

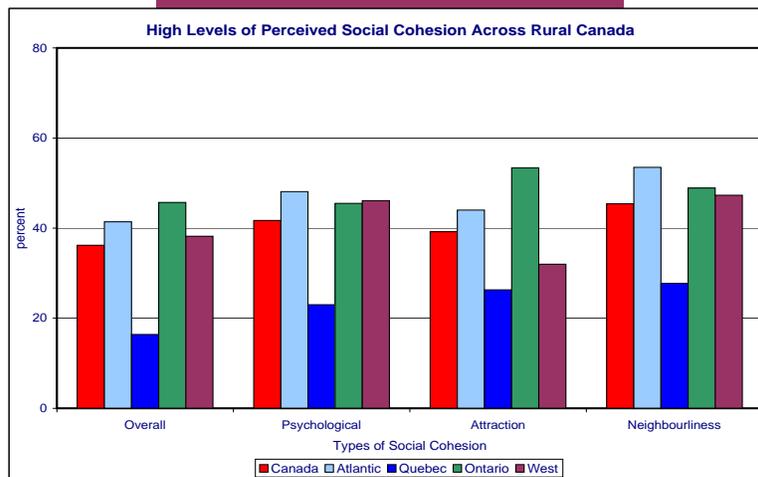
High Levels of Social Cohesion in Rural Communities, Except in Rural Quebec and Among Rural Youth

What is social cohesion? What regions of the country have the highest and lowest levels of social cohesion? What demographics are reported as feeling higher than average levels of social cohesion?

Social cohesion is the extent to which people respond collectively to achieve their valued outcomes. We can think of it as a measure of one's sense of attachment to and unity within their community. In a survey of individuals in rural households, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with eighteen different statements as they applied to their community and their relationship with their community. Collectively the responses provide a measure of social cohesion. Each of the eighteen statements fit into one of three elements of social cohesion: Psychological, Attraction, and Neighbourliness. The "Psychological" category included statements about the general sense of belonging to a community. "Attraction" included statements about one's level of satisfaction of the community and their desire to stay or leave. "Neighbourliness" included statements about the level of interaction experienced with his/her neighbours.

Across the national sample of rural residents, the percentage who reported a high level of social cohesion was 36.2%. More respondents reported a high level of social cohesion based on "neighbourliness" than from other factors. Rural Ontario had the highest percentage of respondents who reported a high level of social cohesion (45.7%), and this was driven by an especially high sense of

the community. Atlantic Canada had the highest percentage of respondents with a high level of "psychological" related social cohesion, suggesting that people there feel that they really do belong in their community. Atlantic Canada also had the highest percentage of respondents with a high level of "neighbourliness" related social cohesion, suggesting that people there derive a great sense of connectedness from their deep interactions with neighbours.



A higher percentage of seniors reported high levels of social cohesion (42.4%) compared with those in other age groups.

It is much lower among young adults, at 27.4%. It is interesting to note that among each of the three age groups above 35 years, the percentage of respondents reporting high levels of "psychological" related social cohesion is much higher than it is among young adults. This suggests that over time people become more comfortable with the community in which they live and begin to feel that it is the place they should live in. For younger adults, there is, perhaps still a sense of mobility and "possibilities", and not wanting to "commit" to any given place for a long period of time.

"attraction" to one's community. However, the overall level of social cohesion among respondents from rural Quebec was very low, with only 16.4% of respondents reporting high levels of social cohesion.

Comparing the regions, Ontario had the highest percentage of respondents with a high level of "attraction" related social cohesion, suggesting that people there feel very attracted to physical and social attributes of

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Social cohesion is needed in communities because if people feel a sense of belonging and togetherness, they are more likely to work together for the good of the community; and to tackle opportunities, problems and conflicts in a healthy, proactive, way. With low levels of social cohesion, a community can find itself not making progress because the lack of healthy relationships gets in the way.

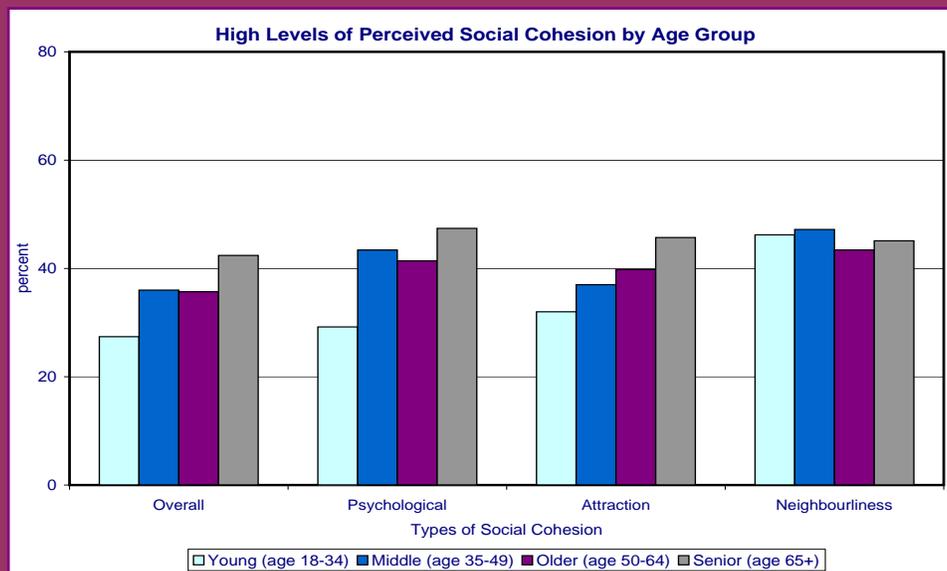
Communities need to invest in activities which build

togetherness: hold meetings when planning for the future; hold events and activities which bring people together in a social setting to have fun and interact with one another; and support for new and existing non-governmental organizations which bring people together to work on community projects.

Failing to establish and maintain social cohesion can prove problematic for small towns and rural communities. If residents do not feel a strong level of

attachment or pride to their community, they are more likely to move away, thus decreasing the population and reducing the market local businesses serve. A lack of pride could directly result in a low number of volunteers, making it difficult to start or finish important community tasks.

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