

How was it for you? Canadians weigh in on 2023, reflecting gratitude, exhaustion & less happiness than past years

Two-in-five say they had a good year overall, while one-quarter say it was more negative than positive

December 27, 2023 – As Canadians load their plates with post-Christmas leftovers and reflect on a year almost over, new data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds 2023 receiving mixed reviews.

Considering factors such as their health, happiness and financial situation two-in-five Canadians say the year was more good than bad for them, with one-third saying it was average, and one-quarter more negative than positive about the last 12 months.

On the financial wellbeing front, however, Canadians are – as they have expressed to ARI [throughout the year](#) – in a darker place.

While the majority say they're satisfied with this aspect of life, fully two-in-five say they are not. More than half of those with household incomes lower than \$50,000 join the latter group, who hope that 2024 will bring more prosperity.

Using an additive score, ARI created four groups along a Life Satisfaction Index. These include the Very Satisfied (24%), Satisfied (25%), Dissatisfied (28%) and Very Dissatisfied (23%). There are important variations in who comprises which of these groups.

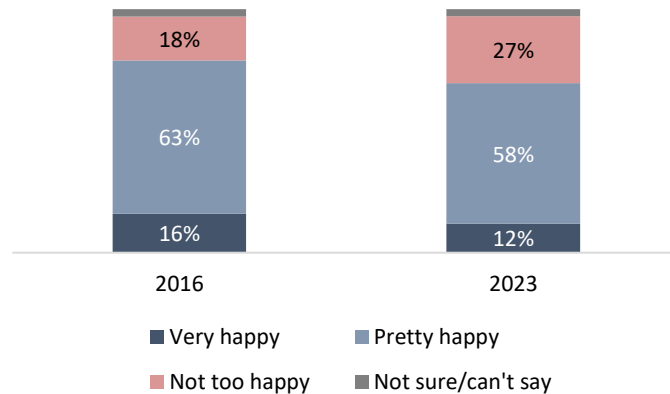
Consider that among visible minorities in Canada, 65 per cent are either Dissatisfied or Very Dissatisfied overall. Comparatively, for non-visible minorities this proportion is a much smaller 48 per cent.

Those who have kids in their household are more also likely to be on the dissatisfied side of this equation as well (59%) compared to those without children (48%). Some of this is attributable to the role that income and age play in satisfaction with leisure, finances, and other aspects of life. Canadians over the age of 54 tend to be most satisfied with their lives, both men and women.

When it comes to Canadians' mental health, one-in-three (32%) say they're dissatisfied with how they feel currently. Young women are most likely to feel their mental health could be better – nearly half (45%) say this.

Comparing some of these data to responses from 2016 when the Angus Reid Institute last asked, there are notable trends. The first is that happiness levels have dropped slightly among the population. Seven

Generally, how would you say things are these days in your life -- Would you say you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from Dec. 15-19, 2023 among a representative randomized sample of 1,516 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

years ago, before COVID-19 had spread about the globe and when the economic climate was more stable, four-in-five (79%) said they were either “very” or “pretty” happy. In 2023 that proportion has dropped to 70 per cent, with a nine-point increase in those saying they’re “not too happy” with their life.

The proportion satisfied with their stress levels has also dropped five points over this period, though there is one improvement worth noting. There has been a five-point increase in Canadians self-reported satisfaction with their love life, from 64 to 69 per cent.

What this leads to is a population divided in how they would describe their year. The two most chosen words are grateful (37%) and exhausting (37%). As one might expect, how Canadians describe their year largely depends on where they find themselves on the Life Satisfaction Index.

