men, the average time spent with family members decreased by 45 minutes, from 250 minutes in 1986 to 205 minutes in 2005. The decrease in time spent with family was observed for all regions, for all levels of education and for nearly all age groups.

How can all these results be separated out and the significance of all these associations determined? But most of all, why is it that workers with such dissimilar characteristics tend to spend less time with family members?

### **Why has family time decreased?**

One probable explanation for the decrease in the average time that workers spend with their family members is that the characteristics of workers, and the time they devote to other activities such as work, changed significantly between 1986 and 2005. Specifically, it is possible that certain types of workers who tend to spend less time with their family members (such as those age 45 or older), made up a larger proportion of all workers in 2005. If so, this would lower the average time spent with family by workers taken as a whole.<sup>14</sup>

Looking at the statistics presented in Table A.2, this hypothesis seems plausible. For example, it can be seen that the proportion of workers age 45 or older, a subgroup that tends to

spend slightly less time with family than others, increased from 30% in 1986 to 44% in 2005. In contrast, the proportion of workers between ages 30 and 34, one of the age groups that spends the highest average amount of time with family, decreased from 17% to 12% of workers.

Table A.3 also shows that on average, workers devoted more time to paid employment in 2005 than in 1986 (536 minutes versus 506 minutes during a typical workday). This is also a significant change, which suggests that a number of workers have increasingly less time available to spend with family.

While interesting and relevant, the data contained in Tables A.1, A.2 and A.3 give no indication as to which of these many factors had the greatest influence on the decrease in family time between 1986 and 2005. In an attempt to identify this, a statistical analysis was done to take into account both the various factors influencing the time spent with family and the various changes in worker profiles between 1986 and 2005.

### **Increase in hours worked during a typical workday is the main reason for the decrease in time spent with family**

Table 1 shows that, compared to 1986, workers spent an average 39 minutes less with family members in 1998 and 43 minutes less in 2005 (Model 1). This first statistical model does not take into account any of the factors associated with family time. Models 2 and 3 illustrate how this difference decreases when more and more factors are considered simultaneously. In Model 4, the differences between years are no longer of any statistical significance. This last result supports the hypothesis that the changes in worker characteristics and the time workers devote to various activities explain the decrease in time spent with family between 1986 and 2005. Of these characteristics, which had the most influence?

It is not surprising that the amount of time spent at work is the factor

that correlates most strongly with time spent with family: as work hours rise, family time falls. For example, holding all factors included in Model 4 constant, the estimated time spent with family was 52 minutes less for workers who devoted 9 to 10 hours to their paid employment versus those who devoted 7 to 8 hours.

The average time devoted to paid employment during the typical workday increased considerably between 1986 and 2005 and the proportion of workers who devoted many hours to their paid activities also increased (for example, while 17% of workers had devoted 10 hours or more to their work in 1986, 25% did so in 2005).

This increase in the average length of the workday has major implications for the overall trends in average time spent with family. According to another decomposition analysis (detailed results not shown), the increase in the average number of hours spent at work during the typical workday is the factor that contributed most to the decline in time spent with family between 1986 and 2005, accounting for about 39% of the decrease in family time. This proportion was higher than for all other factors considered in this study.

It should be noted that these results provide no information about time spent with family during workers' leave days. Further analyses would need to be done to verify whether different trends are emerging for those days.<sup>15</sup>

### **As time spent watching television increases, so does time spent with family**

While watching television is often perceived as an individual activity, it is nevertheless quite often done as a family or a couple. And it is an activity that accounts for much of workers' free time. In 2005, after paid employment and personal care (including sleep), watching television (including movies, videos and DVDs) was the activity to which workers

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<b>Predicted length of time spent with family by the reference person</b>				
	250 min	247 min	246 min	226 min
<b>Year</b>				
1986	reference	reference	reference	reference
1992	- 19 min	- 23 min	- 16 min	n.s.
1998	- 39 min	- 40 min	- 24 min	n.s.
2005	- 43 min	- 41 min	- 16 min	n.s.
<b>Age</b>				
15 to 24	...	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
25 to 29	...	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
30 to 34	...	reference	reference	reference
35 to 39	...	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
40 to 44	...	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
45 and older	...	n.s.	n.s.	-10
<b>Sex</b>				
Women	...	reference	reference	reference
Men	...	- 11 min	n.s.	n.s.
<b>Region</b>				
Atlantic Canada	...	+ 15 min	n.s.	n.s.
Quebec	...	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Ontario	...	reference	reference	reference
Prairies	...	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
British Columbia	...	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
<b>Family structure</b>				
Spouse, no children	...	reference	reference	reference
Spouse, at least one child aged 0 to 4	...	+ 55 min	+ 53 min	+ 42 min
Spouse, no children under 5, at least one child aged 5 to 12	...	+ 35 min	+ 32 min	+ 26 min
Spouse, no children under 13, at least one child aged 13 to 24	...	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Lone parent with at least one child aged 0 to 4	...	+ 61 min	+ 50 min	+ 59 min
Lone parent with no children under 5, at least one child aged 5 to 12	...	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Lone parent with no children under 13, at least one child aged 13 to 24	...	- 76 min	- 69 min	- 40 min
<b>Highest level of schooling</b>				
Elementary school	...	reference	reference	reference
Secondary diploma	...	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
College or trade school diploma or certificate	...	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
University degree	...	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
<b>Time spent on work and work-related activities</b>				
3 to 5 hours	...	...	+ 122 min	+ 121 min
5 to 6 hours	...	...	+ 66 min	+ 68 min

... not applicable

n.s.: Not statistically different than the reference group at  $p < 0.01$ .

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1986, 1992, 1998 and 2005.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
6 to 7 hours	...	...	+ 33 min	+ 33 min
7 to 8 hours	...	...	reference	reference
8 to 9 hours	...	...	- 18 min	- 19 min
9 to 10 hours	...	...	- 48 min	- 52 min
10 to 11 hours	...	...	- 76 min	- 84 min
11 hours or more	...	...	- 151 min	-151 min
<b>Time spent on personal care including sleep</b>				
Less than 7 hours	...	...	+ 53 min	+ 63 min
7 to 8 hours	...	...	+ 21 min	+ 27 min
8 to 9 hours	...	...	reference	reference
9 to 10 hours	...	...	- 32 min	- 30 min
10 to 11 hours	...	...	- 60 min	- 61 min
11 hours or more	...	...	- 114 min	- 109 min
<b>Time for meals at home, snacks, coffee</b>				
Did not eat at home	...	...	reference	reference
1 to 24 minutes	...	...	n.s.	+ 23 min
25 to 44 minutes	...	...	n.s.	+ 24 min
45 to 64 minutes	...	...	+ 16 min	+ 37 min
65 minutes or more	...	...	+ 32 min	+ 58 min
<b>Trips by car or public transport</b>				
No trips either by car or public transport	...	...	reference	reference
1 to 60 minutes	...	...	n.s.	n.s.
61 to 120 minutes	...	...	n.s.	- 14 min
121 minutes or more	...	...	- 22 min	- 25 min
<b>Trips by foot</b>				
No trips by foot	...	...	reference	reference
1 to 30 minutes	...	...	-12 min	- 11 min
31 minutes or more	...	...	n.s.	n.s.
<b>Social activities outside the home</b>				
No social activities	...	...	reference	reference
1 to 90 minutes	...	...	+ 13 min	+ 16 min
91 minutes or more	...	...	+ 60 min	+ 60 min
<b>Read books, magazines, newspapers</b>				
No reading	...	...	reference	reference
1 to 60 minutes	...	...	- 16 min	- 11 min
61 minutes or more	...	...	- 42 min	- 34 min
<b>Television, including watching videos or DVDs</b>				
No television	...	...	reference	reference
1 to 60 minutes	...	...	+ 8 min	+ 44 min
61 to 120 minutes	...	...	+ 19 min	+ 58 min
121 to 180 minutes	...	...	+ 29 min	+ 69 min
181 minutes or more	...	...	+ 55 min	+ 99 min
<b>Prevalence of certain activities</b>				
<b>Watched television alone during the day</b>				
No	...	...	...	reference
Yes	...	...	...	- 114 min
<b>Had a meal, snack or coffee alone</b>				
No	...	...	...	reference
Yes	...	...	...	- 55 min
<b>Adjusted R-Square</b>	0,01	0,05	0,33	0,47



devoted the most time during the average workday (79 minutes).

The results of the statistical analysis show that as time spent watching television on a given day increased, so did the time spent with family. For example, compared to a worker who had watched no television, a worker who had spent one to two hours in front of a television set had also spent an average of 58 minutes more with family members (holding constant all other factors associated with family time, i.e., equivalent workday duration, equivalent time spent on personal care, identical family status and so on). While people do not necessarily interact directly with others when watching television, they are nevertheless likely to be in others' company, which is less often the case when they are not watching television.

That being said, it is also possible that more and more workers are watching TV alone. The number of households with two or more sets increased from about 28% in 1987 to 63% in 2005. In addition, the percentage of households with three or more television sets has jumped in recent years, from 18% in 1997 to 27% in 2004. The fact that workers watched television alone, if only briefly during the day, completely changes the notion of a positive link between TV and time spent with family. In fact, workers who had watched television alone during a given day spent, on average, 113 minutes less with their family members than those who had not watched alone, holding constant all other factors considered in the analysis.

Workers' television viewing habits are not at all insignificant, since they had a major impact on the decrease in time spent with family between 1986 and 2005. The fact that increasingly more workers had watched television alone at some point in the day (27% in 2006 versus just 17% in 1986) accounts for nearly one quarter (24%) of the decline in time spent with

family. And the fact that on average, workers spent less time watching television (a drop of about 15 minutes between 1986 and 2005) accounted for about 9% of the decrease in the time they spent with family.

### **More people are spending mealtime alone**

Mealtime, and especially supertime, is the favourite time of day for family members to interact and talk about their day — and also sometimes argue! Between 1986 and 2005, two trends in workers' habits regarding meals, snacks and breaks negatively affected time spent with family. First of all, the average time spent at meals outside work hours decreased, from 60 minutes in 1986 to 45 minutes in 2005. But above all, workers were far more likely to have at least one meal, snack or coffee alone (only 17% in 1986, versus 27% in 2005). After time spent at work and time spent watching television, it is changes in workers' meal habits to which one should turn for a better understanding of the decrease in time spent with family. The fact that workers tend increasingly to eat alone accounted for 18% of the decline in the average time spent with family between 1986 and 2005. The fact that the average time devoted to meals decreased appreciably accounted for about 11% of the decline.

The correlation with time spent on personal care (including sleep) does not require much explanation. As with workday duration, the more time people spend washing, dressing or sleeping, the less time they have for activities with family members. What is most interesting is that time spent on personal care ranks fourth in importance, along with time spent on meals, among the factors that contributed to the decline in time spent with family. In other words, if the average time spent by workers on family activities declined between 1986 and 2005, this was owing in part to the fact that workers were spending more time sleeping, dressing and so on.

The last change to have a notable effect on the decrease in time spent with family between 1986 and 2005 is the declining prevalence and time spent by workers on social activities outside the home. In 1986, workers spent, on average, 23 minutes on social activities outside their home (going to a restaurant with one or more people, visiting people in their homes, and so on); this average dropped by more than half, to just 11 minutes in 2005. Obviously, taking part in social activities outside the home does not automatically mean spending more time with family members — people may, for example, spend this time socializing with friends or acquaintances. However, for people living in families, as was the case for the workers in this study, some of these outings included the spouse or children. Social activities are therefore an ideal opportunity to spend time as a family. The fact that the average time devoted to social activities outside the home decreased between 1986 and 2005 accounted for 7% of the decline in time spent with family.

### **Workers living with young children are spending more time with family**

Among the other factors associated with the average time spent with family, but that contributed less to the decrease observed between 1986 and 2005, we might first mention family structure. As Model 4 shows, holding all other factors constant, the estimated time spent with family by workers with a child under age 5 is significantly greater than that spent by workers living with a spouse but no children. Parents living without a spouse, but with a young child (i.e., lone-parent workers), spent the most time with one or more family members — about one hour more than workers living with a spouse only. In contrast, workers living with only a youth or young adult spent the least estimated time with family of all categories. There is little surprise in this, since they have no spouse with whom to

share their activities outside work, and their children probably have their own activities that they want to pursue alone or with friends.

These results for workers as a whole obscure the fact that women living with a partner are more affected than men, in terms of time spent with family, by the presence of young children in the household. In fact, when children, especially young children, are present, women spend significantly more time with family than men do. Further analysis showed that female workers living with a spouse and a child under 5 spent an average 47 minutes more with the members of their family than did men with similar family structure (holding the other factors constant). The same analysis showed that women living with a spouse and at least one child between age 5 and 12 (but no preschoolers) spent an average 23 minutes more with family than did men with an identical family structure.

A recent study shows that men and women have increasingly been sharing unpaid housework equally, including caring for children.<sup>16</sup> However, the same study shows that women have continued to devote appreciably more time than men to caring for the children by, for example, reading to them, taking them to the park, helping them with homework or driving them to various activities. These enduring distinctions probably explain to a large extent why women living with a partner and a child spend more time than men with one or more family members on a typical workday.

There was, however, no statistically significant difference between male and female lone-parent workers in terms of time spent with their family members. But it should be said that the majority of these lone-parent workers are women (about three-quarters in this study).

Time spent on trips, whether by car or on public transit, also correlates to a slight reduction in time spent

with family. However, because some of this travel involves taking children to and from activities, the statistical correlation is relatively weak compared to other factors. Canadian workers spent, on average, more time travelling to and from work in 2005 than in 1992.<sup>17</sup> The analysis shows that this is not, however, one of the main contributors to the decrease in time spent with family.

