

Canadians' mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic

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The Secretary General of the United Nations has stated that the mental health and wellbeing of societies have been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and are a priority to be addressed urgently. Fears about the health impacts of the virus, concerns for family members, extended social isolation, economic risk and uncertainty are all common sources of distress around the world.

While some predict that there will be a long-term rise in the number and severity of mental health problems due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Statistics Canada is committed to monitoring the mental health of Canadians over this period.

From April 24 to May 11, 2020, approximately 46,000 Canadians participated in our online questionnaire "Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians: Your mental health." Today, Statistics Canada is releasing these data as part of a series of results based on this crowdsourcing initiative. Readers should note that unlike other surveys conducted by Statistics Canada, crowdsourcing data are not collected under a design using a probability-based sampling. Therefore, caution should be exercised when interpreting the findings, and no inferences about the overall Canadian population should be made based on these results.

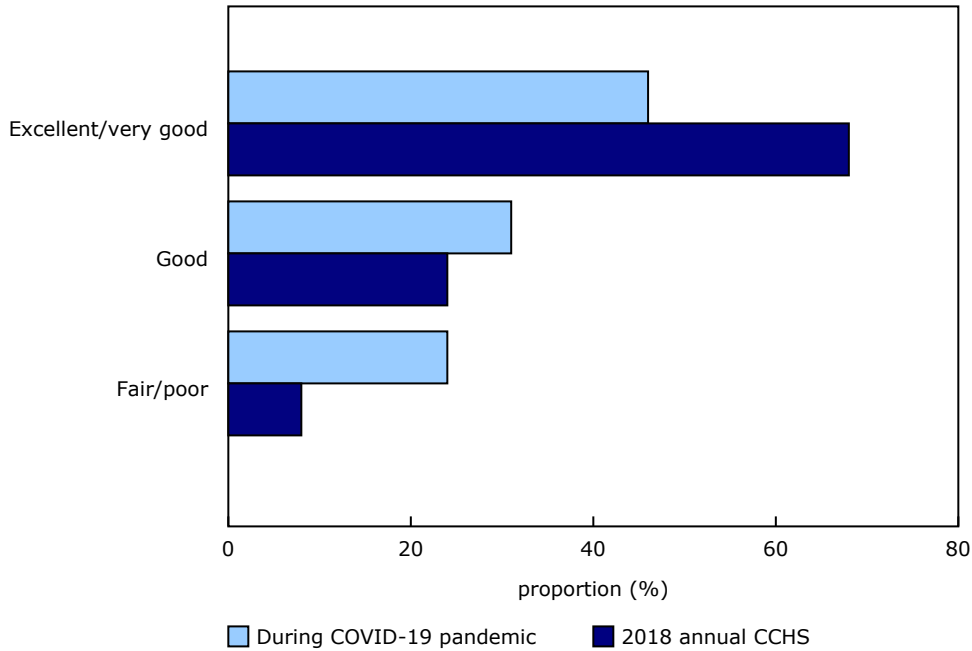
Almost one-quarter of participants indicate fair or poor mental health

Almost one quarter of the crowdsource participants (24%) reported fair or poor mental health, 31% reported good mental health, and nearly half (46%) reported very good or excellent mental health. Previously published data from the 2018 Canadian Community Health Survey found that 8% of Canadians reported fair or poor mental health, 24% reported good mental health, and 69% reported very good or excellent mental health.