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

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Part One: Life satisfaction in 2023

Percentage saying they're 'happy' has dropped

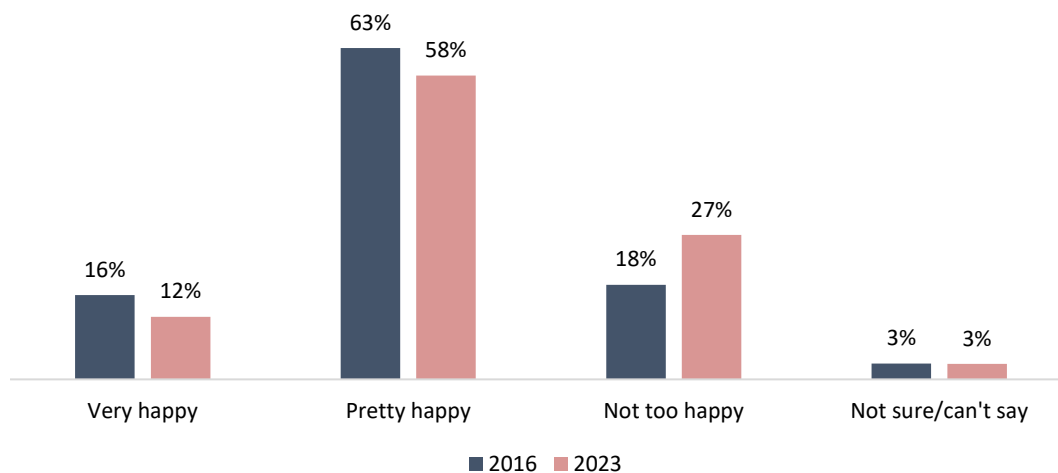
As Canadians evaluate the positives and negatives from the year past, for many, the overall economic picture will have done much to sour memories of 2023. Inflation has been a persistent companion for Canadians since the beginning of 2022, leaving many with declining purchasing power and budgets increasingly devoted to the necessities of life – rent, mortgages, groceries – and less free to spend on other elements that perhaps would spark more joy.

Related: Snowed Under: Falling inflation provides scant relief as Canadians cool holiday spending for a second year

Still, most Canadians find happiness in their lives. Seven-in-ten describe themselves as very (12%) or pretty (58%) happy. More than one-quarter (27%) are less pleased, saying they are “not too happy”.

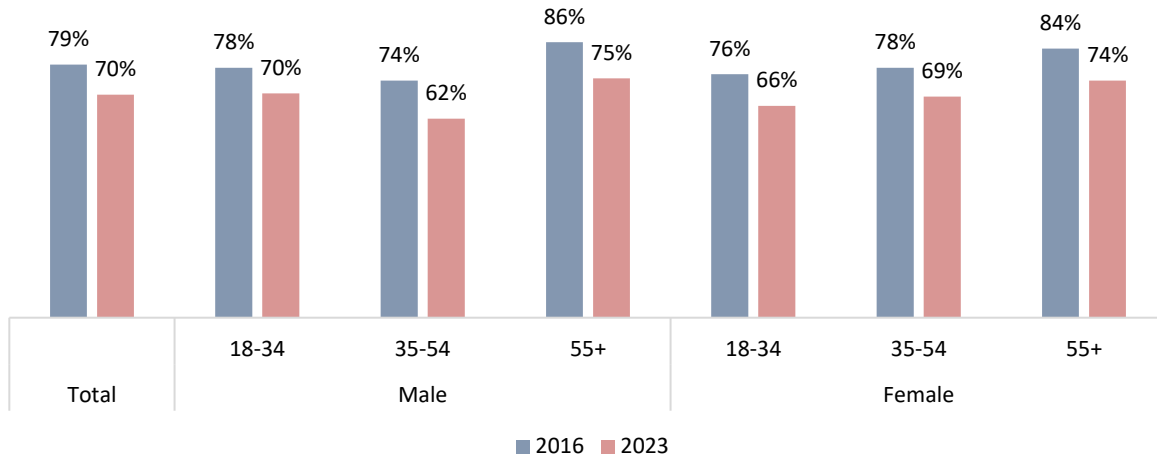
The latter figure represents a growing sense of unhappiness among Canadians since the Angus Reid Institute last asked this question in 2016, a pandemic, a period of historic inflation and turmoil ago:

Generally, how would you say things are these days in your life -- Would you say you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?