The same is true of reading activities. Reading is generally a solitary activity, but can also be done in the presence of a child or spouse, when such are present in the household. Nevertheless, workers who spent more time in their day reading also spent a little less time with their spouse or children.

Finally, the findings showed that, when all other factors are held constant, gender, age, level of schooling and area of residence are not associated with a statistically significant decrease or increase in time spent with family. This is

## **CST** What about the differences between men and women?

Table A.1 shows that, on average, male workers spend nearly as much time as female workers with family members during the typical workday. This lack of difference is confirmed, moreover, in several subgroups of the worker population.

In fact, aside from the difference between men and women based on the structure of their household (especially the presence of children, who had a greater influence on the time women spent with family), further analyses did not reveal differences between male and female workers based on age, area of residence or level of schooling. For example, holding the other factors constant, men between age 30 and 34 spent neither more nor less time with family members than did women in the same age group.

The same thing is confirmed regarding the association between workday duration and time spent with family; holding all the factors included in Model 4 constant, and making comparisons based on sex, a woman who had worked 9 hours, for example, spent the same average amount of

time with family as a man who had worked the same number of hours.

The only exception is women who had worked between 3 and 5 hours compared to men who had worked the same number of hours. We know that it is in this subgroup that the estimated time spent with family members increases most (Model 4 estimates that this group of workers spent about 2 hours more with family than the group of workers whose workday ranged from 7 to 8 hours). Further analysis comparing the workers according to gender revealed that women who had worked between 3 and 5 hours during the day spent an estimated 34 minutes less with family members than did their male counterparts (holding the other factors constant). It is, however, difficult to explain why this is so.

In short, aside from the presence of children in the homes of workers living with a partner, the impact of virtually all variables that were shown to correlate with time spent with family was the same for both men and women.

because the other factors mentioned earlier, such as length of the workday, family structure or television viewing, whether alone or not, had much more of an influence on time spent with family. Thus, for a workday of equivalent duration, for example, whether a worker was older or younger had no bearing on the likelihood of their spending more or less time with family.

### Summary

Since 1986, the average time workers spent in activities with members of their family on a typical workday has declined appreciably, from about 4 hours and 10 minutes per day in 1986 to about 3 hours and 25 minutes in 2005. This decline has been observed in the majority of subgroups of the worker population, including men and women, workers living with a spouse only and those living with young children, workers with a college degree and those who have not completed high school. In short, the decrease in the time spent with family members was widespread.

This study identified a number of factors associated with the decrease in time spent with family between 1986 and 2005. The fact that the average time devoted to paid employment during the typical workday has increased appreciably since 1986 is the main factor that explains why people are spending less time with family. The other factors that had an impact on time spent with family over this period are, in order of relative importance: the fact that workers tend increasingly to watch television alone, eat alone, and spend less time on meals, television and social activities outside the home.

Other factors were correlated to time spent with family. The presence of a child in the family, especially a young child, was associated with a considerable increase in the number of minutes spent with family members during the typical workday. This was

especially true of female workers in this type of household. Also, time spent travelling by car and reading took away from time spent with family.



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**Table A.1 Average time spent by workers with their families during a typical workday in 1986 and 2005, by selected characteristics**

	Average time spent with the family				Average time spent with the family		
	1986	2005	Change between 1986 and 2005		1986	2005	Change between 1986 and 2005
	minutes				minutes		
All workers	250	206	-44	<b>Time spent on personal care including sleep</b>			
<b>Age</b>				Less than 7 hours	303	244	-58
15 to 24	243	207	n.s.	7 to 8 hours	257	216	-40
25 to 29	247	208	-39	8 to 9 hours	250	213	-37
30 to 34	264	220	-44	9 to 10 hours	228	185	-43
35 to 39	246	223	-23	10 to 11 hours	208	179	n.s.
40 to 44	243	212	-31	11 hours or more	189	143	n.s.
45 and over	249	194	-54	<b>Time for meals at home, snacks, coffee</b>			
<b>Sex</b>				Did not eat at home	169	200	n.s.
Women	248	209	-39	1 to 24 minutes	233	183	-51
Men	250	205	-45	25 to 44 minutes	227	196	-31
<b>Region</b>				45 to 64 minutes	245	211	-35
Atlantic Canada	258	220	-38	65 minutes or more	285	233	-53
Quebec	237	209	-28	<b>Trips by car or public transport</b>			
Ontario	254	205	-50	No trips either by car or public transport	242	201	-42
Prairies	255	207	-48	1 to 60 minutes	248	196	-52
British Columbia	250	201	-49	61 to 120 minutes	246	216	-30
<b>Family structure</b>				121 minutes or more	273	221	-52
Spouse, no children	231	191	-40	<b>Trips by foot</b>			
Spouse, at least one child aged 0 to 4	274	244	-30	No trips by foot	248	205	-43
Spouse, no children under 5, at least one child aged 5 to 12	271	227	-44	1 to 30 minutes	247	221	n.s.
Spouse, no children under 13, at least one child aged 13 to 24	247	198	-49	31 minutes or more	277	208	-70
Lone parent with at least one child aged 0 to 4	346	251	-95	<b>Social activities outside the home</b>			
Lone parent with no children under 5, at least one child aged 5 to 12	243	196	n.s.	No social activities	239	199	-40
Lone parent with no children under 13, at least one child aged 13 to 24	150	132	n.s.	1 to 90 minutes	270	234	n.s.
<b>Highest level of schooling</b>				91 minutes or more	338	324	n.s.
Elementary school	252	210	-42	<b>Read books, magazines, newspapers</b>			
Secondary diploma	254	203	-50	No reading	253	208	-45
College or trade school diploma or certificate	243	205	-38	1 to 60 minutes	242	205	-37
University degree	241	211	-30	61 minutes or more	236	174	-61
<b>Time spent on work and work-related activities</b>				<b>Television, including watching videos or DVDs</b>			
3 to 5 hours	379	345	n.s.	No television	218	184	-34
5 to 6 hours	341	307	n.s.	1 to 60 minutes	236	193	-43
6 to 7 hours	279	270	n.s.	61 to 120 minutes	241	216	-25
7 to 8 hours	270	236	34	121 to 180 minutes	260	228	-32
8 to 9 hours	260	219	41	181 minutes or more	323	256	-67
9 to 10 hours	220	202	18	<b>Prevalence of certain activities</b>			
10 to 11 hours	206	164	42	<b>Watched television alone during the day</b>			
11 hours or more	118	107	n.s.	No	268	231	-37
				Yes	158	137	-21
				<b>Had a meal, snack or coffee alone</b>			
				No	264	235	-29
				Yes	213	166	-47

n.s.: Not statistically different in 1986 than in 2005 at  $p < 0.01$ .

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1986 and 2005.

Table A.2 Change in the profile of workers living in a family, 1986 to 2005

	1986	1992	1998	2005		1986	1992	1998	2005
%					%				
<b>Age</b>					<b>Family structure (continued)</b>				
15 to 24	6	5	3	3	Spouse, no children under 5, at least one child aged 5 to 12	13	22	22	20
25 to 29	14	12	9	8	Spouse, no children under 13, at least one child aged 13 to 24	22	20	20	22
30 to 34	17	15	15	12	Lone parent with at least one child aged 0 to 4	1	1	1	1
35 to 39	18	18	18	15	Lone parent with no children under 5, at least one child aged 5 to 12	1	2	2	3
40 to 44	15	18	19	18	Lone parent with no children under 13, at least one child aged 13 to 24	3	2	4	4
45 and over	30	32	36	44	<b>Highest level of schooling</b>				
<b>Sex</b>					Elementary school	34	19	15	9
Women	35	40	42	41	Secondary diploma	35	35	34	31
Men	65	60	58	59	College or trade school diploma or certificate	16	26	27	30
<b>Region</b>					University degree	15	20	24	30
Atlantic Canada	7	8	7	7	<b>Prevalence of certain activities</b>				
Québec	27	24	23	23	Watched television alone during the day	17	25	30	27
Ontario	37	38	40	39	Had a meal, snack or coffee alone at home	28	41	45	42
Prairies	18	19	17	17					
British Columbia	10	11	11	13					
<b>Family structure</b>									
Spouse, no children	30	31	33	34					
Spouse, at least one child aged 0 to 4	21	21	17	16					

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1986, 1992, 1998 and 2005.

Table A.3 Changes in time workers devoted to certain activities, 1986 to 2005

	1986	1992	1998	2005		1986	1992	1998	2005
minutes					minutes				
Time spent on work and work-related activities	506	523	528	536	Trips by foot	5	5	5	3
Time spent on personal care including sleep	491	484	488	500	Social activities outside the home	23	16	14	11
Time for meals at home, snacks, coffee	60	52	44	45	Read books, magazines, newspapers	18	17	15	10
Trips by car or public transport	66	68	72	73	Television, including watching videos or DVDs	95	89	84	79

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1986, 1992, 1998 and 2005.

# Keeping up with the times: Canadians and their news media diet

by Leslie-Anne Keown

*News is the first rough draft of history — Philip Graham*

An informed and engaged citizenry is considered by commentators and political scientists to be the cornerstone of an active and thriving democracy.<sup>1</sup> Of course, one of the main ways that a citizen becomes informed is by following news and current affairs. Furthermore, the type of media used is considered important, especially in relation to levels of political participation.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, knowing who follows news consistently allows us to build a more thorough understanding of the amount of political activity Canadians engage in. In addition, it is important to know the sources they use to follow the news and just how varied their “diet” is.

This article explores Canadians and their consumption of news and current affairs media, using the 2003 General Social Survey (GSS) on social engagement. First, it looks at how Canadians who follow news and current affairs frequently differ from those who do not. Then the focus shifts slightly to consider only frequent consumers and the variety of media that comprises their news diet. It explores the sources of media that individuals use and factors that may influence these choices. Finally, the article concludes with a comparison of Canadians whose media consumption consists of only

television to Canadians who have a different diet, and asks how this influences their non-voting political activity.

## **Canadians are very likely to have a daily diet of news, especially seniors**

In 2003, the vast majority of Canadians (89%) followed news and current affairs frequently, that is, daily or several times a week (Table 1). However, seniors aged 65 and over were more likely to follow the news on a frequent basis than young adults aged 19 to 24 (95% versus 79%). It is unclear why this difference exists but previous research points to differences in the amount of time that can be devoted to following the news, as well as to generational differences.<sup>3</sup>

Other important characteristics distinguish those who follow the news and current affairs frequently from those who do not. Men, people who are married, workers employed as professionals or managers, and those with higher incomes were more frequent users.

The immigrant status of Canadians and the region or city where they live have little influence on whether or not they follow news on a frequent basis. However, the language most often spoken at home does make

a difference. Canadians for whom French is their language of preference were most likely to follow the news at least several days a week.

## **Television is the staple food of the frequent user's media diet**

So, most Canadians follow the news on a frequent basis but what is their media “diet” composed of?<sup>4</sup> In this section, we look only at frequent users to see if their news consumption is composed of different media types or is a monodiet that lacks variety.

Frequent users almost always got some of their news from television, with 91% indicating that TV was a news source for them (Chart 1). Television can be thought of as the staple food of news consumption, but certain groups used it more than others. These groups included Canadians age 45 or older, women, people who live in a married or common-law relationship, those who have household incomes below \$60,000 per year and people living in Quebec. These patterns closely follow overall television viewing patterns in Canada and mirror the findings of previous work on the kinds of television programs watched by Canadians<sup>5</sup> (Table 2).

Almost as substantial an element in their daily news consumption



**Table 1 Seniors, men, those who are not married and those with higher incomes are frequent followers of news and current affairs**

	% who follow the news daily/weekly		% who follow the news daily/weekly
All respondents 19 years and older who follow the news frequently	89	<b>Immigration and language</b>	
<b>Demographic characteristics</b>		<b>Born in Canada</b>	
<b>Age</b>		Yes	89
19 to 24	79	No	90
25 to 44	87*	<b>Language used at home</b>	
45 to 64	93*	English	89
65 and older	95*	French	91*
<b>Gender</b>		Other	87*
Women	88*	<b>Place of residence</b>	
Men	91	<b>Region</b>	
<b>Marital status</b>		Atlantic	88*
Married/common-law	91*	Quebec	91*
Other	86	Ontario	90
<b>Work and education</b>		Prairies	88*
<b>Highest level of education</b>		BC	88*
No postsecondary	87*	<b>Urban/rural area</b>	
Some postsecondary	91	Montreal	91*
<b>Occupation type</b>		Toronto	92*
Professional/manager	93*	Vancouver	89*
Other occupations	88	Other CMA <sup>1</sup>	89*
<b>Household income</b>		CA <sup>2</sup>	88*
Less than \$29,999	87	Rural	87
\$30,000 to \$59,999	89*		
\$60,000 and more	92*		
Not stated	87		

1. Census metropolitan area.

2. Census agglomeration.

\* Significantly different than reference group shown in italics at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2003.

was print journalism, with 70% of frequent users reporting that the newspaper was one of their sources for gathering information on news and current affairs. People with a higher consumption of newspapers included those 45 years and older, men, people with postsecondary education, individuals with household incomes above \$60,000 per year, and those Canadians in a professional or management occupation.