While crowdsourced data are not directly comparable to population estimates from a sample survey, these findings are consistent with recent results from Statistics Canada's probabilistic web panel survey "Canadian Perspective Survey Series 1: Impacts of COVID-19" which also found that the self-perceived mental health of Canadians has fallen during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Chart 1
Self-perceived mental health of participants, April 24 to May 11, 2020, and 2018 Annual CCHS

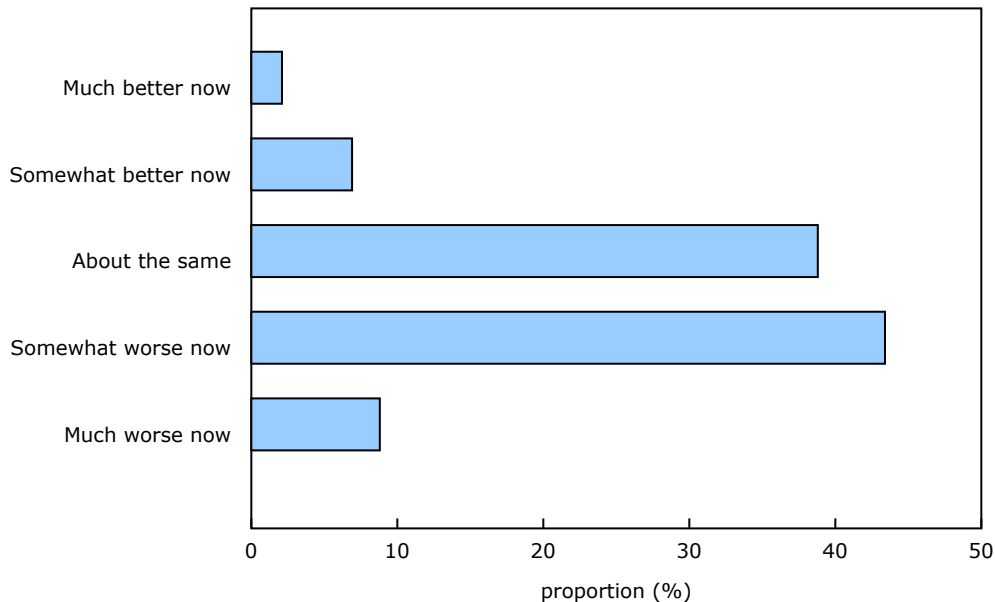


Source(s): Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians – Your mental health and 2018 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS).

Over half of participants report that their mental health has worsened since the onset of physical distancing

Canadians were asked how their mental health has changed since physical distancing began. Just over half (52%) of participants indicated that their mental health was either "somewhat worse" or "much worse." The other 48% of participants said that their mental health was "about the same," "somewhat better" or "much better."

Chart 2
Change in self-perceived mental health since the onset of physical distancing, April 24 to May 11, 2020



Source(s): Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians – Your mental health.

Most participants experience at least one symptom of anxiety

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic can be experienced in many different ways, including feelings of depression, grief, fear, panic, and anxiety which can be normal responses to situations where day-to-day routines are disrupted and circumstances are uncertain and perceived as potentially risky. The questionnaire asked Canadians about their feelings related to anxiety, which is one of the most common reactions to such situations.

Most (88%) participants experienced at least one symptom of anxiety in the two weeks prior to completing the survey. "Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge" was the most commonly reported symptom (71%), followed by "becoming easily annoyed or irritable" (69%) and "trouble relaxing" (64%).

Anxiety was measured using the GAD-7 scale, which is used in population health surveys to identify probable cases of generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) as well as to measure the severity of anxiety symptoms.

Among those who said their mental health is worse since physical distancing began, 41% reported symptoms consistent with moderate or severe anxiety. In contrast, among those who experienced no change or better mental health, 8% reported symptoms consistent with moderate or severe anxiety.

Studies are being conducted around the world by researchers and governments to monitor the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health. These international studies have found that mental health has worsened during the pandemic and that individuals are experiencing elevated feelings of depression, anxiety, and psychological distress. The frequency and the intensity of these feelings will vary across individuals and, for some, could lead to a clinical diagnosis. According to the Pew Research Center in the United States and the Mental Health Foundation in the United Kingdom, young people and those financially affected by the pandemic are particularly vulnerable.

