

Let's Get Active!

Planning Effective Communication Strategies

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT MONITORING PROGRAM



Perceived Life Stress

A national study conducted in 2011-2012 investigated the issue of work-life balance in Canada.¹ This study indicated that many Canadian employees feel overloaded by the demands of work and family.¹ Generally, they spend long hours at work, regularly take work home, and find that competing work demands within the family unit makes life balance challenging. In addition, Canadian employees have heavy family commitments, whereby half of respondents spent time each week in child care, and 23% spend time each week in elder care.¹ Beyond work and family life, Canadians are also engaged in other types of roles, such as volunteer work, social circumstances, physical activity, or chores. These demands on time, workloads, and stress levels, can be considerable. This bulletin explores Canadians' perceptions of stress in their life in relation to physical activity, age, and sex.

Roughly one-quarter of adults in Canada indicate that on most days they see their life as *quite a bit* or *extremely* stressful.² This rate varies according to activity level, whereby a higher proportion (25%) of adults who are inactive find life *quite a bit* or *extremely* stressful compared to those who are at least moderately active (22%). At the opposite end of the range, approximately one-third of adults say that consider their life to be *not very* or *not at all* stressful, and this also varies by activity level. Indeed, 36% of those who are at least

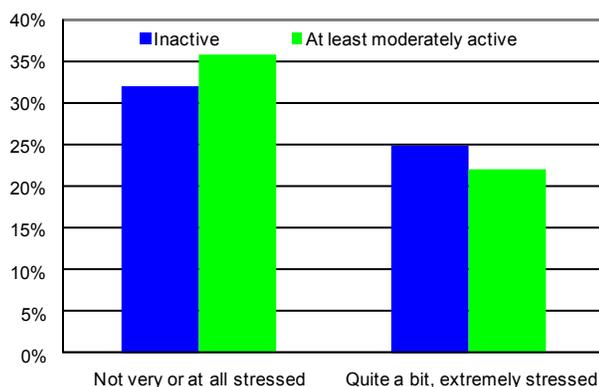
moderately active indicate a low level of stress, whereas this decreases to 32% among those who are inactive.

This bulletin explores disparities between age and sex groups in the associations between perceived life stress in relation to activity level (both self-rated, see side box for further details).

Measuring perceived life stress - In this study, perceived life stress was determined by the respondents' ratings of the amount of stress in their life on "most days".

Measuring physical activity - In this study, the physical activity indicator measures the single domain of leisure time physical activity (LTPA). This self-report measure assesses recall of physical activity participation during the past 3 months. Activity level is calculated by multiplying the occasions by the average time reported for each activity participated in by the MET (metabolic equivalent which indicates the amount of energy expended on the activity relative to a resting state) value for each of these activities. As the question is based on 3 month recall, in order to calculate the yearly total, this product is multiplied by 4. This calculation is repeated for each PA reported. The energy expenditure value is summed across each activity and divided by 365 to yield the average energy expenditure from LTPA per day. For the purposes of this bulletin, active is considered achieving 1.5 or greater MET per day. See Bulletin 1 in this series for more information on physical activity rates based on 2013 data.

FIGURE 1
Perceived life stress by activity level, 20 years and older



Canadian Community Health Survey, 2013²

Age

Among adults 45 years and older, a greater proportion of inactive adults indicate that they are *quite a bit* or *extremely* stressed in life whereas fewer say that they are *not very* or *not at all* stressed, compared to those who are at least moderately active. There are no significant differences in this regard among those younger than 45.

Exploring two activity-level categories independently, there are slight differences in patterns related to age.

Among those who are inactive, 35 to 64 year olds are generally the most likely to perceive their life as *quite a bit* or *extremely* stressful compared to the average. The relationship between a low level of stress and age among the inactive population is interesting. Inactive older adults (65 years and older) are by far the most likely to say that they are *not very* or *not at all* stressed (52%) compared to their younger counterparts, whereas inactive 35 to 44 year olds are least likely to indicate this (21%).

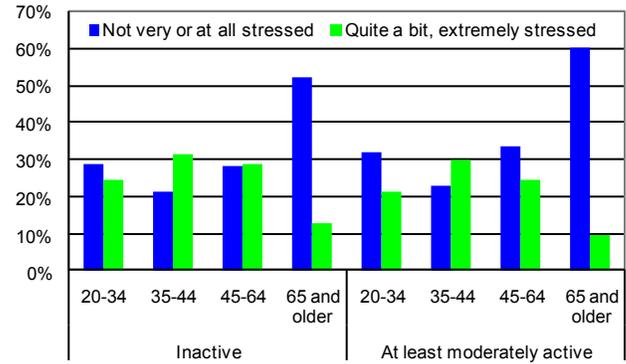
Among those who are at least moderately active, 35 to 44 year olds are most likely to indicate a high level of stress (*quite a bit* or *extremely* stressed), whereas older adults are least likely to indicate this. The converse relationship appears among those who say that they are *not very* or *not at all* stressed in life.

Age and gender

The above relationships also vary when age is examined in relation to gender. For example, the overall differences between inactive and moderately active adults and feelings of *high* stress in life are not significant when looking at gender in combination with age, with one exception. Inactive older men (65 years and older) are more likely than active older men to report high levels of stress.

On the other hand, the differences between inactive and moderately active adults and feelings of *low* stress in life are higher among active older men (45 years and older) compared to inactive older men. Among women, this same difference is only significant among 65 year olds and older.

FIGURE 2
Perceived life stress by activity level by age



Canadian Community Health Survey, 2013²

Additionally, table 1 further describes gender differences *within* age categories when looking at two activity-level categories independently.

TABLE 1
Perceived life stress by activity level, age, and gender²

		Inactive	At least moderately active
Quite a bit or extremely stressed	Overall	35 to 64 year olds most likely	35 to 44 year olds most likely 65+ years least likely
	Men	35 to 44 year olds more likely than average	
	Women	65+ years least likely	
Not very or at all stressed	Overall	35 to 44 year olds least likely	35 to 44 year olds least likely 65+ years most likely
	Men	65+ years most likely	
	Women	65+ years most likely	

References

- Duxbury L, Higgins C. Revisiting Work-Life Issues in Canada: The 2012 National Study on Balancing Work and Caregiving in Canada. Available at: <http://newsroom.carleton.ca/wp-content/files/2012-National-Work-Long-Summary.pdf> (accessed March 5, 2015).
- Statistics Canada. Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), 2003-2013. Reproduced and distributed on an "as is" basis with the permission of Statistics Canada. This does not constitute an endorsement by Statistics Canada of this product.



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