The third most common news media source was radio, which is where 53% of frequent users reported that they got some of their daily news. Seniors consumed radio at a much

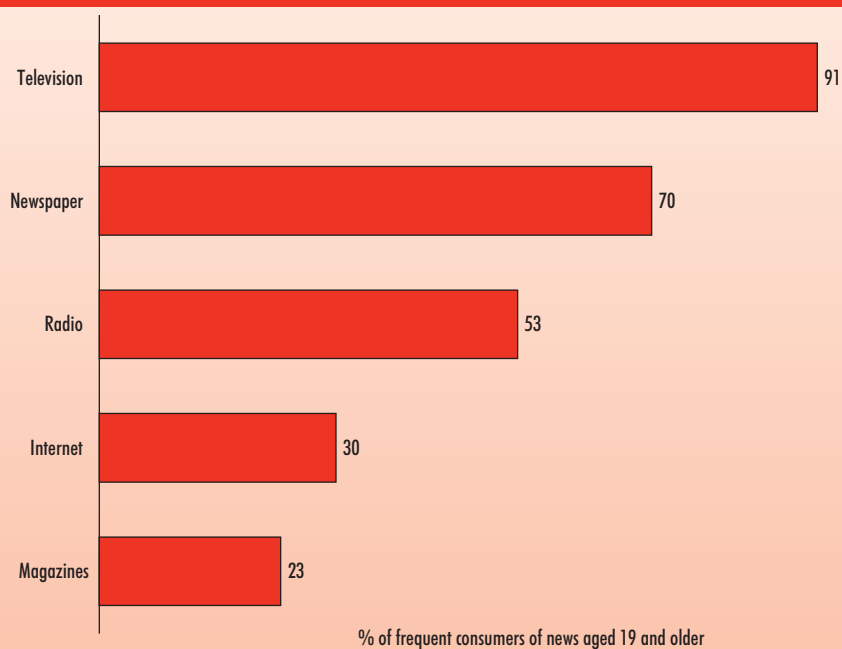
higher rate than other Canadians, at 83%. Other groups showing higher use of radio as a news source included those who are married or living common-law, individuals with some postsecondary education, Canadians in a professional or management occupation, those who speak English most often at home, and Canadians living outside Quebec.

### **Internet part of the media diet, especially among younger Canadians**

In 2003, 30% of Canadians who followed the news frequently reported using the Internet to do so. This is not

surprising, since other studies have shown that accessing online news services is one of the most common things to do on the Internet.<sup>6</sup> (Readers should note that these results are based on use in 2003 and that Internet use patterns have changed considerably since then.)

Amongst Canadians who followed the news on a frequent basis, using the Internet was most common among 19- to 24-year-olds (42%) and least common among seniors (9%). Women were less likely than men to use the Internet as a news source; likewise, those with some postsecondary education used it much more often



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2003.

than those without. Professionals and managers were twice as likely as other occupational groups to include the Internet as part of their daily news diet, perhaps because people in these types of jobs tend to use the Internet at work. Canadians with higher incomes also used Internet news more frequently than those in lower income groups. (Some of these differences may have lessened as the Internet has become accessible to more Canadians.)

One key finding is that frequent news users born outside Canada were more likely to use the Internet as a news source. The Internet can provide news about other areas of the world in a more in-depth manner than might be possible with the more conventional sources of print and broadcast news. Immigrants may also use the Internet more commonly as a news source due to the availability of news in their language of preference.

The value of the Internet as a multilingual medium is somewhat supported by the differences

observed in Internet use as a news source depending on the language that is most commonly spoken at home. Those who speak a language other than English or French at home were more likely to be users of Internet news than those who speak one of the two official languages. In 2003, those who speak French were the least likely language group to use the Internet as a news source. This may be related to Internet access rather than language, as Quebec had lower levels of Internet use for all purposes than other areas in Canada at that time.<sup>7</sup>

#### Canadians like to sample news from multiple media sources

Canadians who follow the news daily or several times a week tend to get their information from more than one media source. Only 17 % of those who followed the news frequently used a single source (usually television). The vast majority (72%) consumed from two to four sources of news. About 10% used all five types of media to get their news. On average, frequent news

users consulted 2.7 media sources to meet their news requirements. Those 45 to 64 years of age used more sources than other age groups; men used more sources than women. Those with postsecondary education tended to select a wider variety of sources than those with a high school diploma or less.

One of the most varied media diets is found among those whose occupation is professional or manager. In this group, the average number of media sources used was 3.0, which is significantly higher than that of other occupational categories (2.6). This trend was also reflected in the finding that those Canadians whose household income is more than \$60,000 per year consumed a wider variety of news media than any other income group.

Language preference also influences the number of sources from which Canadians gather their daily news. Frequent users who speak English at home had the most varied sources, followed by those who speak a language other than English or French. Those who speak French in the home had the least varied media consumption.

Not surprisingly, given the influence of language on source variety, region of the country also influences media selection. Frequent users in Quebec and the Atlantic provinces chose fewer sources than their counterparts in other regions of Canada. Of those Canadians living in the three major census metropolitan areas (CMAs), those living in Montréal showed the lowest average number of media sources. Similarly, those living in rural areas had the least varied media consumption when compared to those in more urban centres.

These results suggest that the variety of media frequent news users consume may be directly related to the size of the media marketplace. In order for the news diet to be varied, it is essential that media in many forms and in one's language of preference be readily available and personally accessible. Thus, when the selection

Table 2 Frequent users rely on television but usually consume more than one source of news

	% of frequent users					Average number of sources used
	Television	Radio	Newspaper	Magazines	Internet	
All respondents 19 years and older who follow the news frequently	91	53	70	23	30	2.67
<b>Demographic characteristics</b>						
<b>Age</b>						
19 to 24	86	41	66	20	42	2.55
25 to 44	89*	54*	67*	21*	38*	2.70*
45 to 64	92*	57*	73*	25*	27*	2.73*
65 and older	95*	83*	74*	24*	9*	2.55
<b>Gender</b>						
Women	92	52	68*	22	24*	2.58*
Men	90	54	73	24	36	2.76
<b>Marital status</b>						
Married common-law	91*	56*	72*	23*	30	2.71*
Other	89	49	68	21	30	2.58
<b>Work and education</b>						
<b>Highest level of education</b>						
No postsecondary	93	48	61	18	20	2.40
Some postsecondary	89	57	73	26	39	2.81
<b>Occupation type</b>						
Professional/manager	91*	60*	75*	30*	48*	3.04*
Other occupations	88	52	69	21	24	2.58
<b>Household income</b>						
Less than \$29,999	93*	48*	61*	18*	20*	2.40*
\$30,000 to \$59,999	91*	53*	68*	21*	27*	2.59*
\$60,000 and more	87*	59*	76*	28*	41*	2.92*
Not Stated	92*	49	69*	19*	21*	2.50*
<b>Immigration and language</b>						
<b>Born in Canada</b>						
Yes	91	54	71*	23	28*	2.67
No	90	52	67	20	36	2.68
<b>Language used at home</b>						
English	89	57	75	25	32	2.79
French	94*	44*	61*	19*	21*	2.39*
Other	90*	49*	62*	18*	34*	2.53*
<b>Place of residence</b>						
<b>Region</b>						
Atlantic	91*	58*	67*	17*	24*	2.57*
Quebec	94*	46*	62*	19*	23*	2.44*
Ontario	89	55	74	24	34	2.75
Prairies	90	56*	74	24	29*	2.73*
BC	89	57*	75*	27*	36*	2.81*
<b>Urban/rural area</b>						
Montréal	93	48*	63	21*	29*	2.53*
Toronto	90*	55*	73*	24*	39*	2.80*
Vancouver	88*	57*	74*	25*	39*	2.83*
Other CMA <sup>1</sup>	89*	54	73*	24*	32*	2.73*
CA <sup>2</sup>	92	53	74*	23*	26*	2.67*
Rural	92	54	64	20	19	2.48

1. Census metropolitan area.

2. Census agglomeration.

\* Significantly different than reference group shown in italics at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2003.



offered is more limited, the tendency will be to turn to television as it is the staple that is almost universally available.

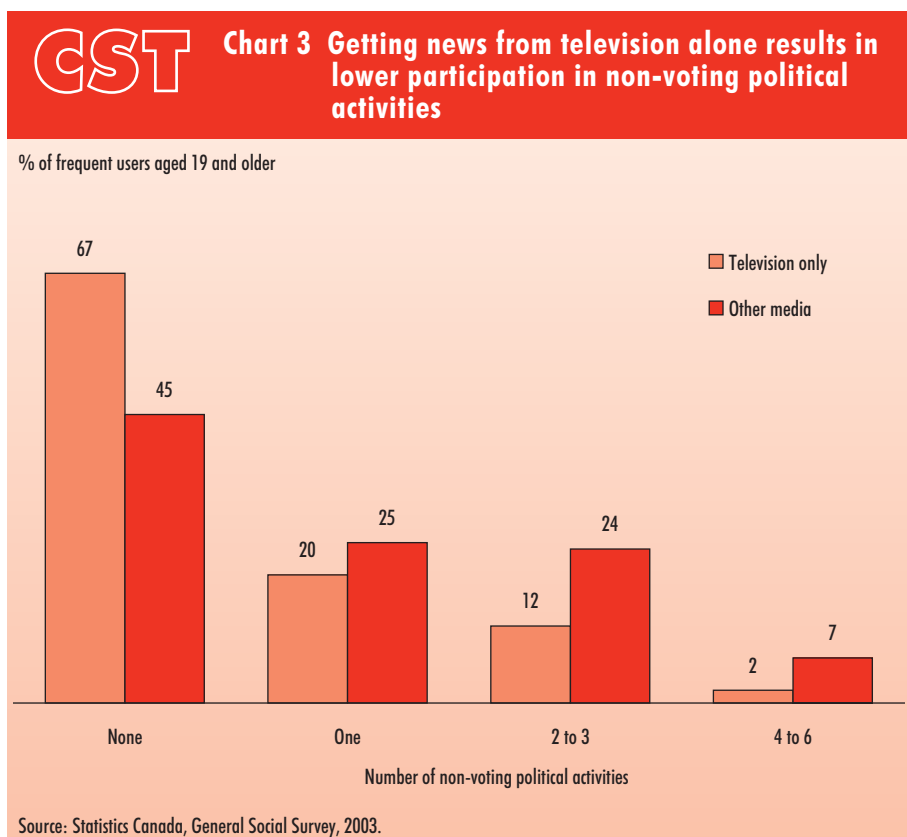
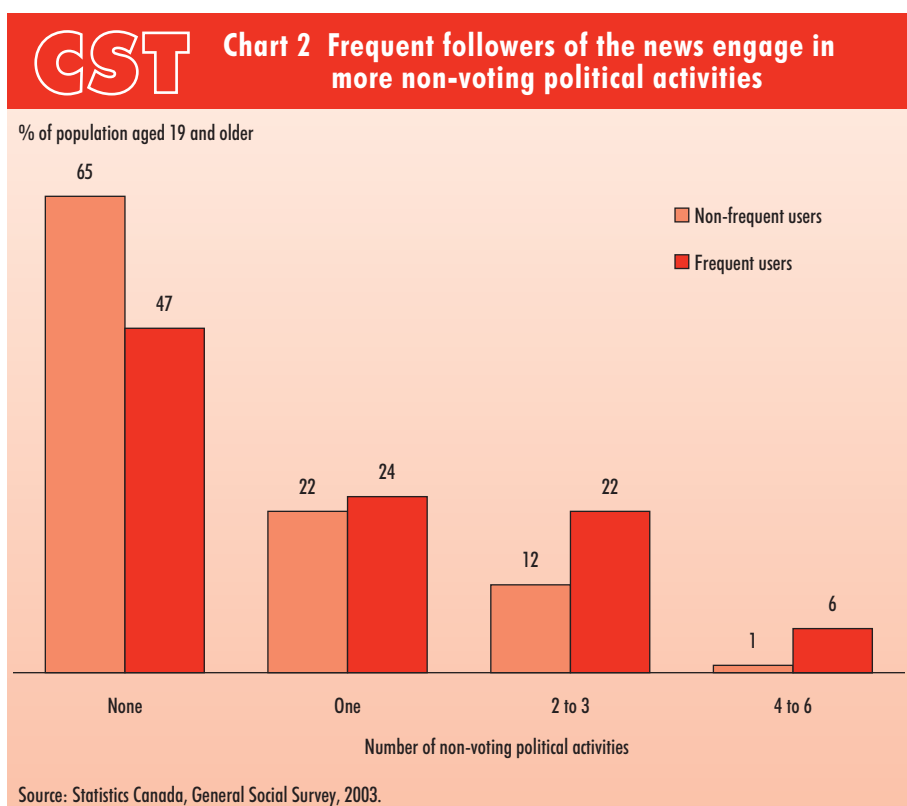
### Frequent users who speak English and live in more urban areas are less reliant on television only

Making television their sole choice to follow news and current affairs was more common among younger adults, women, those who are single, those with no postsecondary education and those in lower income brackets.

Choosing television alone from the media sources available was also more common amongst those who use a language other than English as their language of preference. This is also reflected when considering geographic location. Higher percentages of frequent news user who live in Montréal or more rural areas selected television as their sole choice of media source. This reflects patterns of overall television viewing in Canada.<sup>8</sup>

### Frequent users are more likely to engage in non-voting political activities

Frequent users of the news tended to be more involved in non-voting political activities such as attending public meetings; searching for information on a political issue; volunteering for a political party; expressing their views by contacting a newspaper or politician; signing a petition; or participating in a march or demonstration (Chart 2). The difference was particularly pronounced when considering those who did not participate in any activities and those who participated in four or more. This finding lends support to previous research that suggests that following the news and current affairs is related to being a more politically engaged citizen.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, these same studies argue that individuals who use media that require them to read and engage more actively with the material being presented have higher levels of civic



## GST What you should know about this study

The 2003 General Social Survey (GSS) on social engagement surveyed about 25,000 Canadians aged 15 and older living in private households in the 10 provinces. It was developed to explore the measurement of social capital and develop a better understanding of how social networks and norms of trust and reciprocity contribute to individual and social outcomes. For this purpose, the survey collected information on a wide range of activities, such as social contacts with family, friends and neighbours; involvement in organizations, political activities and volunteer work; and the informal care they provide or receive. It also explored the values and attitudes and the level of trust in people and in public institutions. Overall, the survey provided comprehensive information on the many ways that Canadians engage in civic and social life.

