

## Blue Ocean Business Masterminds



The internet may be contributing to a long term decline in the social networks in the US, according to a study that reveals fewer close ties are now shared with family and friends than twenty years ago.

A study conducted in 2004 was compared with data from 1985 by sociologists from Duke University and the University of Arizona, who discovered the number of close confidants listed by respondents, had shrunk dramatically in the past two decades.

The study did not uncover any reasons for the social change, but based on other studies, the researchers speculated that contributing factors to the decline in social networks might include the increase number of hours that people spend at work and the influence of internet communication.

"New technology, while it allows people to connect over larger distances, might diminish the need for face-to-face visits with friends, family or neighbors," the study said.

Another suggested factor included the scattering of families across broader geographical regions.

The study, published in the June issue of American Sociological Review, compared data from 1985 and 2004 and found that *the mean number of people with whom Americans felt they could discuss important matters had fallen by nearly a third, from 2.94 people in 1985 to 2.08 in 2004.*

**The number of people who said they had no one with whom to discuss important matters also more than doubled during the period to about 25 per cent.**

"This change indicates something that's not good for our society. Ties with a close network of people create a safety net. These ties also lead to civic engagement and local political action," said Lynn Smith-Lovin, a professor of Sociology at Duke University.

Although the study found that both family and non-family connections had been lost, the greatest impact was on non-family connections fostered by membership of clubs, organizations and neighborhoods.

The researchers said the changes had taken them by surprise, and they are now planning follow up surveys.

"It's unusual to see very large social changes like this that aren't tied to some type of demographic shift in the population," said Miller McPherson, a research professor of sociology at Duke and professor of sociology at the University of Arizona.

"But even if the change is exaggerated for some reason, given our analyses of the highest quality, nationally representative data available, we are confident there is a trend toward smaller, closer social networks more centered on spouses and partners."