

Living together saves more than money

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Statscan study shows people living with partner less likely to be lonely



Statscan study shows that living with a partner leads to a stronger social network and lower levels of loneliness. (Marika McKenzie)

By Marika McKenzie
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Move in with your sweetheart. A study shows you will have a better social life than if you live alone.

A recent study, released in Canadian Social Trends, an online magazine released through Statistics Canada, says people living alone have smaller and poorer quality social networks than those living with a significant other.

The study finds having good networks of close friends, relatives and even acquaintances is linked with better physical and mental health. The study surveyed 15,600 Canadians and examined three indicators for a fulfilling social life: network size, how often a person contacts their social network and feelings of loneliness.

Couples, the study found, have larger social networks and experience less loneliness. Only 14 per cent of people living with a partner experience loneliness. Of those living alone, 21 per cent experience loneliness.

Kelly Cousens, a sales representative for Frito-Lay, lives with her boyfriend, Andrew Delziel. She says living with Delziel has greatly expanded her social life. "It wasn't just like I started dating Andrew ... I inherited almost 30 friends and we hang out all the time."

The study also looked at the family networks of people living as couples and people living alone. Those living together as a couple were closer to more relatives than those living alone.

Cousens' social network expanded to include her partner's family. "Andrew's family, who basically are my second family ... his mom, his dad, his sister, his grandparents. They've basically adopted me."

Cousens rarely feels lonely.

Not everyone feels being single or living alone affects happiness. Maegan Ridgway, a single student who lived alone while attending Dalhousie in 2011, says she had two close friends at the time.

"I wasn't ever alone because I didn't have time to be. My friends were always around, I was in the midst of a very busy semester and just about to start exams," said Ridgway. "My time living alone was used for studying and spending solitary time, which is something I've always valued."

Not all people who live alone are content with being by themselves, says Sean Mackinnon, a Dal PhD student in the faculty of psychology. His first impression of the study was consistent with what most people would think – people who live alone are more likely to be lonely.

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“Even though these people still have a lot of good frequent contact with friends, they’ll subjectively feel more lonely when they are living alone,” said Mackinnon.

According to Health Canada, 16 per cent of women and 11 per cent of men will at some time in their lives suffer from depression. Living alone and the loneliness that may come from it, said Mackinnon, can be a starting point for depression or other mental health issues.

Mackinnon said the feeling of loneliness leaves people emotionally and physically disconnected from the people in their lives.

Being lonely “is hard,” he said.



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