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A day in the life: How do older Canadians spend their time?

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A day in the life: How do older Canadians spend their time?

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Overview of the study

This study uses the 2015 General Social Survey on Time Use to examine the time spent by Canadian seniors aged 65 and over on various activities. The paper focuses on three types of activities: unpaid household work, active pursuits and passive leisure activities. It examines the factors associated with time spent on these activities, and also provides comparisons with the 1986 General Social Survey on Time Use.

- In 2015, 91% of senior women (aged 65 and over) engaged in unpaid household work on a typical day, compared with 83% of senior men. When they engaged in unpaid household work, senior women also spent more time on such activities (3.5 hours a day) than senior men did (2.9 hours).
- About three-quarters of men and women aged 65 and over engaged in active pursuits such as exercising, socializing and using technology, spending approximately 3.5 hours doing so on a typical day. A further 9 in 10 seniors also engaged in passive leisure activities such as watching television and reading.
- Factors that affect the time use of seniors include age, sex, employment status, educational attainment and living arrangements. Older seniors, for example, spend more time on passive leisure activities (e.g., watching television and reading) and sleep more than younger seniors.
- Health status also affects seniors' participation in some activities. Seniors who reported that their health was poor or fair were less likely to participate in socializing and reading, as well as civic, religious and organizational activities than those who said that their health status was excellent or very good.
- Between 1986 and 2015, the participation rate of senior women in active pursuits declined, from 77% to 69%. In addition, both senior men and women decreased their average time spent on active pursuits over the period, by 35 minutes and 40 minutes a day, respectively.

Introduction

The population in Canada, as in many industrialized countries, is aging. As a result of longer life spans and lower fertility, the share of the population aged 65 and over has been slowly increasing since the early 20th century.¹

The aging of the Canadian population, and the retirement of baby boomers, has attracted quite a bit of attention by government and researchers in past decades.² Existing research has focused on the economic and financial pressures brought about by the aging population.³ This includes financial pressure on the health care system

and how to care for seniors, as well as the adequacy of retirement savings and how to manage retirement pensions as the number of retirees increases.

At the same time, a growing body of research examines how older Canadians spend their time, particularly to determine their labour force participation. The findings are important because in Canada, as in other industrialized countries, people are retiring later and living longer.⁴ For example, the 2016 Census showed that more people are working past the age of 65: nearly 1 in 5 Canadians aged

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65 and over reported working at some point during the previous year, which was almost double the proportion in 1995.

Understanding how older individuals spend their time is also essential as many seniors continue to contribute to society in other ways (such as volunteering and caregiving)—their contributions do not necessarily end because they are no longer formally employed.⁵ Research has found that seniors who volunteer give more hours than those in any other age group.⁶ They are also more likely to engage in charitable giving and, although they are the least common group of caregivers, they are the most likely to spend the greatest number of hours providing care.⁷

Once seniors retire, what are they doing with their extra free time? Are they using their time to volunteer, exercise or travel? Could it be that they are spending their post-retirement years in a more inactive

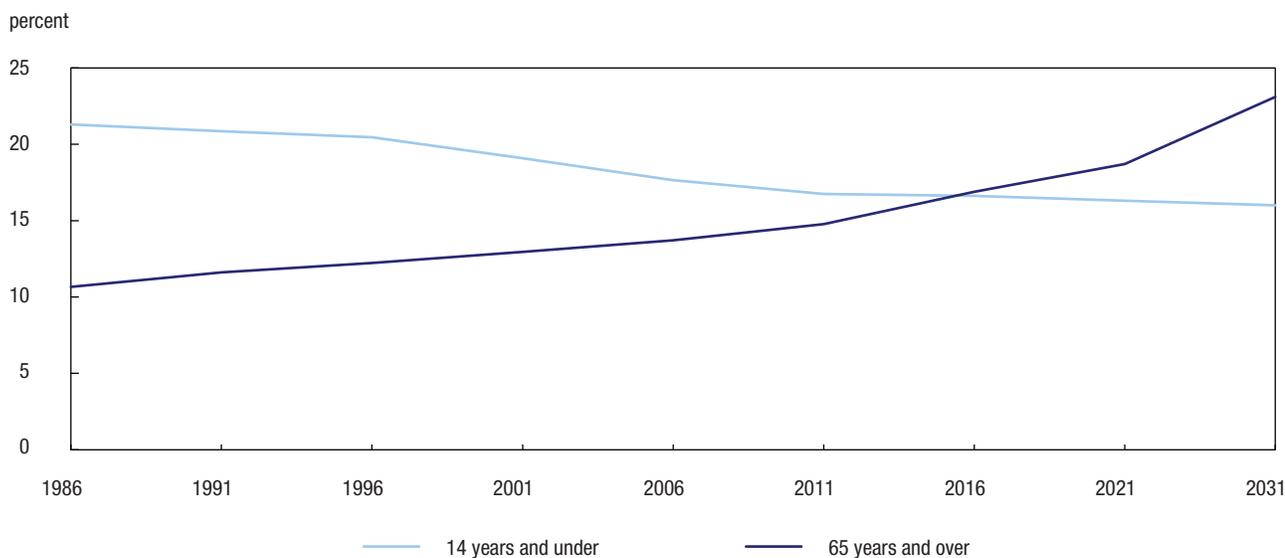
way?⁸ Existing research using data from time use surveys in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands has shown that, as people age, there is a definite shift in time allocation from paid work to leisure activities.⁹ It is also important to note that, according to this research, part of that increase can be attributed to more passive leisure activities and not necessarily active pursuits.¹⁰ In addition, existing health research has found that seniors spend the most time on sedentary activities.¹¹

