

More Middle-Age People in Rural Canada Have Higher Levels of Stress than Other Rural People

What percentage of rural Canadians feel they suffer from high stress? What regions of the country report the highest or lowest levels of stress? Does gender or age impact stress levels?

The 2001 NRE Rural Household survey asked respondents to state if they felt high or low levels of stress. The survey found that 12.6% of all Canadians living in rural communities expressed feeling high levels of stress. However, 14.9% of rural Canadians reported low stress levels. Other respondents either felt that they had average levels of stress or did not answer the question.

More middle-age people in rural Canada report high levels of stress compared to the rural population in general; 16.6% of people age 35-54 in rural communities report high levels of stress. This could be due in part to changes within their households. The survey found that recent changes to the financial, employment or health status of someone in the household were the leading sources of stress for this age group.

Changes in financial and employment status reflect changes within the new rural economy. For example, there has been a significant number of jobs eliminated from the natural resource sector, the loss of family farms, and changes related to wages and income support programs, all of which have put

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stress on finances for many rural Canadians. Furthermore, as people age, new health problems emerge, causing further stress.

At the other end of the spectrum only 5.9% of rural seniors report high levels of stress. This is likely because, other than health, seniors experience relatively few changes in other aspects of their life.



Several other demographic groups varied from the national average of 12.6% reporting high stress. Of the four regions (Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, and West), Quebec had the largest percentage of

respondents reporting high stress levels (18.5%) while Ontario (8.6%) had the lowest percentage reporting high stress level. Quebec men and women each had the highest percentage of high stress compared to those in other regions.

A much higher percentage of young adults in Quebec, middle-age people in Quebec, Ontario, and Western Canada, and older adults (55-64 years of age) in Quebec reported high levels of stress. A much lower percentage of older adults and seniors in Atlantic Canada as well as seniors in Ontario and Western Canada reported high stress levels.

What policies could be developed to address the issue of stress in rural communities? Help could be provided to make the transition from employment in the natural resource management sector to other sectors quicker and easier. Ensuring access to quality health care for rural Canadians may also help to reduce the stress surrounding the inevitable effects of aging. Obviously introducing these kinds of changes to policies and programs cannot totally eliminate stress associated with major changes, but they may be able to reduce high levels of stress or shorten the period of time a person feels stressed.

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