This article looks at respondents 19 years and older in order to include only those individuals who have reached the age of majority for political participation. Voting patterns of respondents are not considered because eligibility to vote (i.e. citizenship) was not collected by the survey.

**Frequent users:** Individuals who follow the news and current affairs at least several times a week.

**News media/media diet:** The sources Canadians use to access the news and current affairs (television, newspaper, radio, magazines, Internet).

engagement and more knowledge of current affairs than those who use television as their primary or only source of news.<sup>10</sup>

And certainly, the GSS data show that the media one selects does influence participation in non-voting political activities. Those frequent users who chose only television tended to participate in fewer non-voting political activities (Chart 3). In fact, in terms of their involvement, those who used television as their only source of news closely mirrored those who did not follow the news at all. This finding supports previous U.S. research that shows lower rates of political participation are associated with using TV as the only source of news.<sup>11</sup>

### Summary

Most Canadians follow news and current affairs at least several times a week. Few Canadians use a single media source for their news. However, the variety of the media sources consumed does seem to be related to access. It appears that variety is dependent on having sufficient access to media in many forms and in one's preferred language. Canadians living in rural areas and those who speak French most often at home find access more difficult than other frequent news consumers. When access to additional sources of media is blocked—for whatever reason—it appears that people turn to television for news and current affairs information.

The level of political engagement Canadians report is also influenced by their frequency of news consumption and the choices they make from the media sources available to them. Frequent followers of the news participate in more political activities, but relying only on television results in a pattern of political activity that closely mirrors those who do not follow news at all. Those who follow news frequently in a variety of media sources seem more likely to be politically engaged Canadians.

GST

**Leslie-Anne Keown** is an analyst with *Canadian Social Trends*.

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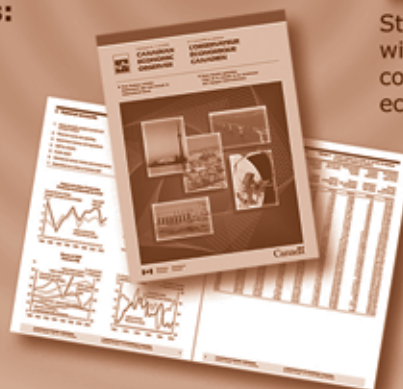
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# Aboriginal languages in Canada: Emerging trends and perspectives on second language acquisition

by Mary Jane Norris

Canada enjoys a rich diversity of peoples, cultures and languages. In addition to French and English, the country's two official languages, and numerous immigrant languages, there are many languages indigenous to Canada itself. Indeed, across Canada there are some 50 or more individual languages belonging to 11 Aboriginal language families. These languages reflect distinctive histories, cultures and identities linked to family, community, the land and traditional knowledge. For many First Nation, Inuit and Métis people, these languages are at the very core of their identity.

Aboriginal peoples, though, are confronted with the fact that many of their languages are disappearing, an issue which may have profound implications. Over the past 100 years or more, at least ten once-flourishing languages have become extinct. However, declining trends in the intergenerational transmission of Aboriginal mother tongues are being offset to a degree by the fact that Aboriginal languages are also being learned as second languages.

## **Only one in four Aboriginal people speaks an Aboriginal language**

Currently, only a minority of the Aboriginal population in Canada is able to speak or understand an Aboriginal language. According to 2001 Census data, of the 976,300 people who identified themselves as Aboriginal, 235,000 (or 24%) reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language.<sup>1</sup>

This represents a sharp drop from 29% in 1996,<sup>2</sup> and appears to confirm most research which suggests that there has been substantial erosion in the use of Aboriginal languages in recent decades. Another definite indicator of the erosion is the declining percentage of the Aboriginal population whose mother tongue is Aboriginal. In 2001, just 21% of Aboriginals in Canada had an Aboriginal mother tongue, down from 26% in 1996.

However, the decline in mother tongue population has been offset to some degree by the fact that many Aboriginal people have learned an Aboriginal language as a second language. In 2001, more people could speak an Aboriginal language than had an Aboriginal mother

tongue (239,600 versus 203,300). This suggests that some speakers must have learned their Aboriginal language as a second language. It appears that this is especially the case for young people.

Learning an Aboriginal language as a second language cannot be considered a substitute for learning it as a first language.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, increasing the number of second language speakers is part of the process of language revitalization, and may go some way towards preventing, or at least slowing, the rapid erosion and possible extinction of endangered languages. Indeed, the acquisition of an Aboriginal language as a second language may be the only option available to many Aboriginal communities if transmission from parent to child is no longer viable.

As well, in gaining the ability to speak the language of their parents or grandparents, young Aboriginal people will be able to communicate with their older family members in their traditional language. It is also thought that the process itself of learning an Aboriginal language may contribute to increased self-esteem and community well-being, as well as cultural continuity.<sup>4</sup>

## CST Home language of today, mother tongue of tomorrow

A crucial element affecting the long-term viability of a language is simply how many people speak it at home. The language that is most often spoken within the home is more likely to become the mother tongue of the next generation; if not, the transmission from one generation to the next will likely be broken. Indeed, as the 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples concluded, the viability or continuity of a language is dependent on it being used on a daily basis, ideally as the primary home language.

Long-term declines in language continuity translate into decreasing shares of children acquiring an Aboriginal mother tongue, and increasingly older mother tongue populations. Erosion of home language use has seen the proportion of children (ages 0 to 19 years) in the Aboriginal mother tongue population fall from 41% in 1986 to just 32% in 2001, while the percentage of adults aged 55 and over increased from 12% to 17%.

These trends indicate that many Aboriginal languages – even larger ones – will be confronted with the challenges of continuity for the next generation. In 2001, just 13% of the Aboriginal population reported that they spoke an Aboriginal language most often in the home, while an additional 5% reported using one regularly. This proportion is lower than the rates for people who can converse in an Aboriginal language as well as those for mother tongue speakers (24% and 21%, respectively). For example, even though Ojibway has the third largest mother tongue population in Canada, its use as the major home language is diminishing.

The prospects of transmitting a language as a mother tongue can be assessed using an index of continuity, which measures the number of people who speak the language at home for every 100 persons who speak it as their mother tongue. Over the period 1981 to 2001, the index of continuity decreased from about 76 to 61. Both men and women in practically all age groups experienced a decline in language continuity as their home language use shifted from Aboriginal to non-Aboriginal languages. The trend was most pronounced for women, especially those in the child-bearing and working-age years.

However, information on languages spoken “regularly” at home (as distinct from “most often”) began to be collected with the 2001 Census. In 2001, while the number of people speaking an Aboriginal language most often in the home was 129,300, just over 50,000 additional people were speaking one at home on a “regular” basis. This information could be particularly relevant to endangered languages, which tend to be spoken “regularly” at home but not “most often.” For example, only 10% of persons reporting Haida as a home language speak it “most often”, while 90% speak it “regularly.” In contrast, the majority of viable languages tend to be spoken in the home on a “most often” rather than on a “regular” basis, for example Inuktitut (82%), Cree (69%) and Ojibway (56%).<sup>1</sup>

1. Norris, M.J. and L. Jantzen. 2003. “Aboriginal Languages in Canada’s Urban Areas: Characteristics, Considerations and Implications.” In *Not Strangers in These Parts: Urban Aboriginal Peoples*. Eds. David Newhouse and Evelyn Peters. Ottawa: Privy Council Office.

### Aboriginal second language speakers

According to the 2001 Census, 20% of the total population who could speak an Aboriginal language – over 47,100 people – had learned it as a second language. And it appears that second language learning has been on the rise. The index of second language acquisition indicates that for every 100 people with an Aboriginal mother tongue, the number of people able to speak an Aboriginal language increased from 117 to about 120 speakers between

1996 and 2001 (Table 1). It appears that growing numbers of second language speakers may increasingly be offsetting the declining size of mother tongue populations.

What is perhaps even more significant to their long-term viability is the fact that second language speakers tend to be considerably younger than people who learned an Aboriginal language as their mother tongue. In 2001, for example, about 45% of second language speakers were under age 25, compared to 38% of mother tongue speakers (Chart 1).

### Second language learners impact endangered Aboriginal languages

Over the 20-year period from 1981 to 2001, most Aboriginal languages, whether considered *viable* or *endangered*, experienced long-term declines in their continuity (see “What you should know about this study” for definitions). And not surprisingly, the endangered ones suffered the most. Among endangered British Columbia languages like Haida and Tlingit, for example, continuity levels declined to practically nil by 2001; indeed,

**Table 1 Young Aboriginal language speakers are increasingly likely to acquire their language as a second language rather than as a mother tongue**

	Total population in 2001 with...			% of all speakers who are second language speakers				
	Ability to speak	Second language	Index of second language acquisition <sup>1</sup>	All ages	Under 25	Age 25-44	Age 45-64	Age 65+
Total Aboriginal languages	239,620	47,155	120	20	23	20	16	12
<b>Algonquian Family</b>								
Cree	97,230	20,160	121	21	25	20	16	14
Ojibway	30,505	7,960	130	26	40	27	18	11
Montagnais-Naskapi	10,470	605	106	6	5	6	6	3
Micmac	8,955	1,740	117	19	26	19	10	9
Oji-Cree	10,475	680	106	6	9	5	2	2
Attikamekw	4,955	210	105	4	6	3	1	0
Blackfoot	4,495	1,600	149	36	74	38	17	8
Algonquin	2,425	585	130	24	31	22	18	10
Malecite	1,095	415	133	38	46	53	25	13
Algonquian n.i.e. (includes Michif)	995	415	154	42	70	48	35	22
<b>Inuktitut</b>	<b>32,775</b>	<b>3,445</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Athapaskan Family</b>								
Dene	10,585	985	110	9	11	8	7	4
South Slave	2,205	695	151	32	54	31	19	10
Dogrib	2,285	355	119	16	23	9	11	6
Carrier	2,055	750	142	36	68	49	21	13
Chipewyan	940	270	144	29	64	29	19	17
Athapaskan, n.i.e.	1,690	615	140	36	58	41	25	13
Chilcotin	1,145	220	113	19	42	16	7	0
Kutchin-Gwich'in (Loucheux)	500	180	137	36	73	53	24	21
North Slave (Hare)	1,030	165	119	16	27	17	6	8
<b>Dakota/Sioux Family</b>	<b>4,955</b>	<b>815</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Salish Family</b>								
Salish, n.i.e.	3,020	1,565	157	52	83	65	30	22
Shuswap	1,255	590	154	47	71	59	24	23
Thompson(Ntlakapamux)	720	315	152	44	85	61	30	16
<b>Tsimshian Family</b>								
Gitksan	1,320	370	132	28	77	33	14	10
Nishga	915	430	153	47	86	70	35	4
Tsimshian	505	160	117	32	0	46	38	20
<b>Wakashan Family</b>								
Wakashan, n.i.e.	1,270	450	130	35	80	48	26	13
Nootka	505	160	109	32	79	64	13	13
<b>Iroquoian Family</b>								
Mohawk	755	405	178	54	80	48	38	18
Iroquoian, n.i.e.	250	105	102	42	50	40	40	25
<b>Haida Isolate</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Kutenai Isolate</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Tlingit Isolate</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>11</b>
Aboriginal languages, n.i.e.	1,400	740	159	53	61	61	51	31

1. See "What you should know about this study" for concepts and definitions.

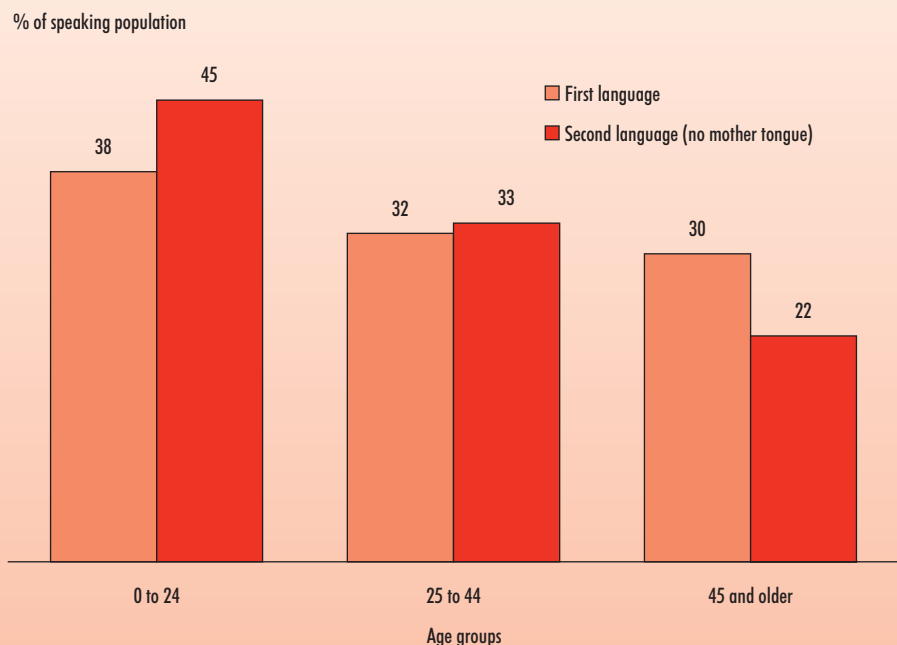
n.i.e. Not included elsewhere.

Notes: For total Aboriginal languages combined, Index of Second Language Acquisition is based on total number of responses, since some respondents are able to speak more than one Aboriginal language. Due to incomplete enumeration of reserves, special caution should be exercised when using data for the Iroquoian family of languages.