Moreover, existing research has shown the importance of being socially engaged throughout the aging process.¹² Older age is a transitional period when people experience changes not only in physical health, but also in social roles that can influence how seniors organize their time and social activities. Some studies suggest that social engagement in meaningful

activities and maintaining close relationships may be particularly important for older adults.¹³ Maintaining connections to family and friends, however, may be more difficult for seniors: research has also shown that social networks become smaller with age.¹⁴

This article uses data from the General Social Survey (GSS) on Time Use to examine how seniors spend their days on selected activities. The first part of this paper includes an analysis of the sociodemographic factors associated with time use for seniors in 2015. The second section of the paper adds to the existing research by examining, in a multivariate model, the factors associated with participation in selected activities. Lastly, the paper also briefly examines the differences in time use among seniors over a 30-year period by comparing the 2015 GSS with data from the 1986 GSS on Time Use.

Chart 1
Proportion of children aged 14 years and under and proportion of people aged 65 years and over, 1986 to 2031



Note: The population estimates based on the 2011 Census (adjusted for undercoverage) are the base population for the projection data.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1986 to 2016; population projections from the M1 growth scenario of national projections, 2021 to 2031.

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Senior population continues to increase

According to the 2016 Census, there were 5.9 million seniors in Canada, which accounted for 16.9% of the total population. In comparison, there were 2.4 million seniors in 1981, or 10% of the population.

The first baby boomers turned 65 in 2011, which has led to the largest increase (+20%) in the number of seniors in Canada in 70 years. In addition, although they represent a relatively small proportion of the overall senior population, centenarians were the fastest-growing population between 2011 and 2016 (+41%). The overall population in Canada, in comparison, grew by 5% during the same period.¹⁵ As a result of the rapid

increase in the number of seniors, 2016 marked the first time that the census enumerated more seniors than children aged 14 and under.

The proportion of the population aged 65 and over is also expected to continue to increase over the coming decades and, by 2031, there may be as many as 9.6 million seniors in Canada, which would represent 23% of the total population (Chart 1).¹⁶ An aging population has important implications as more Canadians are receiving an old age pension and are seeking health care and services, while housing and transportation needs are also changing. As a result, understanding the factors associated with time use among this growing population can provide information for policymakers to develop long-term strategies.

Another important factor is that the senior population is increasingly female, given that women have a longer life expectancy than men.¹⁷ According to the 2016 Census, among seniors (aged 65 and over), the number of women exceeded the number of men by more than 20%, while there were two women for every man in the population aged 85 and over.

Senior women and men spend their time in different ways

This section explores many of the factors associated with seniors' participation in different activities in 2015. Data constraints meant it was necessary to combine activities for the analysis, and therefore this study focuses on larger categories of activities. Nevertheless, the results

Table 1
Participation rate and time spent on selected activities, men and women aged 65 and over, 2015

	Participation rate		Average time spent (participants)			
	Men (ref.)	Women	Men (ref.)	Women	Men (ref.)	Women
	percent		minutes		hours	
Paid work	13	6*	398	343	6.6	5.7
Unpaid household work	83	91*	177	209*	2.9	3.5*
Meal preparation	61	76*	78	91*	1.3	1.5*
Indoor cleaning	33	68*	75	122*	1.2	2.0*
Outdoor cleaning/maintenance	30	10*	166	99*	2.8	1.7*
Other unpaid work	28	34*	86	80	1.4	1.3
Shopping for goods and services	36	39	82	87	1.4	1.4
Active pursuits	75	77	213	209	3.6	3.5
Engaging in civic, religious and organizational activities	8	10	119	131	2.0	2.2
Socializing and communicating	37	46*	135	135	2.2	2.2
Engaging in cultural activities	3 ^E	4	138	156	2.3	2.6
Engaging in leisure and physical activities	44	39*	132	133	2.2	2.2
Using technology	30	27	129	110	2.1	1.8
Passive leisure activities	92	89	291	276	4.9	4.6
Watching television or videos	87	82*	255	235*	4.2	3.9*
Listening to music and radio	6	3*	104	109	1.7	1.8
Reading	35	41*	119	119	2.0	2.0
Sleeping	100	100	542	544	9.0	9.1

^E use with caution

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) (p < 0.05)

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2015.

showcase some of the important characteristics associated with time use allocation among this growing population.