Older Canadians are much more likely to describe themselves as happy than their younger counterparts. This was true in 2016 and now, but there have been declines in professed happiness across all age groups. Seven years ago, men aged 35- to 54-years-old and women 18- to 34-years-old were the least likely to say they were generally happy. That’s still the case, but there is a larger gap between the former group and the latter now:

Percentage saying they are generally 'very happy' or 'pretty happy' these days

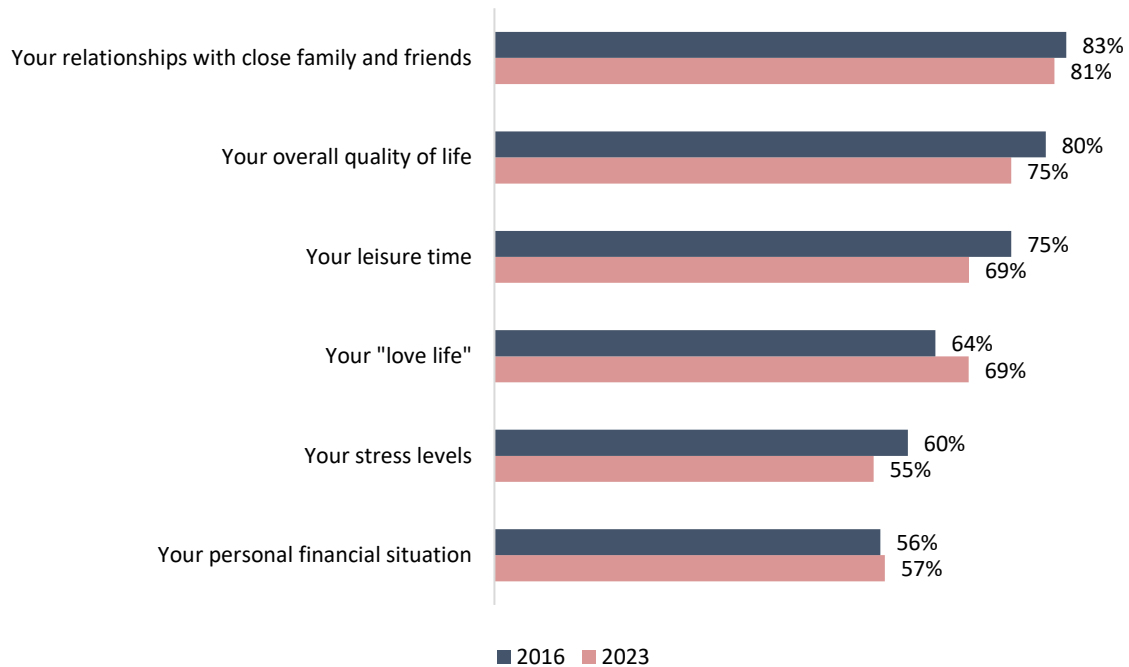


Love lives improve, finances steady, quality of life down

Canadians were asked to evaluate their satisfaction with nine elements of their life. A majority say they are satisfied with all nine, but the size of the majority varies from a low of 55 per cent who are satisfied with their stress levels and 57 per cent who are satisfied with their personal finances to 81 per cent who are satisfied with their relationships with close family and friends.

The latter has been a consistent source of satisfaction from Canadians since 2016. Other aspects of Canadians' lives have seen decreasing satisfaction – overall quality of life, social life, leisure time, stress levels – while Canadians are more likely to express satisfaction with their love life than they were seven years ago. Finances have been a consistent source of discontent for many even prior to these latest economic challenges:

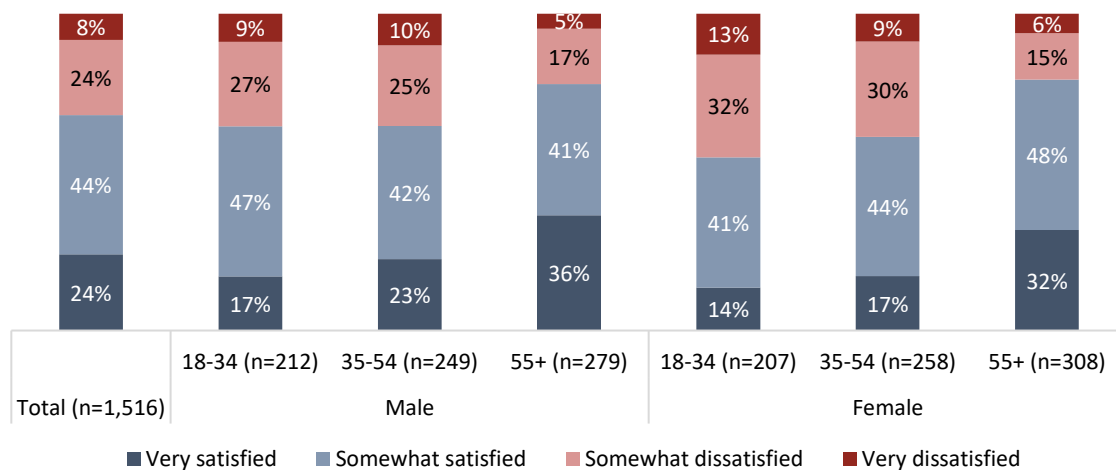
Overall satisfaction with each of the following specific aspects of your life today:



Older Canadians enjoy better mental health

Men and women offer different evaluations of their mental health. Women are more likely to report being dissatisfied than men, though the difference between the genders evaporates for Canadians older than 54. Older Canadians are the most likely group to say they are “very satisfied” when it comes to their mental health today. Some of this correlates to income level, as those who are older have a higher likelihood of financial security, home ownership, and other stabilizing lifestyle factors :

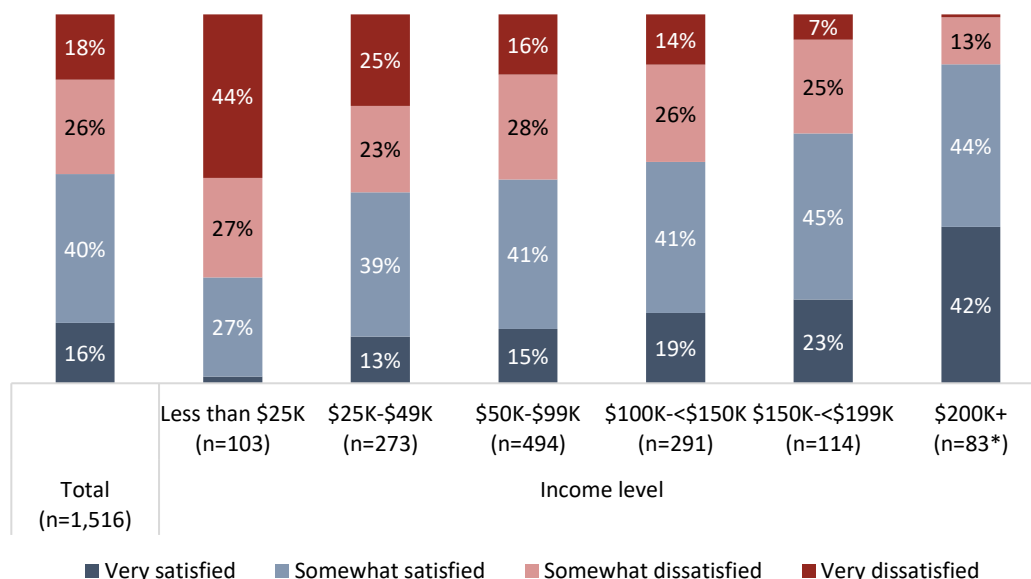
Satisfaction with 'mental health' in your life today:



Finances a challenge for lower-income earners

After a difficult year for many Canadians' finances more than two-in-five (44%) express dissatisfaction with their economic situation. However, financial unhappiness is much more common in lower income brackets than higher ones:

Satisfaction with 'personal financial situation' in your life today:



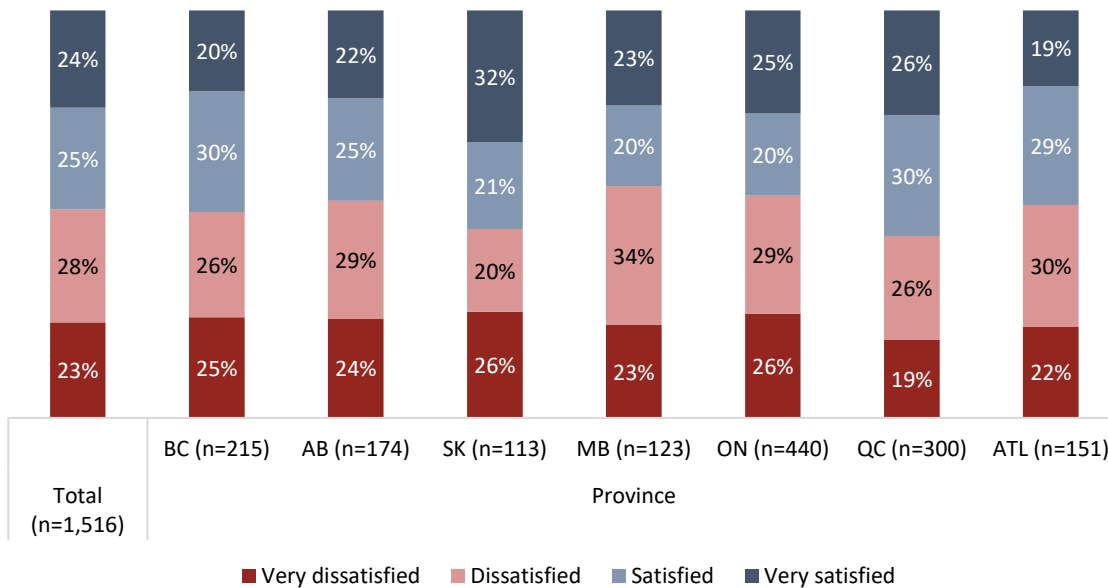
**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

Part Two: The Life Satisfaction Index

To better encapsulate Canadians' evaluations of their life as it stands to end 2023, the Angus Reid Institute created the Life Satisfaction Index, which uses a plus-minus scale to incorporate satisfaction across nine categories. Respondents receive two points if they're "very satisfied" with an element of their life, one point if they're "satisfied", negative one point if they're "dissatisfied" and negative two points if they're "very dissatisfied". Respondents are sorted into four groups based on these totals.

The four groups are near equal in size, with slightly more quantified as Dissatisfied (28%). These groups aren't distributed equally across the country, however. There are more Very Satisfied in Saskatchewan (32%) than elsewhere, and fewer Very Dissatisfied (19%) in Quebec:

Life Satisfaction Index



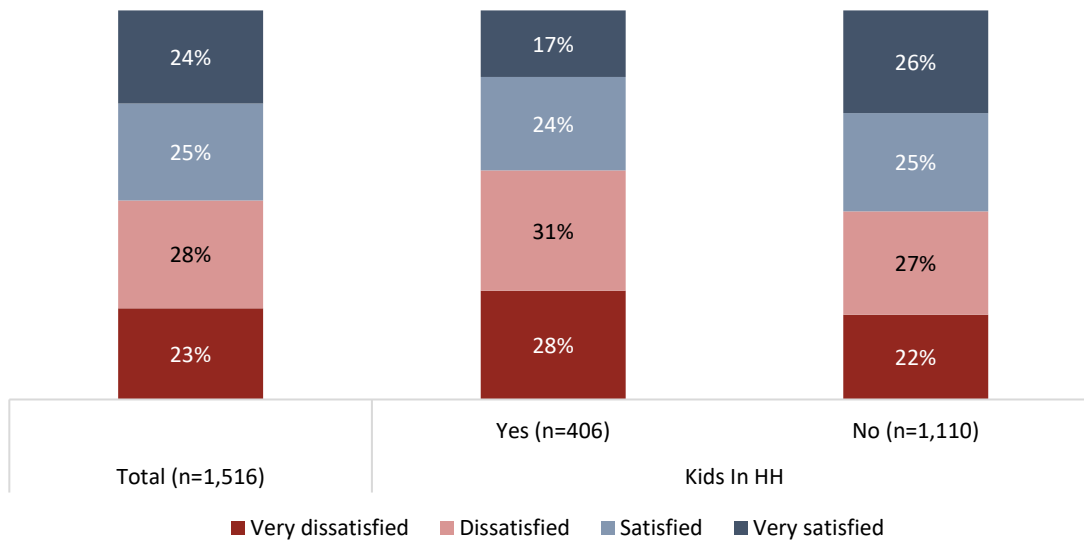
Biggest factors in life satisfaction include age, income level, kids

When it comes to life satisfaction, age is important. Older Canadians (55+) are more than twice as likely to be Very Satisfied according to the Life Satisfaction Index than younger ones. Two-in-five (40%) men older than 54 are found to be Very Satisfied, the most of any demographic.