Source: Statistics Canada, 1996 and 2001 Censuses of Population.



**Chart 1 Second language learners tend to be much younger than the people who learned an Aboriginal language as their mother tongue**



Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Population.

each of these languages currently has fewer than 200 first language speakers. At the same time, while the more viable languages like Inuktitut have retained their linguistic vitality, several larger viable languages like Cree and Ojibway saw steady long-term declines in continuity over the two decades.

Depending on the state of a given language – that is, whether it is viable or endangered – a number of different growth patterns were observed between 1996 and 2001. In particular, younger generations of Aboriginal language speakers are increasingly likely to acquire their language, especially if it is endangered, as a second language rather than as a mother tongue. For example, the Tlingit language family has one of the oldest mother tongue populations, but the index of second language acquisition and average age of speakers indicates that two people (usually younger) speak the language to every one person with a mother tongue. These indicators

suggest that younger generations are more likely to learn Tlingit as a second language.

Generally, among most endangered languages, there is an overall decline in the ability to speak the language because any gains in second language speakers are not sufficiently large enough to offset the losses of mother tongue speakers. However, for some endangered Aboriginal languages, it appears that the speaker population may be growing due to a concerted effort to learn them as a second language.

This appears to be the case of the smaller Salish languages, which experienced a 5% drop in mother tongue population from 1996 to 2001, while simultaneously posting an impressive 17% increase in total number of speakers. At the same time, the average age of all Salish speakers was notably younger at 42 years of age, compared to 50 years for the mother tongue population. (Table 2)

This pattern also applies to a number of viable languages in which second language speakers appear to be adding to the total number of speakers. Languages experiencing these growth patterns between 1996 and 2001 include Attikamek, with a 21% increase in population able to speak the language compared to a 19% growth in its mother tongue population. Similarly, the number of people able to speak Dene increased 11%, while its mother tongue population increased only 7%. Other languages with higher gains in ability to speak compared to gains as a mother tongue include Micmac, Dakota/Sioux, Montagnais/Naskapi, and Inuktitut.

In fact, among some of the most endangered languages, second language speakers account for over half of the speaking population. In 2001, for example, 57% of those who spoke Tlingit as well as 54% of those who spoke Haida and 52% who spoke some of the smaller Salish languages were second language learners. Similarly, among practically all of the endangered languages, as well as many languages considered to be “not quite viable, approaching endangered” or “uncertain”, a minimum of a third of all speakers are second language speakers. These included the smaller Algonquin languages, Malecite, Blackfoot, Carrier, Tsimshian, Kutenai, Nishga, and Shuswap.

It also appears that young people make up a substantial share of Aboriginal second language speakers among endangered languages. In 2001, for example, among children under age 15 who could speak an endangered language, 71% learned it as a second language (Chart 2).

In contrast, the prevalence of second language speakers declines with increasing age among both endangered and viable-language speakers, a pattern that is not surprising since older generations of Aboriginal peoples are more likely to have an Aboriginal mother tongue. Among speakers aged 65 years and

**Table 2 For some Aboriginal languages, gains in second language speakers may be offsetting the decline in mother tongue populations**

	Mother Tongue	Continuity Index <sup>1</sup>	Ability Index <sup>1</sup>	% change 1996 to 2001 for languages with over 2,000 speakers		Viability status <sup>1</sup> in 1996 and 2001
				Mother tongue	Ability	
<b>Total Aboriginal languages</b>	<b>203,300</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>-3.3</b>	<b>-0.6</b>	
<b>Algonquian Family</b>	<b>142,090</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>120</b>			<b>mostly viable</b>
Cree	80,075	62	121	-6.2	-3.1	viable large
Ojibway	23,520	45	130	-10.1	-6.0	viable large
Montagnais-Naskapi	9,890	91	106	8.0	10.2	viable small
Micmac	7,650	65	117	2.3	8.2	viable small
Oji-Cree	9,875	73	106	4.1	2.4	viable small
Attikamek	4,725	95	105	18.6	21.1	viable small
Blackfoot	3,025	56	149	-27.1	-20.2	viable small / uncertain
Algonquin	1,860	30	130	-12.6	-8.4	viable small / uncertain
Malecite	825	33	133			viable small / uncertain
Algonquian, n.i.e. (includes Michif)	645	19	154			uncertain
<b>Inuktitut</b>	<b>29,695</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>viable large</b>
<b>Athapaskan Family</b>	<b>18,530</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>121</b>			<b>mostly viable</b>
Dene	9,595	81	110	6.8	10.8	viable small
South Slave	1,460	39	151			viable small / uncertain
Dogrib	1,925	70	119	-7.7	-6.8	viable small
Carrier	1,445	34	142	-34.8	-29.3	viable small / uncertain
Chipewyan	655	27	144			viable small / uncertain
Athapaskan, n.i.e.	1,210	22	140			uncertain
Chilcotin	1,010	53	113			viable small
Kutchin-Gwich'in (Loucheux)	365	15	137			endangered
North Slave (Hare)	865	55	119			endangered
<b>(Dakota)Siouan Family</b>	<b>4,310</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>viable small</b>
<b>Salish Family</b>	<b>3,210</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>156</b>			<b>endangered</b>
Salish, n.i.e.	1,920	21	157	-5.2	17.1	endangered
Shuswap	815	19	154			endangered
Thompson	475	18	151			endangered
<b>Tsimshian Family</b>	<b>2,030</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>135</b>			<b>mostly endangered</b>
Gitskan	1,000	31	132			viable small / uncertain
Nishga	600	23	153			endangered
Tsimshian	430	21	117			endangered
<b>Wakashan Family</b>	<b>1,445</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>123</b>			<b>endangered</b>
Wakashan	980	18	130			endangered
Nootka	465	6	109			endangered
<b>Iroquoian Family</b>	<b>670</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>150</b>			<b>uncertain</b>
Mohawk	425	8	178			uncertain
Iroquoian, n.i.e.	245	8	102			uncertain
<b>Haida Isolate</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>164</b>			<b>endangered</b>
<b>Kutenai Isolate</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>129</b>			<b>endangered</b>
<b>Tlingit Isolate</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>219</b>			<b>endangered</b>
Aboriginal languages, n.i.e.	880	24	159			endangered

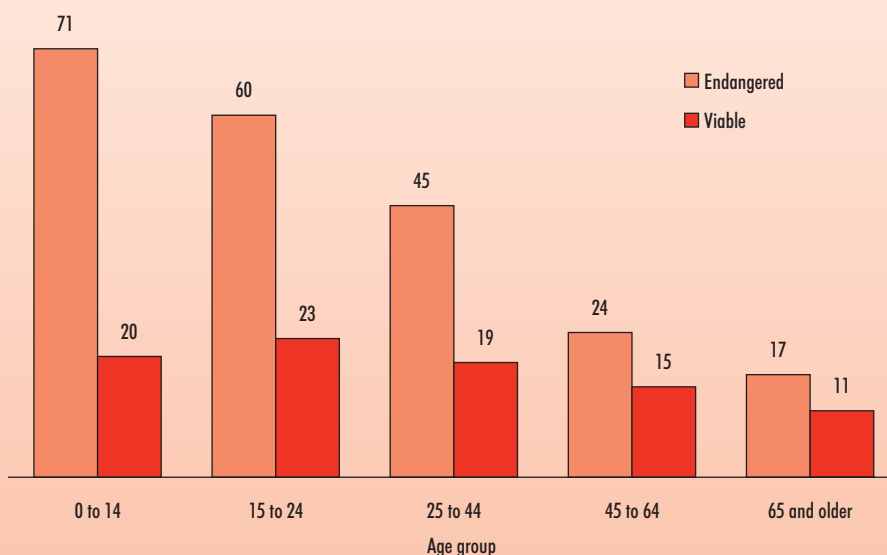
1. See "What you should know about this study" for concepts and definitions.

n.i.e. Not included elsewhere.

Notes: The indices are based on combined single and multiple responses for mother tongue and home language. Due to incomplete enumeration of reserves, special caution should be exercised when using data for the Iroquoian family of languages. Changes in coding procedures between 1996 and 2001 means that counts for North Slave and South Slave (Athapaskan family) are not comparable between censuses. Percentage changes calculated using data adjusted for differences in enumeration and reporting patterns in 1996 and 2001, particularly affecting Cree, Ojibway and Oji-Cree.

Source: Statistics Canada, 1996 and 2001 Censuses of Population. Catalogue 9660030XIE2001007, and Norris, "Aboriginal Languages in Canada," Canadian Social Trends No. 51 (Winter 1998).

% of speaking population who are second language learners



Note: See "What you should know about this study" for definitions of endangered and viable languages.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Population.

older, the share of second language speakers drops to just 17% of those speaking an endangered language, and 11% of those speaking a viable language.

However, for some of the most endangered languages, high shares of second language speakers do not always imply younger speakers. In fact, populations of second language speakers are also aging along with mother tongue populations. For example, in 2001 virtually none of the 500 people who could speak Tsimshian were under the age of 25, even though 32% were second language speakers.

### Both on- and off-reserve, second language learners are making gains

Interestingly, it also appears that younger generations living off-reserve, and especially those in urban areas, are increasingly likely to learn an Aboriginal language as a second language rather than as a mother tongue. Among Registered Indians

off reserve, 165 children aged 10 to 14 are able to speak a First Nation language for every 100 children with a First Nation mother tongue.<sup>5</sup> This suggests that a substantial number of children learn their traditional language as a second language.

Of course, the issue is even more salient in Aboriginal communities (that is, reserves, Inuit communities and settlements). In 1996, about two-thirds of comparable communities reported that most Aboriginal speakers had learned the language as their mother tongue; by 2001, the proportion had dropped to less than half. In contrast, the number of communities where many speakers had acquired it as their second language doubled from 8.5% to 17%. All told, about 33% of communities enumerated in 2001 could be classified as being in transition from a mother tongue to a second language population.<sup>6</sup>

Naturally, families impact the transmission of an Aboriginal language from parent to child,

be it as a mother tongue or as a second language. The vast majority of Aboriginal children aged 5 to 14 (over 90%) can converse in their parent's or parents' language, with many having learned it as a second language. Children most likely to learn an Aboriginal language as a second language are from linguistically mixed families, live in urban areas, or speak an endangered language.<sup>7</sup> For example, while 70% of children with Salish language parentage could speak their parent(s)' language, only about 10 percent had acquired it as a mother tongue.<sup>8</sup>

### Learning Aboriginal language is important to most parents

Recent trends in the acquisition of Aboriginal languages as second languages point to an increased recognition that speaking an Aboriginal language is important. According to the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey, parents of 60% of Aboriginal children in non-reserve areas believed it was very important or somewhat important for their children to speak and understand an Aboriginal language.

Parents are not alone in thinking that learning an Aboriginal language is important. Both Aboriginal adults and youth, including those in non-reserve areas, share the same opinion. For example, among the off-reserve population in Saskatchewan, 65% of Aboriginal adults and 63% of Aboriginal youth aged 15 to 24 thought that learning, relearning, or maintaining their language was "somewhat important" or "very important". Similarly, in the Yukon, language learning was considered important by even higher proportions of Aboriginal adults and youth (78% and 76%, respectively).<sup>9</sup>

The attitudes of youth are critical to the future of languages, particularly as parents of the next generation. Furthermore, unlike older generations, Aboriginal youth today have to contend with the prevailing influence of English and French through the mass media, popular culture, and

This study is based mainly on 1996 and 2001 Census of Population data. The study population covers those individuals who self-identified as Aboriginal on the census. Some caution is required in comparing Aboriginal populations between censuses, due to ethnic mobility and fluidity in self-identity among the Aboriginal population. Also, intercensal comparisons of Aboriginal language data can be affected by differentials in coverage, incomplete enumeration, reporting, content and questions, which have been controlled for where feasible.

**Aboriginal language speaker:** The ability to speak and to converse in an Aboriginal language. Although respondents were instructed to report only those languages in which they can carry on a conversation of some length on various topics, ability is based on the respondent's own assessment. Since varying degrees of fluency may be represented in the data, it is suggested that some caution be exercised in considering the implications of second language acquisition for transmission and continuity.

**Mother tongue/first language speaker:** Mother tongue refers to the first language learned at home in childhood and still understood by the individual. First language speakers are those persons with an Aboriginal mother tongue who report the ability to speak an Aboriginal language. In a small percentage of cases (5%, or 11,000, in 2001), respondents with an Aboriginal mother tongue did not report that they could speak an Aboriginal language. Although the Aboriginal mother tongue population and first language speakers are not strictly equivalent concepts, the two terms are used interchangeably in this article.

**Second language speakers:** For purposes of this study, these individuals are defined as persons who report the ability to speak an Aboriginal language, but who do not have an Aboriginal mother tongue.

**Home language:** In this study, home language refers to the language spoken most often at home by the individual. In the 2001 Census, a new section on languages spoken on a regular basis at home was added. (Because of changes in the question, the 2001 "spoken most often" measure may not be directly comparable to previous censuses.)

**Index of ability/Index of second language acquisition:** compares the number of people who report being able to speak the language with the number who have that Aboriginal

language as a mother tongue. If, for every 100 people with a specific Aboriginal mother tongue, more than 100 persons in the overall population have the ability to speak that language, then some have learned it as a second language.

N.B.: As indirect estimates of second language acquisition, the index of second language acquisition and the estimated intercensal growth in the numbers of second language speakers assume that all persons with an Aboriginal mother tongue also reported the ability to speak an Aboriginal language. As such they serve only as indicators, not as precise measures.

**Index of continuity:** measures the number of people who speak the language at home for every 100 persons who speak it as their mother tongue.