The 2015 GSS data on time use show that senior women and men spend their time in different ways. This suggests that gender differences in paid and domestic work persist among seniors, even though they have generally transitioned out of employment and parental roles.¹⁸ For example, the participation rate for paid work among senior men (i.e., the proportion of persons who reported having done an activity on an average day) was 13% versus 6% for senior women.¹⁹

There are also differences in unpaid household work. The participation rate for senior women was 91% versus 83% for senior men (Table 1). Further examination of unpaid household work showed differences in the participation rates for certain activities. For example, senior women are two times more likely than senior men (68% versus 33%) to do some indoor cleaning during the day, and they are also more likely to engage in meal preparation than their male counterparts (76% versus 61%). At the same time, women aged 65 and over reported spending, on average, significantly more time on these activities. For instance, senior women spent an average of 47 more minutes per day on indoor cleaning and 13 more minutes on meal preparation.

The only exception is for outdoor cleaning/maintenance activities: senior men are more likely to participate in these activities than senior women (30% versus 10%). When senior men do outdoor work, they spend more than one extra hour (an additional 67 minutes) on it than senior women.

In addition to taking unpaid household work into account, it is also important to examine other types of activities such as leisure and recreational pursuits and television watching. Various types of leisure activities have different implications for well-being and aging. For example, some activities can help maintain physical and social capabilities and promote health, while others are less beneficial as they are more sedentary and can be more socially isolating.²⁰

For the purposes of this paper, active pursuits refer to activities that require some level of engagement. These include activities such as socializing and communicating; volunteering; walking; exercising; participating in organized sports; attending cultural events; pursuing hobbies; writing letters, books and poems; and using technology such as the Internet. Passive leisure activities, on the other hand, refer to unstructured or passive forms of activity. These include watching television, listening to music and reading²¹ (see the *Data sources, methods and definitions* section for a detailed list of variables that make up the active pursuits and passive leisure activities categories).

The results show that senior women and men are as likely to be involved in active and passive pursuits, however, they engage in different types of activities. For active pursuits, senior men were more likely to engage in leisure and physical activities (44% versus 39%) while senior women were more likely to participate in socializing and communicating (46% versus 37%). For passive leisure activities, senior women were more likely to read (41% versus 35%) while senior men were more likely to watch television (87% versus 82%).

Although senior men and senior women may participate in different activities, the amount of time they spend on these activities is not significantly different. The only exception is watching television as senior women spend less time, on average, on this activity (3.9 hours versus 4.2 hours per day).

Seniors' participation in selected activities varies by age

This section examines the amount of time spent on selected activities by age group. Current seniors (aged 65 and over) are compared with future seniors (aged 55 to 64) to present how activities change as individuals age and move into their later years. In addition, current seniors are split into two age groups: those aged 65 to 74 and those aged 75 and over.

The data show that the participation rate for unpaid household activities does not vary across age groups (Table 2). Specifically, 85% of future seniors (aged 55 to 64) engaged in unpaid household work over the course of a given day, compared with 88% for those aged 65 to 74 and 87% for those aged 75 and over.

In addition, the data show that the average amount of time spent on unpaid household activities is lower for those aged 55 to 64 (3.1 hours) than for those aged 65 to 74 (3.3 hours). However, the time spent remains fairly unchanged for the oldest age group (3.2 hours). It is possible that although seniors have more time for household work, the demand for this type of work declines due to smaller household sizes. Furthermore, it is also possible that older adults may also experience disabilities or be

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in poorer health, which may make certain activities, including household work, more challenging.²²

For other activities, the participation rates for civic, religious and organizational activities vary slightly across the different age groups. The participation rate in such activities was 10% for seniors aged 75 and over compared with 8% for those aged 65 to 74. The participation rate for future seniors was 6%, which is not significantly different from the reference category. Although there are some differences in the participation rates, the data also show that the time spent on these activities remains fairly consistent across all age groups.

There are, however, differences in the participation rates for leisure and physical activities by age. Future seniors had a lower participation rate for such activities compared with those aged 65 to 74 (33% versus 41%) while, among the oldest seniors, the participation rate remained at 41%. However, the amount of time

spent on these activities did not vary by age. Seniors in all three age groups who engaged in these activities spent just over two hours doing so. In addition, and consistent with existing research, seniors aged 75 and over were significantly less likely to use technology than those aged 65 to 74 (22% versus 33%).²³ However, among those who used technology, the time they spent did not vary significantly across the different age groups.

The data also show that the participation rates and time spent on more passive activities significantly varies across age groups. Not only do the participation rates for watching television and reading increase with age, but the data also show an increase by age in time spent on these activities. For example, the average time spent watching television increased by one hour for persons between the ages of 55 and 64 as well as for those 75 and over. A similar relationship can be found between reading and aging. This suggests that, as seniors age and

move away from paid work, some of that time is being replaced by more passive activities.