The proportion of those in the top two categories of the index also rises, as one may suspect, with income level. Conversely, half (48%) of those living in households earning less than \$25,000 annually are Very Dissatisfied ([see detailed tables](#)).

Canadians living with kids are less likely to express satisfaction than those without. This is especially true when it comes to their physical health (53% satisfied vs. kids not in household 62%), leisure time (57% vs. 73%) and finances (46% vs. 61%).

Life Satisfaction Index

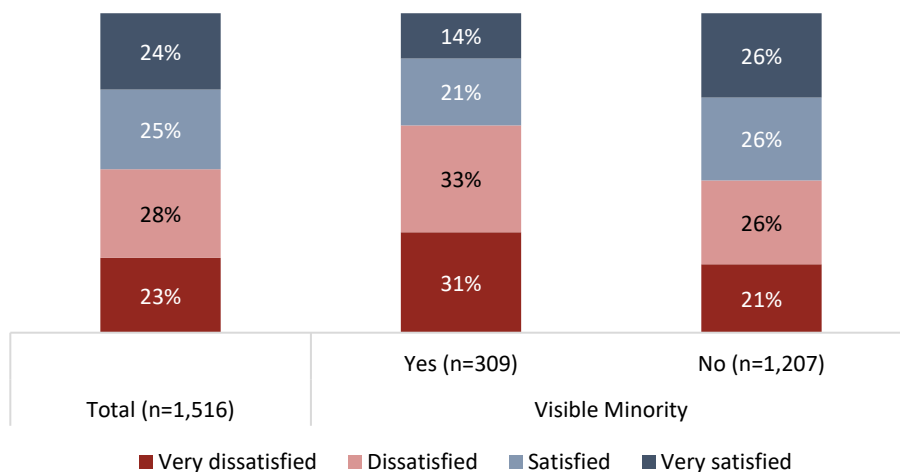


As well, Canadians who identify as visible minorities are more likely to be Very Dissatisfied with their life than others, especially when it comes to finances and physical health ([see detailed tables](#)). Previous ARI studies have found Canadians who identify as visible minorities more likely to struggle finding a family doctor. As well, visible minorities are more likely to report feeling discriminated based on their race or ethnicity, and less likely to say there has been progress at eradicating racism in Canada.

Related:

- [After a 'decade of decline' in health care, Canadians not convinced that money is enough to solve the crisis](#)
- [Canada and the Culture Wars: Most point to some progress reducing racism, but far fewer call it 'significant'](#)

