

## Demography of Everyday Life

We have all heard of the Baby Boom—the increase in the number of children born following the Second World War. The baby-boom was international in scope, but was particularly pronounced in Canada where a relatively large number of children were born between 1952 and 1965. The cohort following the baby-boom produced relatively fewer children. This period is often referred to as the baby-bust era, and its members have been labelled “Generation X” (Coupland, 1991).

The impact of demography on our society was popularized in the 1990s with the publication of the Canadian best seller *Boom, Bust and Echo* by David Foot and Daniel Stoffman.

Professor Foot popularizes that statement that demography “explains about two-thirds of everything”. While it is arguable whether this statement is reflective of reality, there is little doubt that demography has had a significant impact at both the individual and societal levels. The size of this birth cohort is huge, comprising as many as 33 % of the population in 1966. In other words, one out of every three persons in Canada in 1966 was a baby-boomer.

Let’s imagine the life of an individual born towards the end of this cohort, say in 1959. The first days of this individual’s life was likely spent outside in the hallway, rather than inside a maternity ward. This was because hospitals could not handle the sudden increase in births, and they were forced to keep children outside the maternity ward proper.

As the child matured, she would have only a slim chance of attaining a childcare space in one of the nation’s facilities that were overcrowded and with long waiting lists. On the other hand, the child would most likely have at least two other siblings, and a mother who would stay at home with them during the preschool years. Further, when it came time for this individual to enter school, their classroom was probably a portable.

After graduation from high school this individual might well end up choosing to become a teacher. There are at least two reasons for this career choice at the time: first, there existed a chronic teacher shortage; secondly there were no jobs to be had for those that graduated from high school that year. By this time colleges and universities were well informed enough to build additional classrooms. Shortages of university teachers, however, forced academic institutions to recruit instructors outside the country, notably in the United States.

When the individual completed her teaching degree, she started applying for teaching positions, only to face an oversupply of graduates seeking too few positions. She soon joined the large number of overqualified individuals applying for any job available, including taxicabs driving which is said to have its share of Ph.D.s.

Our imaginary individual stuck it out, driving a cab for few years, working as a substitute teacher, taking additional courses, and “networking”. At age 28, she managed to secure an entry-level position in the human resource department of a large multinational corporation. However, once in this job this individual noticed something strange. All of the middle managers above her were only a few years older than herself, making it extremely difficult for her to later attain middle- and upper-levels positions for herself.

The final difficulty occurs with impending retirement when there are not enough younger workers relative to the retiring generation. Canadian pension plans were created when it looked as if the population would continue to grow indefinitely. A growing population, of course, implies that there are more young people than old ones.

### **Sources**

Coupland, Douglas, 1991. *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*. New York: St. Martin's press.

Foot, David and Daniel Stoffman, 1996. *Boom, Bust & Echo: How to Profit from the Coming Demographic Shift*. Toronto: Mcfarlane Walter & Ross.

Jones, Landon Y, 1981. *Great Expectations: America and the Baby Boom Generation*. New York: Ballantine Books.