Finally, the amount of time seniors spend sleeping also increases with age. This is consistent with existing research that shows time spent sleeping increases with age for both men and women, although short sleep duration and poor sleep quality have also been found to be common among seniors.²⁴ The data show that persons aged 55 to 64 spend an average of 8.5 hours sleeping. Seniors aged 65 to 74 spend 8.9 hours sleeping, compared with 9.3 hours for those aged 75 and over.

Employment plays an important role in seniors' participation in selected activities

In order to better understand how seniors spend their time, the role of employment on how much time seniors spend on certain activities should be considered. For instance,

Table 2
Participation rate and time spent on selected activities, by age group, 2015

Activities	Participation rate			Average time spent (participants)		
	55 to 64	65 to 74 (ref.)	75 and over	55 to 64	65 to 74 (ref.)	75 and over
	percent			hours		
Doing unpaid household work	85	88	87	3.1*	3.3	3.2
Engaging in civic, religious and organizational activities	6	8	10*	2.1	2.3	1.8
Socializing and communicating	42	41	43	2.3	2.3	2.2
Engaging in leisure and physical activities	33*	41	41	2.3	2.2	2.3
Using technology	30	33	22*	1.7	2.0	2.0
Watching television and videos	76*	83	86	3.3*	3.9	4.3*
Reading	24*	36	42*	1.5*	1.8	2.2*
Sleeping	100	100	100	8.5*	8.9	9.3*

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) (p < 0.05)

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2015.

Table 3
Participation rate and time spent on selected activities, by employment status, 2015

Activities	Participation rate		Average time spent (participants)	
	Employed (ref.)	Not employed	Employed (ref.)	Not employed
	percent		hours	
Doing unpaid household work	78	89*	2.5	3.3*
Engaging in civic, religious and organizational activities	9	9	1.9	2.1
Socializing and communicating	36	43	2.4	2.2
Engaging in leisure and physical activities	30	42*	1.7	2.2*
Using technology	33	28	1.8	2.0
Watching television and videos	80	85	3.0	4.2*
Reading	31	39*	1.4	2.0*

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2015.

employment may affect time use more than age because of its influence and impact on economic resources, time availability, and possible opportunities for social engagement and other activities.²⁵ In general, older individuals who have transitioned out of employment²⁶ are more likely to participate and spend a greater number of hours engaged in other activities. For example, participation in unpaid household work is lower for seniors who continue to work, at 78%, versus 89% for those who are not employed (Table 3).

A comparison of seniors' engagement in civic, religious and organizational activities (which includes volunteer work) shows that their rate of participation did not vary depending on whether or not they were employed (9% for each). In addition, the average time spent on these activities between the employed and those who are not employed was not significant. A similar trend was found for participation and time spent socializing and communicating.

However, employment status matters when it comes to leisure and physical activities. Those who are not employed have a significantly higher participation rate than those who are employed (42% versus 30%).²⁷ Seniors who are not employed are not only more likely to engage in these activities but, when they participate in leisure and physical activities, they are also more likely to spend additional time (30 minutes) on them than seniors who are still employed.

The results for passive activities also show that the participation rate for reading is higher for those who are not employed than for the employed (39% versus 31%), while the proportions are not significantly different for watching television (85% versus 80%). For time spent by seniors who engaged in these passive activities, the data show that those who are not employed spend an additional 1.2 hours (74 minutes) watching television. In addition, time spent reading is significantly higher for seniors who are not employed than for those who are still employed (an additional 39 minutes).

Healthier seniors are more likely to participate in active pursuits

Existing research has found that, compared with those who report fair or poor health, healthy older individuals spend more time on certain activities such as unpaid work and active leisure pursuits.²⁸

The participation rate of seniors in unpaid household work did not vary significantly by health status. Specifically, 89% of seniors who reported their health as excellent or very good engaged in unpaid household work on a given day, while the proportion decreased to 84% for seniors who reported their health as fair or poor (Table 4). Among seniors who did report time spent on unpaid household work, however, those who reported their health as fair or poor spent less time in this activity than healthy seniors. The average time spent on unpaid work increased from 2.9 hours for those who reported fair or poor health to 3.4 hours for those in excellent or very good health. This is consistent with research that found some activities such as household work may be more difficult for older adults in poorer health.²⁹

In general, the participation rate for active pursuits varies significantly by health status. For example, the participation rate for civic, religious and organizational activities was significantly lower for seniors who reported their health as fair or poor compared with those in excellent or very good health (5% versus 10%). Similar results were found for socializing and communicating as well as for leisure and physical activities. Despite the gap in the participation rates for these activities, the average time spent by participants

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Table 4
Participation rate and time spent on selected activities, by self-rated health, 2015

Activities	Participation rate			Average time spent (participants)		
	Excellent or very good (ref.)	Good	Fair or poor	Excellent or very good (ref.)	Good	Fair or poor
	percent			hours		
Doing unpaid household work	89	87	84	3.4	3.2	2.9*
Engaging in civic, religious and organizational activities	10	9	5*	2.3	1.9	2.1
Socializing and communicating	45	41	37*	2.3	2.2	2.4
Engaging in leisure and physical activities	45	39	36*	2.2	2.1	2.3
Using technology	32	27*	25*	1.9	2.0	2.3
Watching television and videos	82	88*	85	3.7	4.2*	4.9*
Reading	42	37*	32*	2.0	2.0	2.0
Sleeping	100	100	100	8.9	9.1	9.5*

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2015.

on any of these active pursuits did not vary significantly by health status. At the same time, the participation rate for using technology was significantly lower for seniors who reported their health in more negative terms than for those in excellent or very good health.