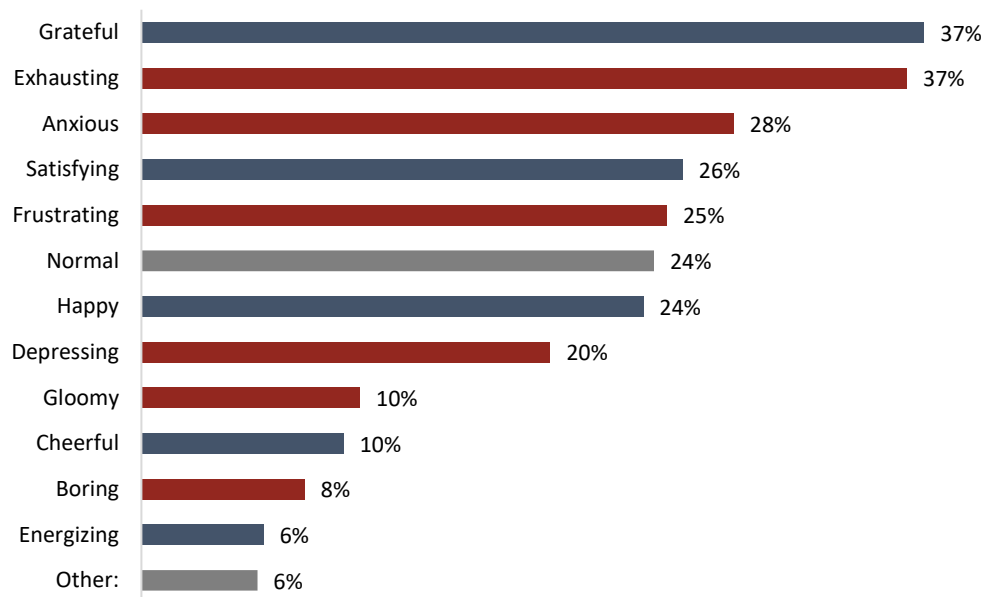
Life Satisfaction Index



Part Three: How Canadians describe their year

Canadians were asked to describe how they feel about their past 12 months using a list of words, both positive and negative. Atop the list are two equally chosen words, one positive and one negative. Nearly two-in-five (37%) say they look back on 2023 feeling grateful, while the same number look back and feel exhausted. Three-in-ten say they it was an anxious year (28%), while a similar number say it was satisfying (26%):

**Looking back on 2023, which of the following words would you use to describe your year?
(Up to three chosen; all respondents, n=1,516)**



There are generational and gender variations, with Canadians 18 to 54 years of age quite a bit more likely than their older peers to say this year was exhausting. The 35- to 54-year-old group, men and women alike, are more likely to say the year was frustrating, while women of all ages are more likely to voice anxiousness this year compared to their male peers:

Looking back on 2023, which of the following words would you use to describe your year?							
	Total (n=1,516)	Male			Female		
		18-34 (n=212)	35-54 (n=249)	55+ (n=279)	18-34 (n=207)	35-54 (n=258)	55+ (n=308)
Grateful	37%	38%	26%	34%	43%	39%	44%
Exhausting	37%	44%	43%	20%	46%	46%	26%
Anxious	28%	27%	25%	19%	34%	32%	33%
Satisfying	26%	25%	23%	33%	22%	20%	30%
Frustrating	25%	22%	34%	20%	21%	30%	24%
Normal	24%	23%	25%	29%	22%	24%	24%
Happy	24%	22%	20%	27%	23%	25%	25%
Depressing	20%	19%	20%	22%	19%	19%	18%

Those individuals on the negative end of the Life Satisfaction Index describe the year in a way almost unrecognizable compared to the Very Satisfied. For the Very Dissatisfied, half say the year was exhausting (54%), anxious (48%), or depressing (47%):

Top five words chosen to describe 2023, shown by Life Satisfaction Index segment (Up to three chosen)			
Very dissatisfied (23% of Canadians)		Dissatisfied (28% of Canadians)	
Exhausting	54%	Exhausting	46%
Anxious	48%	Anxious	39%
Depressing	47%	Grateful	35%
Frustrating	41%	Frustrating	33%
Gloomy	24%	Normal	22%

For those on the other side of things in their appraisal of life in 2023, the year was primarily a Happy, and Satisfying one, leaving them feeling Grateful:

Top five words chosen to describe 2023, shown by Life Satisfaction Index segment (Up to three chosen)			
Satisfied (25% of Canadians)		Very satisfied (24% of Canadians)	
Grateful	44%	Grateful	53%
Normal	36%	Happy	53%
Satisfying	35%	Satisfying	49%
Exhausting	31%	Normal	30%
Happy	27%	Cheerful	23%

For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by the Life Satisfaction Index, [click here](#).

Methodology Note:

The Life Satisfaction Index was scored by using all responses to question 2 in the survey about satisfaction with various elements of life ([see questionnaire here](#)). If someone was very satisfied with one aspect, they received two points. One point was given if they were just “satisfied”. For negative responses the same scoring was used but subtracting points rather than adding. The scores for each group are as follows:

Very Dissatisfied (-2 or worse)

Dissatisfied (-1 to 5)

Satisfied (6 to 10)

Very Satisfied (11 or better)