

Canadians prefer to watch sports, not participate:

StatsCan Aging society becoming less active ?

A new study says that when it comes to sports, at least, Canadians like to watch.

The Statistics Canada study found that barely three in 10 Canadians aged 15 and over participated regularly in at least one sport in 2005, down dramatically from nearly half in the early 1990s.

The report estimates that 7.3 million people, or about 28 per cent of the adult population, participated in some form of sport.

That's down substantially from 8.3 million, or 34 per cent, in 1998, and 9.6 million, or 45 per cent, in 1992.

"Many more of us were spectators," says the study, released Thursday. "In 2005, an estimated 9.2 million adults were 'involved' in amateur sports as spectators, a 20.3 per cent increase from 1998."

Furthermore, the sport Canadians liked best to play was rather more leisurely than the one they used to prefer. Golf replaced ice hockey as the most popular sport in Canada in 1998.

By 2005, almost 1.5 million adult Canadians were golfers, three-quarters of them men. Hockey drew 1.3 million. Other sports — in order of popularity, swimming, soccer, basketball, baseball and volleyball — all drew between 500,000 and 800,000 participants.

The study found the decline in participation was widespread, cutting across all age groups, education levels, income brackets, both sexes and almost all provinces.

Teenagers aged 15 to 18 had the highest participation rate but that, too, declined to 59 per cent in 2005 from 77 per cent in 1992. "The downward trend in sport participation does not necessarily mean that Canadians do not engage in physical activities," said the report. "Many exercise regularly through various physical programs or classes, while others enjoy jogging, gardening or other such activities."

Aging population participates less:

The study blamed the aging population for much of the decline. In 1992, people aged 35 and over represented 60 per cent of the adult population and about 36



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percent for them participated in sports, it said. By 2005, two-thirds of Canadians were in this age group, and their participation rate was down to 22 per cent.

"Society is aging and becoming less active," said the report. "Only 17 per cent of Canadians aged 55 and over participated in sports, well below the proportion of 25 per cent in 1992."

Other factors included family responsibilities, child-rearing, careers, lack of interest, and participation in other leisure-time pursuits such as watching television and surfing the internet.

For many, a time crunch is to blame: 30 per cent of non-active Canadians reported lack of time as the major factor for their physical inactivity. This proportion jumped to 45 per cent of those aged 25 to 34, "a group that was probably busy raising young families and pursuing careers," said the study.

Among older non-active Canadians aged 55 and over, 28 per cent indicated that age was the biggest factor. Almost a quarter of them reported health conditions, while another quarter cited lack of interest in sport. "Canadians spent an average of only 30 minutes a day on active sport," said the study.

"The rest of the day was spent working (paid and unpaid work), participating in civic and voluntary activities, sleeping, having meals, socializing, reading, surfing the internet, watching television, going to the movies and participating in other entertainment activities."

Biggest drop in sports participation in B.C., Quebec:

The study found participation in sport declined in all provinces between 1998 and 2005, except Prince Edward Island. The biggest declines occurred in Quebec and British Columbia.

A third of Nova Scotia's population participated in some sport, the highest provincial rate.

While active participation declined, the study found indirect involvement in sports on a voluntary basis actually increased. The number of amateur coaches reached 1.8 million, or seven per cent of the population, in 2005. This was up from 1.7 million in 1998, and more than twice the 840,000 in 1992.

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