Participation in passive leisure activities is also affected by health status. For instance, among those who watched television, the average time spent increased by more than one hour between those who reported their health as excellent or very good and those in poorer health (3.7 hours versus 4.9 hours). According to the data, those in fair or poor health and those in good health also reported a lower participation rate for reading than seniors in excellent or very good health. However, the time spent reading on a given day did not vary by health status among seniors.³⁰

In addition, there is a relationship between sleeping and self-reported health among seniors who reported their health as fair or poor. On average,

they spent more time sleeping than their healthier counterparts (9.5 hours versus 8.9 hours).³¹

Multivariate results confirm the findings at the bivariate level

The next section of the paper uses Tobit regression models to simultaneously assess the relationship between a number of sociodemographic factors and the time spent on activities by seniors. Tobit regression analysis is well suited to time use data, which have a large number of non-participants in certain activities. The technique assesses all participants and non-participants by simultaneously considering both the likelihood of daily participation and the average duration of time spent.³² For this multivariate analysis, three outcomes are examined: unpaid household work, active pursuits and passive leisure activities.³³

The regression estimates confirm some of the findings at the bivariate level. For example, the results suggest

that the relationship between unpaid household work and sex seen at the bivariate level remains in the multivariate analysis (Table 5). For instance, senior women did almost one more hour (53 minutes) of household work than men, after controlling for other sociodemographic factors. The model also shows that senior women spent almost 50 fewer minutes than men on passive leisure.

After controlling for other factors, the results also show that older seniors (aged 75 and over) spend an average of 16 minutes less on unpaid household work than younger seniors. Although the results are not significant for active pursuits, older seniors spend half an hour more (31 minutes) on passive leisure activities, which is consistent with the bivariate results.

Two other significant variables in the model are self-rated health and employment status. Hence, seniors who described their health as fair or poor spent 36 minutes less than those in excellent or very good health on unpaid household

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Table 5
Results from estimating a Tobit model of predicting minutes spent per day on selected activities, 2015

	Unpaid household work	Active pursuits	Passive leisure activities
	minutes		
Sex			
Women	53*	8	-48*
Men	ref.	ref.	ref.
Age			
65 to 74	ref.	ref.	ref.
75 and over	-16*	-8	31*
Geography			
Atlantic provinces	-10	14	-10
Quebec	-20*	3	15
Ontario	ref.	ref.	ref.
Western provinces	-3	13	-22*
Highest level of education			
High school diploma or less	ref.	ref.	ref.
Postsecondary diploma or certificate	2	31*	-33*
University degree	-21*	59*	-60*
Living arrangements			
Living alone	-35*	10*	37*
Living with spouse	ref.	ref.	ref.
Other	-2	-30	25
Self-rated health			
Fair or poor	-36*	-37*	41*
Good	-16*	-30*	24*
Excellent or very good	ref.	ref.	ref.
Employment status			
Employed last week	ref.	ref.	ref.
Not employed last week	76*	57*	83*

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2015.

work and 37 minutes less on active pursuits. However, they also spent more time (41 minutes) on passive leisure activities. The same pattern is evident for seniors who reported their health as good, compared with those who reported excellent or very good health.

The regression results also show the effect of employment on time use. After controlling for other factors, seniors who were not employed spent 76 minutes more on unpaid household work, 57 minutes more on active pursuits and, an additional 83 minutes on passive leisure activities. Such results do not necessarily imply that seniors are

better off when they do not work, as many seniors continue to work by choice, and not necessarily out of necessity. More research would be needed to study the implications of the rising labour market participation of seniors on their wellbeing.

Furthermore, the Tobit results show an association between education and the amount of time seniors spend on various activities. More particularly, those with a university degree spend less time on unpaid household work and passive leisure activities (21 minutes and 60 minutes, respectively), while they spend 59 minutes more on active pursuits. This is consistent with

existing research, which has shown that individuals with higher levels of educational attainment are more likely to devote time to activities that are beneficial to their physical and mental health and to consumption-related leisure activities.³⁴

Finally, living arrangements also matter, especially for seniors who live alone. After controlling for other factors, seniors who live alone spend less time on unpaid household work but spend more time on passive activities.

