

[Statistical] Thoughts on recruiting seniors as economic development

What follows is not a prediction of what will happen, but rather a message of caution that we need to look deeper than what appears, on the surface, to make common sense: that recruiting seniors is a sound economic development strategy. Maybe it is not.

We know that Canada has a growing "senior" population both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the population. In 1996, the senior population was 12.2%, 2001 it had grown to 13.0%, in 2006 to 13.7%, and 14.1% in 2011. Ontario, the study area for this article, has shown a similar pattern, growing from 12.9% in 1996 to 14.6% in 2011.

Ontario's senior population has grown, in absolute numbers, from 1.3 million in 1996 to 1.9 million in 2011, an increase of 40.7%. In 1981 the senior population was 868,000, or 10.0% of the population.

Gerald Hodge, retired planning professor and author (*The geography of aging*, 2008) has stated that it is not the "total numbers of seniors or their rate of growth that signifies population aging" but rather their proportion of the total population that is the issue. With this as my focus, I looked at several characteristics of communities (at the census division level or county/region level) and how they are related to the senior population.

In a brief study I undertook in 2015 of community characteristics and median income (2006 census data) an interesting phenomenon was noted, specifically that a higher proportion of seniors in a community was strongly negatively correlated (statistically significant) with *lower* median incomes ($r = -.68$). This means that the higher the proportion of seniors, the lower the community's median income. Each senior sub-cohort showed strong negative correlations for those aged up to 79, then moderate, negative correlations for those aged 80-years and older. (The correlations are 65 to 69 ($r = -.676$), 70 to 74 ($r = -.728$), 75 to 79 ($r = -.668$), 80 to 84 ($r = -.553$), and 84 plus ($r = -.425$)). The correlations for other age groups to median income was only moderately positive; (birth - 19 years; $r = .485$) and ages 20 - 64, $r = .545$).

Correlations were similar for other census years, too: 2001 was $-.647$ and 2011 was $-.597$. (*Note that in 2011 the government made the long-form census voluntary instead of mandatory so data may be biased based on who sent in returns. As such, I will wait for the 2016 census to see if an*