## **Viability of Aboriginal languages**

Aboriginal languages differ significantly in their state, and in their trends and outlook, and as such they can be classified accordingly. On the basis of a classification by Kinkade,<sup>1</sup> they can be divided into five groupings: already extinct; near extinction; endangered; viable but with a small population base; and viable with a large population.

**Near extinction:** These languages may be beyond the possibility of revival. As only a few elderly people speak them, there may only be enough time to record and archive them.

**Endangered:** These languages are spoken by enough people to make survival a possibility, given sufficient community interest and concerted educational programs. They tend to have small populations, older speakers, and lower rates of language transmission. Many of the smaller languages, often with far fewer than 1,000 persons, have very low prospects for on-going transmission across generations. This is particularly relevant to the situation in British Columbia where many of the languages found there have very low prospects for continuity and are either endangered (e.g. Nishga, Haida) or near extinction.

**Viable but small:** These languages have generally more than 1,000 speakers and are spoken in isolated or well-organized communities with strong self-awareness. In these communities, language is considered one of the important marks of identity. They can be considered viable if their continuity is high and they have relatively young speakers, for example, Attikamek and Dene.



## GST What you should know about this study (continued)

**Viable large:** These languages have a large enough population base that long-term survival is likely assured. Cree, Inuktitut and Ojibway are the only viable languages with large population bases. Large or small, viable languages tend to have relatively young speakers, compared to endangered languages. Census data are available for viable and endangered languages but are not available separately

for languages near extinction owing to their small numbers of speakers.

1. Kinkade, M.D. 1991. "The Decline of Native Languages in Canada" in *Endangered Languages*. Eds. Robert H. Robins and Eugenius M. Uhlenbeck. Published with the Authority of the Permanent International Committee of Linguists (PICL). Canada: Berg Publishers Limited.

other aspects of their daily lives such as education and work. At the same time, their traditional language can serve a different role than that of mainstream languages: it can be a means to "...express the identity of the speakers of a community ... fostering family ties, maintaining social relationships, preserving historical links..."<sup>10</sup> An in-depth study about the values and attitudes of Inuit youth concerning Inuktitut and English found that most young Inuit, even those who thought that they were "good" or "excellent" at speaking Inuktitut, expressed concern that as they use and hear English more frequently, they are losing their ability to speak Inuktitut well.<sup>11</sup> Many also report speaking English more than when they were children. At the same time, many youth associate Inuktitut with their identity, traditional knowledge, and culture; for some, losing Inuktitut can affect their sense of belonging, leading to feelings of marginalization and exclusion. While youth are making a concerted effort to use Inuktitut in daily activities, they also identify a need for support through family, community and education, with opportunities to learn, hear and use it.

### Summary

Although most Aboriginal language speakers learned their language as a mother tongue, many factors contribute to the erosion of intergenerational transmission of Aboriginal languages, including increasing migration between Aboriginal communities and cities, and to and from reserves; linguistic intermarriage; the prevailing influence of English and French in daily life; and the legacy of the residential school system.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, for most Aboriginal children, the "ideal" conditions for acquiring an Aboriginal mother tongue – with both parents having an Aboriginal mother tongue, and residing in an Aboriginal community – are not always feasible.

These pressures and demographics increase the likelihood that a significant share of the next generation of Aboriginal language speakers will be second language learners. Most importantly, though, it will be the desire and interest in learning Aboriginal languages today that will help shape the growth of future generations of Aboriginal language speakers, both first and second language learners.

**Mary Jane Norris** is a senior research manager with the Research and Analysis Directorate, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

1. Data for 2001 are the most recent available at the time of publication. Language data from the 2006 Census of Population will be released in December 2007.
2. Part of this decrease over the period 1996 to 2001 is also attributable to the increased tendency of people to identify themselves as Aboriginal. This is especially the case among persons of Métis heritage, only a small proportion of whom report being able to speak an Aboriginal language. See Statistics Canada, 2003. *Aboriginal Peoples of Canada: A demographic profile, 2001 Census. Analysis Series, 2001 Census*. Catalogue no. 96F0030XIE2001007.
3. See Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), *Gathering Strength* (Vol. 3) and *Perspectives and Realities* (Vol. 4). Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada.
4. Canadian Heritage, 2005. "Towards a New Beginning: A Foundation Report for a Strategy to Revitalize First Nation, Inuit and Métis Languages and Cultures." Report to the Minister of Canadian Heritage by The Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, June 2005. Ottawa. Catalogue No. CH4-96/2005; Chandler, M. J. 2006. "Cultural Continuity in the Face of Radical Social Change: Language Preservation as a Protective Factor against Suicide in First Nations Youth." University of British Columbia. Paper presented at Raising our Voices, Language Conference, Cornwall, Ontario, 15 August 2006.
5. Calculations based on 1996 Census data. Norris, M.J. and L. Jantzen. 2002. Poster and PowerPoint Presentation "From Generation to Generation: Survival and Maintenance of Canada's Aboriginal Languages within Families, Communities and Cities." Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and Canadian Heritage.

6. Norris, M.J. 2006. "Aboriginal Languages in Canada: Trends and Perspectives on Maintenance and Revitalization" In *Aboriginal Policy Research: Moving Forward, Making a Difference*. Eds. J. P. White, S. Wingert, D. Beavon and P. Maxim. Thompson Educational Publishing, Toronto.
7. Norris, M.J. 2003. "From Generation to generation: Survival and Maintenance of Canada's Aboriginal Languages within Families, Communities and Cities." In *Maintaining the Links: Language, Identity and the Lands*. Proceedings of the 7th Conference of the Foundation for Endangered Languages, Broome, Western Australia: 22-24 September, 2003.
8. Norris, M.J. and K. MacCon. 2003. "Aboriginal Language, Transmission and Maintenance in Families: Results of an Intergenerational and Gender-Based Analysis for Canada, 1996." In *Aboriginal Conditions: Research as a Foundation for Public Policy*. Eds. J. White, P. Maxim and D. Beavon. Vancouver: LIBC Press.
9. Statistics Canada, 2006. "Aboriginal Peoples Survey 2001 – Provincial and Territorial Reports: Off reserve Aboriginal Population. Catalogue no. 89-618-XIE, Ottawa.
10. Crystal, D. 2000. *Language Death*. Cambridge University Press.
11. Tulloch, Shelley. 2005 "Inuit Youth: The Future of Inuktitut" in R. O. van Everdingen (comp.), *Proceedings of the 14th Inuit Studies Conference. 11-15 August 2004*, p. 285-300. The Arctic Institute of North America, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Available online at <http://pubs.aina.ucalgary.ca/aina/14thISCProceedings.pdf>.
12. Castellano, B., M. and L. Archibald. 2007. "Healing historic trauma: A report from the Aboriginal Healing Foundation." ([www.ahf.ca](http://www.ahf.ca)) In *Aboriginal Policy Research: Moving Forward, Making a Difference* (Vol. 4) Eds. J.P. White, S. Wingert, D. Beavon and P. Maxim. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing.



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# Time escapes me: Workaholics and time perception

by Leslie-Anne Keown

*Work is more fun than fun* – Noel Coward

**W**ork, regardless of how we define it and whether we are paid for it or not, is a core element of our lives. It adds structure to our waking hours – we have somewhere to be, something to do – and it gives us a sense of identity in the larger world outside the personal circle of family and friends. However, there are some people for whom we think work occupies an even more central place in their lives. And if we think the importance they give their work has become exaggerated, we often call these individuals workaholics.

Workaholics are a stereotype of modern life, and they are both praised and criticized. On the one hand, working to the exclusion of all else may be seen as an asset in the corporate world, and in some professions it may be the accepted way of earning promotion. On the other hand, workaholics may be viewed as neglecting aspects of life such as family and leisure that are important for maintaining a healthy equilibrium.

But perhaps more important in any discussion of workaholics is how they perceive themselves. Being a workaholic – over-dedicated and perhaps overwhelmed by their jobs – is part of their identity. The perceived demands of the job has

become the lens through which they view all their other priorities and the time available to fulfill them.

Using data from 2005 General Social Survey on time use, this article looks at those who identify themselves as workaholics and asks if this self-identification affects their quality of life as measured by the balance between work and family time, time pressure and general life satisfaction.

## **Almost one-third of working Canadians say they are workaholics**

Almost one-third of employed Canadians aged 19 to 64 (31%) identify themselves as workaholics. This percentage has not changed since the General Social Survey (GSS) first began collecting these data in 1992.

Since they are so numerous, it is not surprising that real workaholics don't match the pop culture presentation of workaholics as an elite group of high octane over-achievers. They are no more likely than non-workaholics to be young, highly educated, city dwellers or high-income earners (Table 1). With so little actual socio-demographic difference between workaholics and non-workaholics, we must search somewhere else to find the

distinguishing characteristics that separate the two groups.

## **Workaholics have a different work profile**

Although the popular picture of a workaholic may be one of the high-profile professional, this profile appears to be somewhat inaccurate. Only two broad occupational categories showed a higher percentage of self-reported workaholics than the average – management and trades. Professionals and people in technical and clerical occupations had a significantly lower percentage of those who identify as workaholics among their ranks.

The lower level of workaholics amongst those in a professional occupation is somewhat puzzling. Why would managers be workaholics and professionals not be? Perhaps professionals, such as doctors and lawyers, accept that working longer hours are an integral part of their professional role, whereas managers view these conditions as uncompensated but necessary conditions of their position. As for the higher incidence of workaholics in the trades, an over-abundance of work, coupled with a labour shortage in the skilled trades, might be a contributing factor to this phenomenon.



**Table 1 The occupational profile of workaholics and non-workaholics differs but other demographic differences are not evident**

	Non-workaholics	Workaholics
Average age	40.7	39.8
	(% distribution across)	
Male	56	59*
Female	44	41*
<b>Education</b>		
High school diploma or less	29	27
College diploma/some postsecondary	45	45
University degree	26	28
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married/Common-law	69	67
Other	31	33
<b>Household structure</b>		
Alone	11	11
Couple only	24	23
Couple and children	39	40
Single parent and children	6	6
Other	20	20
<b>Live in a census metropolitan area</b>		
No	33	33
Yes	67	67
<b>Personal income</b>		
Less than \$30,000	28	26
\$30,000 to \$60,000	45	45
More than \$60,000	27	29
<b>Occupation</b>		
Management	8	12*
Professional	21	18*
Technical	8	6*
Clerical	17	12*
Sales and service	23	24
Trades	13	17*
Industry	10	11

\* Significant differences between workaholics and non-workaholics at  $p < .05$ .

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2005.

that they were dissatisfied with their work-life balance, compared to about one-fifth of non-workaholics.

This perceived imbalance between the demands of home and work reflects itself in related areas. A much higher percentage of workaholics than non-workaholics report worrying that they do not spend enough time with friends and family, and that they feel under stress to accomplish more than they can handle.

A sense of disequilibrium is echoed in other aspects of the workaholic's life. People who self-identified as workaholics are more likely to report that they have fair or poor health than non-workaholics. A higher percentage also have trouble going to or staying asleep, perhaps because they are more likely to cut back on sleep when they do not have enough time to finish their other goals during the day.

Not only do workaholics report more negative health effects than non-workaholics, they also indicate lower levels of satisfaction with their life overall. Workaholics are also more likely to report being unsatisfied with the way they spend their non-work time, implying that they know this aspect of their lives could be improved.

Interestingly, workaholics are not different than non-workaholics in terms of their satisfaction with their financial situation. This suggests that the drive to work as they do may arise from some other factor than the need to earn more income.

### Workaholics do not enjoy work more but they are less satisfied with life

The perception of the workaholic as always working does distinguish workaholics from non-workaholics (Chart 1). Workaholics were twice as likely to report they usually worked 50 or more hours per week, at 39% compared with 20% for non-workaholics.

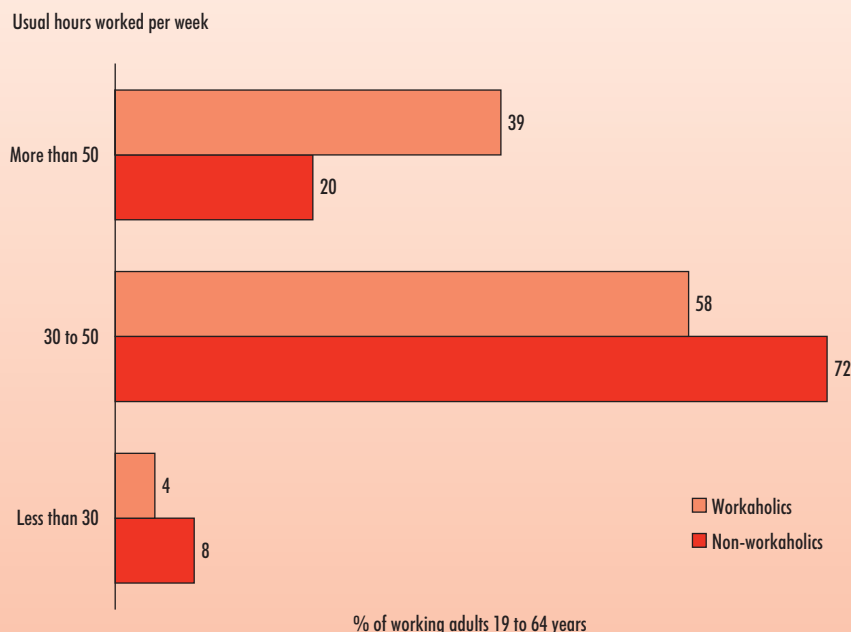
However, they found no more pleasure and satisfaction in their work than non-workaholics. According

to the 2005 GSS, self-reported workaholics did not report that they enjoyed work more than non-workaholics (Table 2). Nor were they more satisfied with their jobs than other workers. This finding does contradict the results of some previous research.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, a key difference between workaholics and non-workaholics is that workaholics are more likely to say that their work and home lives were out of kilter. One-third of workaholics reported

### Workaholics see time slipping through their fingers

The differences between people who see themselves as workaholics and those who do not carry over into their perceptions of time pressures. Overall, workaholics appear to find the unsatisfactory way that time is divided between the priorities in their lives is a source of concern; specifically, they seem to believe that the way they spend their time is somehow beyond their control (Table 3).