Today's seniors participate less in active pursuits than seniors in 1986

It is possible to use data from the 1986 General Social Survey on Time Use to examine changes in time spent on selected activities, specifically unpaid household work, active pursuits and passive leisure.³⁵

In 2015, the participation rate for seniors aged 65 and over in unpaid household work was 87%, significantly higher than the 75% participation rate for 1986 (Table 6). During this 30-year period, the participation for senior men increased significantly from 58% to 83%, while senior women's participation rate remained fairly unchanged (88% versus 91%). Despite the fact that senior men in 2015 were more likely to participate in household chores and the average time they spend has increased, senior women still accounted for a larger share of unpaid household work in 2015 (209 minutes, compared with 177 minutes for men).

In the 30 years between 1986 and 2015, the participation for senior women in active pursuits (excluding using technology) decreased

Table 6
Participation rate and time spent on selected activities for individuals aged 65 and over, 1986 and 2015

	Total		Men (ref.)		Women	
	1986	2015	1986	2015	1986	2015
	percentage					
Participation rate						
Unpaid household work	75	87 [†]	58	83 [†]	88 [*]	91 [*]
Active pursuits ¹	74	69	69	68	77	69 [†]
Passive leisure activities	88	90	89	92	87	89
	minutes					
Average time (participants)						
Unpaid household work	162	195 [†]	130	177 [†]	179 [*]	209 ^{††}
Active pursuits ¹	223	185 [†]	214	179 [†]	230	190 [†]
Passive leisure activities	291	283	318	291 [†]	270 [*]	276

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) (men in the same year) ($p < 0.05$)

[†] significantly different from the 1986 estimate ($p < 0.05$)

¹ The use of technology activity was only available in the 2015 GSS on Time Use. As a result, it was removed from the active pursuits category in this table in order to compare 1986 with 2015. Because of this exclusion, the 2015 data in this table for active pursuits are different than the participation rates and average time spent presented in Table 1 for this category.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1986 and 2015.

significantly, from 77% to 69%. In addition, the results showed a significant decrease in the average time spent on these activities. Between 1986 and 2015, both senior men and women decreased their average time spent on active pursuits (by 35 minutes and 40 minutes, respectively).³⁶

The findings on participation in passive leisure activities show that the seniors' participation rates (for both men and women) have remained fairly unchanged in the last three decades. In addition, the average amount of time they spent on these passive activities did not change significantly between 1986 and 2015, with the exception of senior men, whose time spent decreased by nearly half an hour (27 minutes).

Conclusion

In Canada, the population is aging and the proportion aged 65 and over is expected to increase over the next few decades. As a result, research on this population is important because an aging population has implications on health care and support services, among others. Examining the patterns and factors associated with time use can shed light on how seniors are aging in Canada.

This paper shows that several characteristics are associated with time use allocation among seniors. For example, after controlling for other sociodemographic factors, senior women spend more time

on unpaid household work and less time on passive leisure activities than senior men.

The findings also highlight the importance of employment, which has a significant impact on the way seniors spend their time. The findings also show that health is a significant factor in the way seniors devote their time to various activities. Seniors who describe their health as fair or poor spend less time on unpaid household work and active pursuits. But they also spend more time on passive leisure activities.

Finally, this study also examines how time use allocation changed for seniors between 1986 and 2015. The results show that seniors appear to have moved towards a more egalitarian division of unpaid household work. Senior men's participation rate in unpaid household work increased from 59% to 83%. At the same time, seniors now spend less time on active pursuits than they did three decades ago.

The fact that seniors spend less time in active pursuits could have implications on the health and wellbeing on this group of seniors as they age. Future research will be needed to continue monitoring the activities of this growing population in Canada.

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A day in the life: How do older Canadians spend their time?

Data sources, methods and definitions

Data sources

The General Social Survey (GSS) on Time Use is a cross-sectional survey whose target population consists of non-institutionalized persons aged 15 and over living in the 10 provinces. While the GSS is collected every year on different themes, time use is generally measured every five years. This study compares data from Cycle 2 (1986) with data from Cycle 29 (2015).

A 24-hour diary was used to retrospectively collect all the activities a respondent did on a designated day starting at 4:00 a.m. and ending at 4:00 a.m. the next day. All activities lasting at least 10 minutes were recorded. For each activity, additional information was also gathered to provide a better picture of how long the activity lasted, where it happened, and who was

present during the activity. For the purposes of this paper, only primary (or main) activities are included in the analyses.

Definitions

Reference day and average: During data collection for the General Social Survey on Time Use, the sample was uniformly distributed across the year in order to get time use diaries for each day of the week and for all months of the year. The average day concept reflects the average participation rate and time allocated to the different activities for all days of the week across the year for a given population.

Participation rates: Participation rates can be described as the proportion of persons who reported having done an activity on an average day.

