Age 18 to Age 43

In 1985, the Oilers won the Stanley Cup, Laurence Decore was Mayor, and the first heart transplant in Western Canada was performed at the University Hospital. In May/June 1985, University of Alberta researchers surveyed high school seniors in 6 schools—Eastglen, Harry Ainlay, Jasper Place, Queen Elizabeth, Ross Sheppard, Victoria Composite— to learn about their school and work experiences and plans.

In all, 983 seniors completed questionnaires. Follow-up surveys were mailed in 1986, 1987, 1989, and 1992. A 5th survey was done by phone in 1999. In 2010, 405 participants—now 43 years old—completed a 6th follow-up by phone, web, or mail. Here are some findings from our 25th Anniversary Survey!

Where are you now?

Community of Residence, 2010

Most participants in the 2010 survey still lived in Edmonton or elsewhere in Alberta, but we did hear from people who were living as far away as Australia, Israel, and China.

Transitions to Adulthood and Middle Age

Back in high school, almost all participants lived at home with parents. By age 25, 30% had still not moved out. This study was one of the first in Canada to show that young people lived at home much longer than was the case for their parents' generation (the Baby Boomers).

Compared to their Baby Boomer parents, this generation also waited longer to get married or live with a partner. By age 25, almost half had made this transition; by age 32, three-quarters had done so.

The transition to parenthood took even longer. At age 32, half had become parents. By age 43, in early middle age, 76% were parents.
Further Education
A majority of participants sought higher education. One-third earned a college or technical school diploma, 25% had a university degree, and 12% completed a second post-graduate degree. Three-quarters finished their education by age 30. Overall, men were somewhat more likely to obtain a post-secondary credential, a pattern that has since reversed. Today, women are more likely than men to go to college or university.

Working (for pay or at home)
At age 43, almost all (92%) participants were employed (13% with two or more jobs). Among the employed, 48% were in managerial or professional (requiring a university degree) jobs. Men were slightly more likely to be employed, to be in managerial or professional positions, and to be self-employed. The big gender difference was in part-time work (less than 35 hours/week). Thirty-nine percent of employed women worked part-time, compared to only 7% of employed men. These patterns are similar to those for middle-age Albertans.

What about work at home? Two-thirds of married/co-habiting women said they were mainly responsible for laundry; 60% said they were responsible for cooking, cleaning up the kitchen, and grocery shopping. In contrast, between 10 and 15% of married/co-habiting men said they were responsible for these chores. About 50% of women and 4% of men said they did housecleaning. A minority indicated equal sharing of chores.

Career Changes
The media often report that the average person today will have 7 careers in their lifetime, without citing any data. But participants reported an average of only 2.2 careers by age 43. Will they really have five more careers before retirement? Probably not. Sometimes studies like this help to dispel media myths.
Do You Like Your Job?
Studies have shown that job satisfaction increases as people get older, perhaps because they move into better jobs or begin to see work as less important. We see the same pattern: job satisfaction increased from 60% in 1989 (age 22) to 77% in 2010 (age 43). The increase was more pronounced for women, an unusual finding needing further analysis.

Feeling OK?
Starting at age 20, we asked how healthy participants felt on a scale of 1-5 where 1 was "very unhealthy" and 5 was "very healthy." Physical and mental health went up and down over the years, but by age 43, mental health rebounded, unlike physical health. After a while, your body just starts feeling older!

Have Things Worked Out as You Hoped?
At age 43, two-thirds of participants said that family life and personal relationships had worked out the way they had hoped. But fewer (56%) said their career had turned out as hoped. Women were a bit more likely to answer positively to all three questions. Any ideas why?
Feeling in Control?
We asked whether participants had “little control over the things that happen to me.” Survey results show that participants felt more control in their 20s than in their late teens or at age 43. Perhaps we eventually find that we just can’t control things as much as we thought. University-educated participants felt more control, perhaps because their education led to jobs where they could make more decisions.

Making a Difference?
In early middle age, people start to think about whether they have made a difference in the lives of others, for example, their children, their workmates, or others in their community or society. Four out of ten (43%) of the 2010 participants agreed that “others would say that I have made unique contributions to society” while three-quarters (74%) agreed that “I have had a good influence on the lives of many people.” Women and men answered the first question similarly, but more women (80%) than men (67%) agreed with the second. Why?

We Were All Younger Once

If You Have Moved, or changed contact information, we would like to hear from you, by email or regular mail. It is critical for the usefulness and accuracy of this research program that we keep up to date. We value your input and encourage you to contact us with questions or concerns.

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