**Chart 1 Workaholics tend to work more hours than non-workaholics**

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2005.

A higher proportion of workaholics report that they usually feel rushed trying to get through the day (86% versus 73% of non-workaholics). Over half indicate that they feel trapped in a daily routine. More workaholics than non-workaholics feel that they do not accomplish what they set out to do at the beginning of the day (56% versus 44%). Over one-third of workaholics would like to spend more time alone.

Workaholics seem to recognize that they have a problem using their time effectively. With 56% of workaholics saying they feel they do not have time for fun anymore (much higher than the one-third of non-workaholics), many plan to change their ways. One-third of workaholics reported that they plan to slow down in the coming year, compared to one-fifth of non-workaholics. Whether or not they will be successful in gaining more control over their time is not known.

**Table 2 Workaholics are less satisfied with their work life balance and feel more stressed than non-workaholics**

	Overall	Non-workaholics	Workaholics
<b>Average level of satisfaction with...</b>			
		(Maximum = 10.0)	
Life overall	7.7	7.8	7.5*
Non-work time	7.1	7.3	6.6*
Finances	6.6	6.6	6.5
Work	7.4	7.4	7.4
<b>Average level of enjoyment of work</b>			
	3.8	3.8	3.9
<b>Satisfied with work-life balance</b>			
		(% distribution downward)	
No	24	19	34*
Yes	76	81	66*
<b>Self-rated health</b>			
Fair/Poor	10	9	12*
Good/Excellent	90	91	88*
<b>Experience trouble going to or staying asleep</b>			
No	72	74	66*
Yes	28	26	34*
<b>Cut back on sleep when you do not have enough time</b>			
No	45	50	35*
Yes	55	50	65*
<b>Feel under stress to accomplish more than you can handle</b>			
No	59	67	42*
Yes	41	33	58*
<b>Worry that you do not spend enough time with family or friends</b>			
No	49	55	35*
Yes	51	45	65*

\* Significant differences between workaholics and non-workaholics at  $p < .05$ .

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2005.

**Table 3 Workaholics and non-workaholics differ in their perception of time and workaholics feel more stressed about time**

	Overall	Non-workaholics	Workaholics
(% distribution downward)			
<b>Feel rushed</b>			
Usually	77	73	86*
Occasionally	20	23	12*
Never	3	3	2
<b>Feel under stress when you do not have enough time</b>			
No	38	42	29*
Yes	62	58	71*
<b>Feel trapped in a daily routine</b>			
No	57	61	48*
Yes	43	39	52*
<b>Feel you do not have time for fun anymore</b>			
No	59	66	44*
Yes	41	34	56*
<b>Would like to spend more time alone</b>			
No	70	73	65*
Yes	30	27	35*
<b>Feel like you have not accomplished what you set out to do</b>			
No	52	56	44*
Yes	48	44	56*
<b>Plan to slow down in the coming year</b>			
No	76	80	68*
Yes	24	20	32*

\* Significant differences between workaholics and non-workaholics at  $p < .05$ .

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2005.

But given that being a workaholic is now part of their identity, we might guess this is an elusive goal.

### Summary

Almost one-third of working adults perceive themselves as workaholics. Yet discovering what differentiates the workaholic from the non-workaholic is more difficult than it may first appear. Workaholics and non-workaholics do not differ from each other in any socio-demographic way. Workaholics work more hours and have a slightly different occupational profile than non-workaholics, but this is not the distinguishing characteristic between the two groups.

Rather, self-reported workaholics and non-workaholics have distinctively different ways in which they view their time and the way they allocate

that time to their various priorities. Time appears to slip through the workaholic's fingers. They devote more effort to work, but they derive no more satisfaction or pleasure from it than do non-workaholics. They are dissatisfied with their work-life balance and wish they could spend more time with family and friends. Alternatively, they would like to spend more time alone. Perceived lack of time is a bigger stressor in their everyday lives than it is for non-workaholics. It leaves them feeling rushed, trapped in their daily routines and unable to finish everything they think needs to be done. Overall, time seems to escape them.

  
**Leslie-Anne Keown** is an analyst with *Canadian Social Trends*.

1. Bonebright, C., D. Clay and R. Ankenmann. 2000. "The relationship of workaholism with work-life conflict, life satisfaction, and purpose in life." *Journal of Counselling Psychology*. Vol. 47, no. 4. p. 469-477; Spence, J. and A. Robbins. 1992. "Workaholism: Definition, measurement, and preliminary results." *Journal of Personality Assessment*. Vol. 58, no. 1. p. 160-178.

## CST What you should know about this study

Data used in this article come from the 2005 General Social Survey on time use, which interviewed Canadians aged 15 and over living in the ten provinces. This study is focused on adults 19 to 64 years old whose main activity during the year was working. The target population is based on approximately 9,700 respondents and represents over 13.4 million Canadians.

**Workaholic:** All respondents who answered "Yes" to the question "Do you consider yourself a workaholic?" This self-identification is based purely on the respondent's perception of time, and not on the actual number of hours they work.

The term "workaholic" is used in the popular literature more than in the field of psychology, where the term "work dependency" is often preferred. The word itself came into use in the 1970s and has become an enduring term in common language. Previous research has suggested that about 1 in 4 individuals perceive themselves as workaholics,<sup>1</sup> and a number of different subtypes have been identified in the

academic literature.<sup>2</sup> Depending on their responses to screening questions, workaholics may be classified as anything from a "work enthusiast" to an "unengaged worker."<sup>3</sup>

For further information on classification of subtypes of workaholics, and on the concept as a whole, see J. Spence and A. Robbins, 1992. "Workaholism: Definition, measurement, and preliminary results." *Journal of Personality Assessment*. Vol. 58, no.1. p.160-178.

1. Bonebright, Clay and Ankenmann. 2000; Burke, R. 1999. "Workaholism in Organizations: Gender Differences." *Sex Roles*. Vol. 41, no. 5/6. p. 333-345; Griffiths, M. 2005. "Workaholism is still a useful construct." *Addiction Theory and Research*. Vol. 13, no. 2. p. 97-100; Kemeny, A. 2002. "Driven to excel: A portrait of Canada's workaholics." *Canadian Social Trends*. No. 62. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-008-XIE. p. 2-7; Spence and Robbins.1992.
2. Robinson, B. 2000. "Workaholism: Bridging the gap between workplace, sociocultural and family research." *Journal of Employment Counselling*. Vol. 37, March. p. 31-47.
3. Spence and Robbins. 1992.



# Canadians and their non-voting political activity

by Leslie-Anne Keown

*The job of a citizen is to keep his mouth open* – Günter Grass

One in three non-retired 19- to 64-year-olds was politically active in 2003. They searched for political information, volunteered for a political party, joined a political party, and/or wrote a newspaper or politician to express their views. These forms of non-voting participation in the democratic process are often examined to assess the health of a democracy and the civic engagement of its citizens.

Researchers argue that the factors which influence whether or not an individual will participate in the political arena can be classified into four main categories: socio-demographic characteristics such as age and education; attitudes towards the extent of perception of control over life chances (mastery); direct experiences with the democratic and political process as a youth (often called political socialization); and whether one actively follows news and what medium is used to do so.

This article uses the 2003 General Social Survey to consider what factors influence Canadians to take part in non-voting political activity. In order to identify the relative importance of these different factors on the probability of engaging in this type of political activity, a multivariate statistical analysis was conducted.

This analysis allows the unique contribution of each factor on the likelihood of participating to be identified. Only non-retired Canadians between the ages of 19 and 64 were included in the study.

## **Most common form of non-voting political activity is searching for information**

This article considers four forms of non-voting political participation. These include searching for political information, volunteering for a political party, joining a political party, and/or writing to a newspaper or politician to express one's views. Overall, one in three Canadians engaged in at least one of these four activities (Chart 1). The most common activity was searching for political information. Volunteering for a political party or being a member of a political party were less common, perhaps because these kinds of activities are more common when nominations for candidates are underway or an actual election is being held.

## **Younger adults and men are more likely to participate in the political domain**

Several socio-demographic characteristics have a significant impact on whether or not someone is more likely

than another person to participate in the political arena. Age is important, once other factors in the model are held constant (Table 1). Younger adults aged 19 to 24 were 1.2 times more likely to engage in non-voting activity than older Canadians aged 45 to 64.<sup>1</sup> Those aged 25 to 44 were the least likely to participate, with their odds of involvement being 1.3 times lower. This finding is somewhat different than results of other researchers and may simply reflect the choice of activities being considered in this study.<sup>2</sup>

Gender was also a significant indicator of political involvement among non-retired Canadians aged 19 to 64. Men were 1.5 times more likely to engage in non-voting activities than women. This is not surprising given the higher involvement of men in the formal arena of electoral politics.

The language most commonly spoken at home is also influential. Speaking English produces odds about 1.3 times higher than speaking a language other than English or French. There was no significant difference in the likelihood of non-voting political participation between those who spoke English and those who spoke French, once other factors in the model were controlled for.

Table 1 Education and a history of civic involvement influence participation in political activity

	Odds ratios		Odds ratios
<b>Demographic characteristics</b>		<b>Attendance at religious services</b>	
<i>Women</i>	1.00	Not regular attendee	0.86*
<i>Men</i>	1.49*	<i>Regular attendee</i>	1.00
<b>Age group</b>		<b>Mastery (perceptions of control over life's chances)</b>	
19 to 25 years	1.22*	Low level	0.73*
25 to 44 years	0.76*	Average level	0.76*
45 to 64 years	1.00	<i>High level</i>	1.00
<b>Marital status</b>		<b>News and current affairs information</b>	
<i>Not married</i>	1.00	Regularly follow news and current affairs	
Married (including common-law)	0.96	<i>No</i>	1.00
<b>Household income</b>		<i>Yes</i>	1.75*
Less than \$30,000	1.09	Use only TV to follow news and current affairs	
<i>\$30,000 to \$60,000</i>	1.00	<i>No</i>	1.00
More than \$60,000	1.08	<i>Yes</i>	0.56*
Refused, not stated	0.97	<b>Parental Influence</b>	
<b>Place of birth</b>		<b>Father's education</b>	
<i>Born in Canada</i>	1.00	<i>Less than university</i>	1.00
Born outside Canada	0.84	University degree	1.33*
<b>Language of preference</b>		<b>Mother's education</b>	
<i>English</i>	1.00	<i>Less than university</i>	1.00
French	0.91	University degree	1.26*
Other	0.76*	<b>Parents did volunteer work when respondent was in secondary school</b>	
<b>Region of residence</b>		<i>No</i>	1.00
Atlantic	0.84	<i>Yes</i>	1.34*
Quebec	1.01	<b>Political socialization in school</b>	
<i>Ontario</i>	1.00	<b>Respondent belonged to youth group when in secondary school</b>	
Prairies	1.07	<i>No</i>	1.00
B.C.	1.01	<i>Yes</i>	1.21*
<b>Urban/Rural</b>		<b>Respondent participated in student government when in secondary school</b>	
<i>Urban</i>	1.00	<i>No</i>	1.00
Rural	0.91	<i>Yes</i>	1.67*
<b>Level of education</b>			
<i>High school or less</i>	1.00		
Some postsecondary/College diploma	1.89*		
University degree	3.19*		

\* Significantly different than reference group shown in italics at  $p < .05$ .

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2003.

### Postsecondary education is the most important influence on participation in the political sphere

However, the most important personal characteristic to influence involvement in non-voting political activity is level of education. Over half (51%) of those with a university education had been active in the political arena in the previous year whereas fewer than one-fifth (18%) of

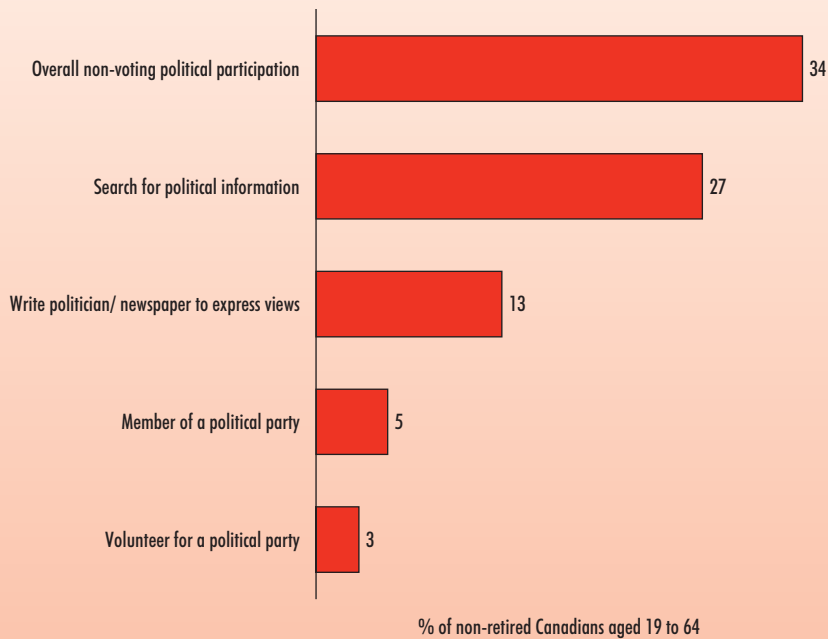
those with no more than high school indicated they had engaged in such activity (Chart 2).