Activity codes in the General Social Survey on Time Use

Category	2015	1986
Paid work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paid work • looking for work • other income-generating activities • paid training • selling goods and services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • working for pay • working overtime/looking for work • travelling during work • waiting/delays at work • idle time before or after work • uncodeable work activities
Unpaid household work	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Meal preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preparing meals, lunch and snacks • preserving foods (baking, freezing, sealing and packing foods) 2) Household chores and interior maintenance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • indoor house cleaning, dishwashing and tidying up • doing laundry, ironing, folding, sewing and shining shoes 3) Household chores and exterior maintenance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking out garbage, recycling, composting and unpacking goods • repairing, painting and renovating • doing outdoor maintenance (car repair, ground maintenance, snow removal and grass cutting) 4) Other unpaid work related to the household <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organizing, planning and paying bills • unpacking groceries, packing and unpacking luggage for travel and/or boxes for a move • planting (picking), maintaining, cleaning garden and caring for houseplants • pet care (feeding, walking, grooming, playing) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Meal preparation 2) Household chores and interior maintenance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meal cleanup (doing dishes/clearing table) • indoor cleaning (dusting/vacuuming) • doing laundry, ironing and folding • mending 3) Other unpaid work related to the household <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outdoor cleaning (sidewalks/garbage) • home repairs, maintenance 4) Other unpaid work related to the household <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gardening, taking care of pets • other uncodeable housework
Active pursuits	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Socializing and communicating <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • socializing and communicating in person • socializing and communicating using any type of technology • writing letters, cards, books and poems 2) Civic, religious and organizational activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organizational activities • voluntary work • religious activities • civic participation such as voting and jury duty • coaching and administering sports 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Socializing and communicating <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • visiting and entertaining friends/relatives • socializing at bars and clubs • other social gatherings • talking, conversing and phoning 2) Civic, religious and organizational activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • professional, union and general • political and civic activity • child, youth and family organizations • religious meetings and organizations • religious services, prayer and Bible reading • fraternal and social organizations • Doing volunteer work and helping • other uncodeable organizations

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Activity codes in the General Social Survey on Time Use

Category	2015	1986
Active pursuits	3) Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attending cinema, exhibitions, library, concerts, theatre and entertainment events • attending sporting events • visiting museums, art galleries, heritage zoos and observatories 4) Leisure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exercising • organized recreational sports • competitive sports (indoor or outdoor) • outdoor sports (non-competitive) such as skiing, skating, swimming and tennis • outdoor activities such as fishing and hunting • arts and hobbies such as drawing, painting, crafting and playing an instrument • leisure activities such as walking, pleasure driving and birdwatching 5) Use of technology such as general computer use, video games, Internet, art and music production	3) Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sports events • pop music, fairs and concerts • movies and films • opera, ballet and drama • museums and art galleries 4) Leisure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engaging in sports and physical exercise and coaching • hunting, fishing and camping • walking and hiking • hobbies • domestic home crafts • music, theatre and dance • games, cards and arcades • pleasure driving and sightseeing • other uncodeable sports and leisure activities
Passive leisure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • watching television and videos • listening to music and radio • reading (online or paper version books, periodicals, newspapers and letters) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • watching television and rented movies • listening to radio • listening to records and tapes • reading books and magazines • reading newspapers
Shopping for goods and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shopping and buying goods such as gasoline, groceries, clothing and cars • shopping for services such as legal services, financial services and vehicle maintenance • researching goods or services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • every day shopping (food, clothing and gas) • shopping for durable household goods • personal care services • government and financial services • adult medical and dental care • other professional services (lawyer) • repair services (cleaning, auto and appliance) • waiting and queuing for purchase • other uncodeable services
Sleep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sleeping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • night sleeping and essential sleeping • incidental sleeping and napping

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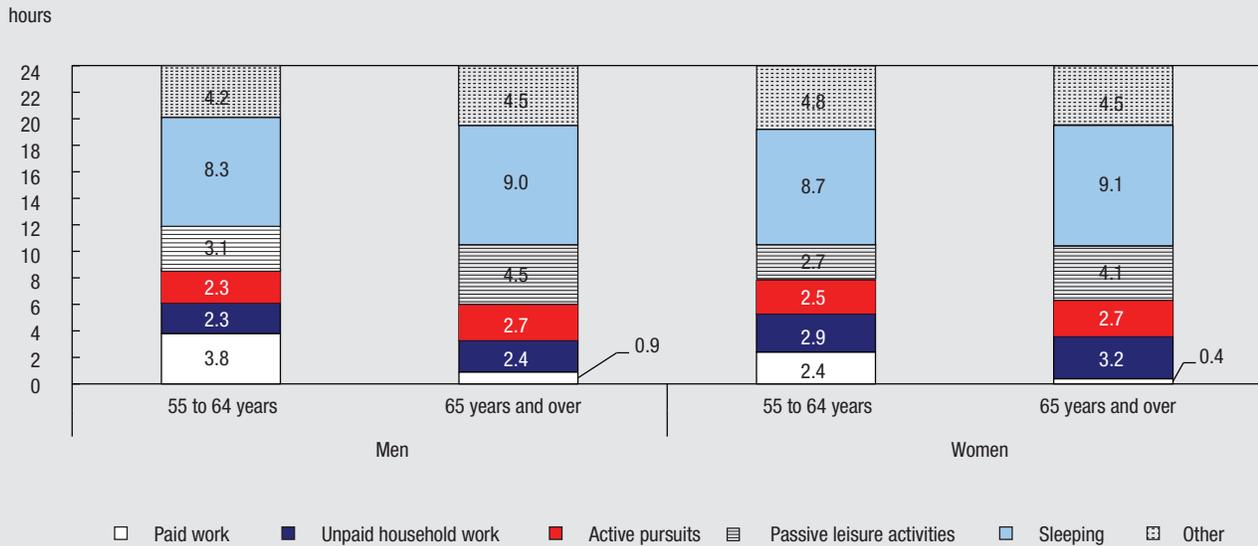
What is the average amount of time seniors spend on each activity over a 24-hour period?