So, after taking account of the effect of other influences, it is not surprising that non-retired 19- to 64-year-olds with some postsecondary education or a college diploma were 1.9 times more likely to engage in political activity than those with a high school education; meanwhile, those with a university degree were

3.2 times more likely to do so. Researchers think that higher levels of education influence the likelihood of political activity because well-educated individuals are assumed to be more familiar with the workings of the democratic system and therefore to be more comfortable operating in the political environment.<sup>3</sup>

Religious attendance also influenced political activities, with frequent attendees at religious

**Chart 1 One in three non-retired Canadians participate in some non-voting political activity**



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2003.

services 1.2 times more likely to participate. Previous research has found that regular attendance at religious services both highlights opportunities for political participation as well as providing a place where individuals can connect with their community and help respond to its needs.<sup>4</sup>

Marital status, income, place of birth, region of residence, and living in a rural or urban area were not significant influences on non-voting political behaviour, once other factors were controlled for.

### Having a sense of mastery associated with political participation

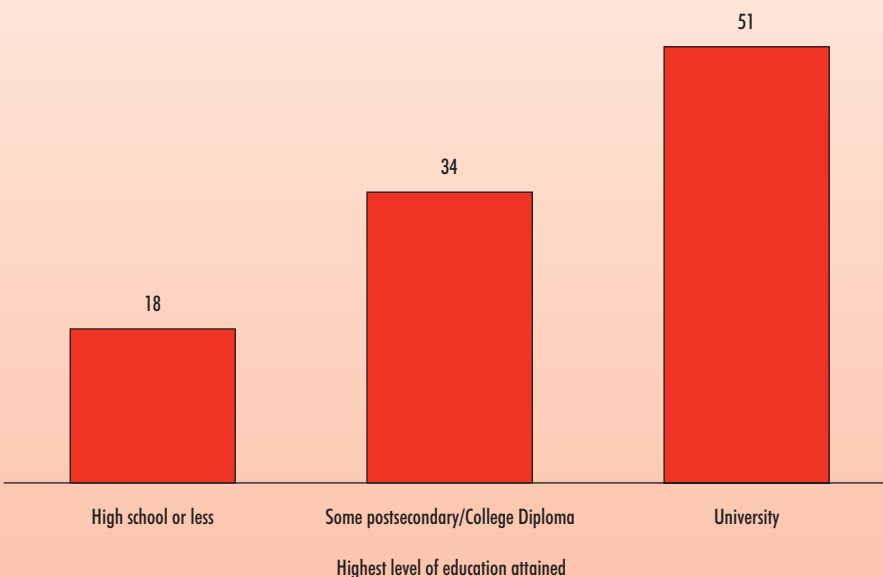
The model results show that sense of mastery – that is, the extent of a person's perception of control over his or her life chances<sup>5</sup> — is also an important indicator of political activity. A higher level of mastery increases the probability of being involved in the political arena when compared to those with an average or low sense of mastery, even once the influence of education and other factors is controlled for. This is supported by other research which has found that when individuals feel that they can influence certain issues, they are more likely to become involved than when they do not feel the possibilities for change or action are within the realm of their control.<sup>6</sup>

### Children follow in their parents' footsteps

The extent of a person's exposure to civic or political activity when they were young – a process called political socialization – influences whether or not they participate in the political arena as an adult.<sup>7</sup> These youthful experiences include having a parent who participated in community activities. Just as children may follow their parents into the family business or into similar professions, parents lay the groundwork for their children's political participation through their education and volunteering activities.

**Chart 2 Postsecondary education encourages participation in the non-voting political arena**

% of non-retired Canadians aged 19 to 64



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2003.

## CST What you should know about this study

The 2003 General Social Survey (GSS) on social engagement surveyed about 25,000 Canadians aged 15 and older living in private households in the 10 provinces. It was developed to explore the measurement of social capital and develop a better understanding of how social networks and norms of trust and reciprocity contribute to individual and social outcomes. For this purpose, the survey collected information on a wide range of activities, such as social contacts with family, friends and neighbours; involvement in organizations, political activities and volunteer work; and the informal care they provide or receive. It also explored the values and attitudes and the level of trust in people and in public institutions. Overall, the survey provided comprehensive information on the many ways that Canadians engage in civic and social life.

The target population is based on a sample of just over 13,000 respondents and represents over 13.5 million non-retired Canadians aged 19 to 64. The reasons for restricting the study population are:

- a) those 19 and older, as people in this age group are most likely to be eligible to fully participate in the political process and to do so voluntarily;
- b) those under the age of 65, as seniors have very different patterns of engagement due to a number of factors such as mobility restrictions and extended leisure time;
- c) individuals who are employed, attending school or engaged in household work or caring for family members (that is, not retired from the workforce), as they are subject to more time constraints than retired persons.

**Political participation/participation in the political arena:** The four forms of political participation considered in this study are searching for political information, volunteering

for a political party, belonging to a political party, and writing to a newspaper or contacting a politician to express your views. An individual had to report engaging in at least one of these activities to be classified as participating in the political arena.

Forms of participation where the explicitly political nature of the activity could not be determined are not included. These excluded activities are boycotting products or services (which may be done for ethical as well as political reasons) and participating in a march or demonstration. For instance, an individual who took part in a walk to raise funds for breast cancer may have reported that they had participated in a march or demonstration.

Voting is considered by many to be the benchmark measure for political participation and civic engagement. However, since elections are only held periodically, measures that look at more constant forms of political behaviour are often chosen instead. In addition, eligibility to vote could not be determined using the GSS, thereby limiting the usefulness of the voting measure.

Of course, there are many forms of political participation that citizens may engage in that are outside the realm of the questions asked in the General Social Survey. These forms of participation are no less important

### **Multivariate analysis**

The statistical analysis uses odds ratios to identify various characteristics associated with the likelihood of participating in the political arena. The results indicate whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the various characteristics included in the model, while holding the effects of the other variables constant.

Forty-one percent of Canadians whose parent had been a volunteer participated in the political arena (Chart 3). Controlling for other influences, the model shows that individuals whose parents had volunteered in the community when they were in secondary school were 1.3 times more likely to engage in political activities than individuals whose parents did not volunteer.

Level of parental education was also an important factor. If either parent had a university degree, then the odds of participating in non-voting political activity were approximately 1.3 times greater than if parents had less education. If both parents had a university degree the effect was even greater, with the odds of political participation rising to 1.7. Higher parental education is thought to be important because

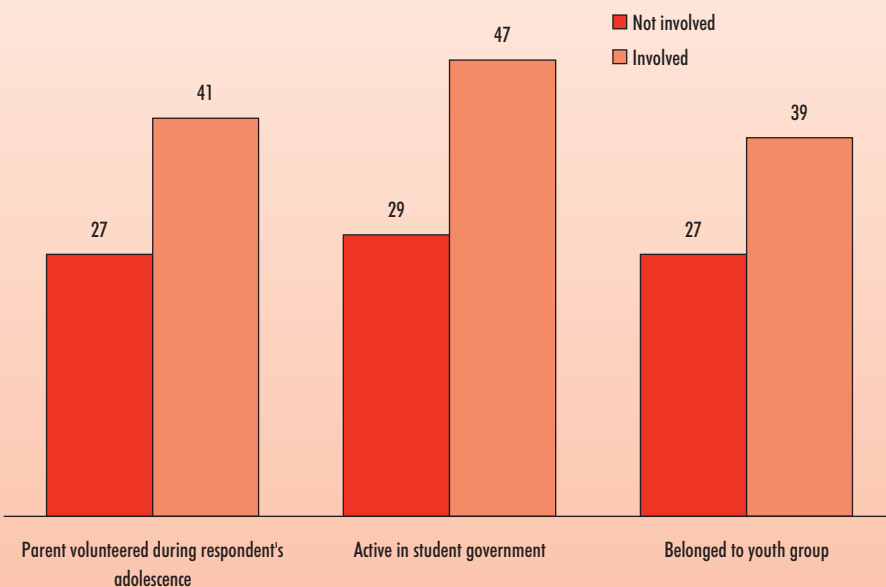
the well-educated are more likely to participate in political activities, to follow and to discuss political issues, thus creating opportunities for their children to observe and model such behaviour.<sup>8</sup>

Not only do children tend to follow in their parents' footsteps, but their own experience with extra-curricular activities in secondary school also serve as a form of political socialization that increases



**Chart 3 Almost half of all individuals involved in student government as an adolescent had participated in a non-voting political activity**

% of non-retired Canadians aged 19 to 64



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2003.

the likelihood of participating in the political arena in later years. Almost half (47%) of those Canadians who participated in student government or belonged to a youth group also engaged in non-voting political activities as an adult.

Controlling for other influences, individuals who participated in youth groups such as Guides, Scouts or 4-H clubs were 1.2 times more likely to take part in at least one form of political engagement as an adult. Additionally, they were 1.7 times more likely to participate if they had been involved in student government. Not only do these findings reflect the importance of political socialization but they also suggest that individuals may self-select to participate in political activities at a relatively young age.<sup>9</sup>

### Being plugged into the news increases the likelihood of political involvement

A previous study that also used data from the 2003 General Social Survey

suggested that there is a relationship between Canadians' civic engagement and their habits of following news and current events.<sup>10</sup> This study confirms that finding. Controlling for other factors, Canadians who follow the news on a weekly or daily basis are 1.8 times more likely to participate in the political arena than those who follow the news less frequently. On the other hand, those whose sole source of news information is television were 1.8 times less likely to engage in non-voting political activity than those who included sources such as the newspaper or Internet in their news media consumption.

This result supports previous work which has found that knowledge of current affairs is one of the most important elements influencing involvement in political affairs because knowledge forms the necessary basis on which to predicate action. In addition, the form in which this information is received is important, since television is the news medium that is least likely to

have a motivating influence on future action.<sup>11</sup>

### Summary

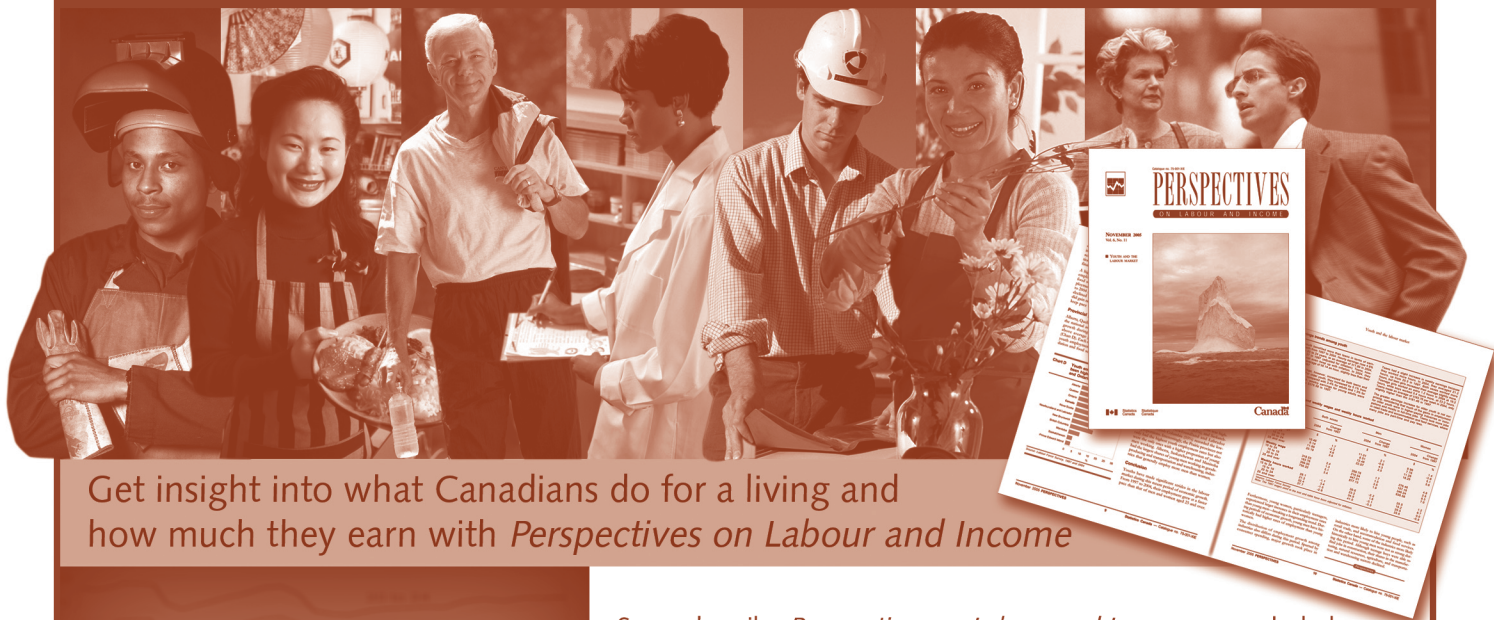
In 2003, about one third of non-retired Canadians between the ages of 19 and 64 participated in political activities. Those with a university degree were much more likely than others to participate. Likewise, knowledge of current affairs and news facilitated involvement, with the source of news playing an important role in whether or not someone took part. A feeling of control over one's life chances (mastery) was also associated with the likelihood of political engagement. Finally, adolescent experiences affected whether a person was likely to be politically active. Having parents with a high level of education and a history of volunteer activity influenced a person's current involvement in non-voting political activities. Similarly, a person's own history with youth groups and student government while in secondary school were significant indicators of non-voting political engagement in adulthood.

**Leslie-Anne Keown** is an analyst with *Canadian Social Trends*.

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