The 2015 GSS on Time Use data presented in this paper refer to the participation rate and average time spent by participants on selected activities. However, the data can also highlight the average time spent on various activities over a 24-hour period.

In 2015, men aged 55 to 64 spent an average of 3.8 hours on paid work compared with 0.9 hours for senior men aged 65 and

over (Chart 2). The data also highlight how time spent on paid work is reallocated to other activities as seniors age and transition out of employment. For both men and women, the results show that most of the time is reallocated to passive leisure activities as they move past the retirement age. Time spent sleeping also increases for seniors, albeit by a smaller margin.³⁷

Chart 2
Average time spent per day on selected activities, by age group and sex, 2015



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2015.

Notes

1. See Statistics Canada (2015); Milan et al. (2014).
2. See Carrière and Galarneau (2011).
3. See Carrière and Galarneau (2012).
4. Carrière and Galarneau (2011) noted a significant increase in the expected number of working years at age 50, since the mid-1990s, which is consistent with the increase in the employment rate of older Canadians starting in the same period. It is also important to note that although a number of older workers either opt for early retirement or retire close to the age of 65, many continue to work past this age because of retirement policies or out of economic necessity. For more information on the labour force participation of seniors, please see Fields et al. (2017); Uppal (2015 and 2010); Schellenberg et al. (2005); Duchesne (2004 and 2002); Haider and Loughran (2001).
5. See Fast et al. (2006).
6. See Hudon and Milan (2016); Sinha (2015); Turcotte (2015).
7. See Turcotte (2015); Sinha (2013).
8. See Victorino and Gauthier (2005).
9. See Victorino and Gauthier (2005); Ravanera and Fernando (2001).
10. See Victorino and Gauthier (2005).
11. See Statistics Canada (2013).
12. See Krantz-Kent and Stewart (2007).
13. See Gilmour (2012).
14. See Hudon and Milan (2016); Sinha (2014).
15. Between 2011 and 2016, the number of children aged 14 and under increased by 4.1%.
16. See Statistics Canada (2015).
17. See Milan (2015).
18. See Sayer et al. (2016).
19. The difference between males and females in the proportion of those who participated in paid work activities was also significant among younger seniors aged 65 to 74 (17% among males vs. 9% among females).
20. See Sayer et al. (2016).
21. See Victorino and Gauthier (2005) for research that has used a similar grouping of activities.
22. See Sayer et al. (2016).
23. See Hudon and Milan (2016).
24. See Chaput et al. (2017); Sayer et al. (2016).
25. See Sayer et al. (2016).
26. For the purposes of this paper, employment status refers to whether the respondent worked in the last week.
27. By contrast, among those who were aged 25 to 54, the participation rate for leisure and physical activities did not vary by employment status.
28. See Hurd and Rohwedder (2007); Dosman et al. (2006).
29. See Sayer et al. (2016).
30. Among younger cohorts (both aged 25 to 54 and 55 to 64), the participation rates for civic, religious and organizational activities, socializing and communicating, use of technology, and television did not vary by health status.
31. Among those aged 55 to 64, those who were in excellent or very good health also slept fewer hours than those who were in worse health. That difference, however, was not significant for younger age groups (aged 25 to 54).
32. For other examples of Tobit analysis and time use data, see Marshall (2007) and Zick (2010).
33. In order to conduct the multivariate analysis, it was necessary to combine activities into active pursuits and passive leisure activities.
34. See Hurd and Rohwedder (2007).
35. Participation in paid work was not directly comparable between 1986 and 2015 because of changes in the definition (see the *Data sources, methods and definitions* section).
36. Among those aged 25 to 54, the participation rate in active pursuits (excluding technology) remained stable among men (57% in 1986 and 55% in 2015) and declined among women (from 65% to 60%). The time spent on active pursuits also declined, albeit less so than for seniors, by 10 minutes among men and 27 minutes among women.
37. For additional information on daily average time spent on various activities, see CANSIM Table 113-0004.

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