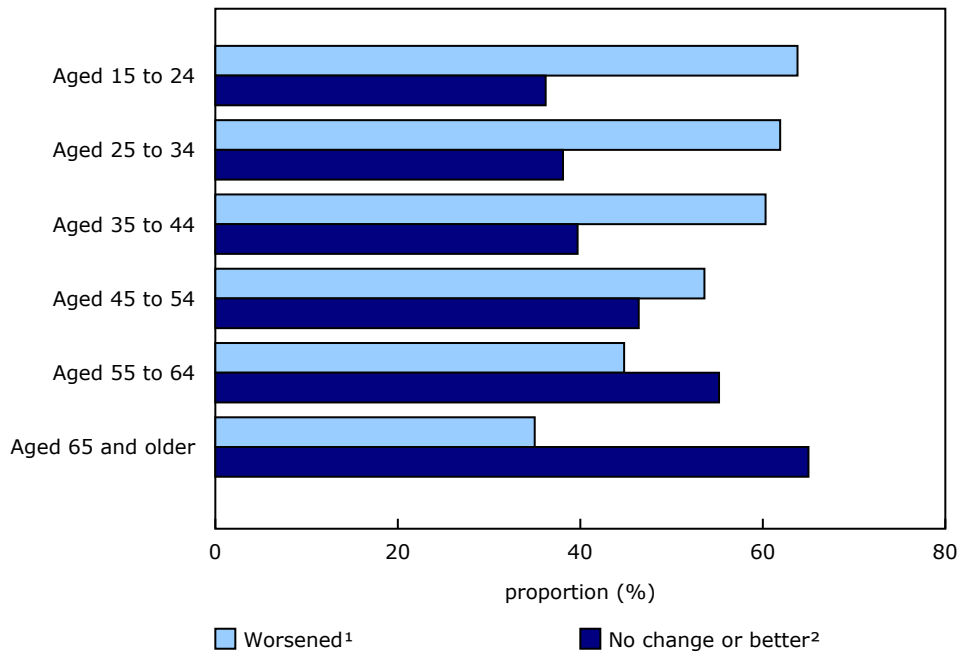
Higher anxiety among those who have been financially affected by COVID-19

Economic impacts related to COVID-19 that cause difficulty meeting financial obligations or essential needs can be a significant cause of anxiety. In this crowdsourcing survey, 43% of participants who reported significant impacts on their ability to meet financial obligations reported symptoms that were consistent with moderate or severe anxiety. Among those who reported that it was "too soon to tell" if the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on their financial status, about one-third (32%) reported symptoms consistent with moderate or severe anxiety. For those experiencing little to no financial impact, 18% reported symptoms consistent with moderate or severe anxiety.

Youth are more likely to report worsening mental health

Youth were the most likely to report a negative impact on their mental health since physical distancing began while seniors were the least likely to do so. Almost two-thirds (64%) of those aged 15 to 24 reported a negative impact on their mental health, while just over one-third (35%) of those aged 65 and older reported a negative impact on their mental health since physical distancing began. This is consistent with earlier results released by Statistics Canada's "Canadian Perspective Survey Series 1: Impacts of COVID-19," which found that every age group except seniors was less likely to report excellent or very good mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic compared with rates prior to the pandemic.

Chart 3
Change in self-perceived mental health since the onset of physical distancing, by age group, April 24 to May 11, 2020



1. Responded 'somewhat worse now' or 'much worse now.'

2. Responded 'about the same,' 'somewhat better' or 'much better.'

Source(s): Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians – Your mental health.

Similarly, those aged 15 to 24 were most likely (41%) to report symptoms consistent with moderate or severe anxiety, while those aged 65 and older were the least likely to do so (11%). The higher level of anxiety among youth reflects the findings from the study "Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on postsecondary students," which highlighted significant concerns about finances, academic disruptions and employment prospects among participants.

Participants who report mental health has worsened also report higher stress levels

Stress is a normal physiological reaction to a difficult situation. Participants were asked about stress levels on most days. Overall, 6% of participants reported no stress (not at all stressful). Two-thirds (66%) reported lower levels of stress (not very stressful or a bit stressful) and 28% reported high stress (quite a bit stressful or extremely stressful).

Among those who said their mental health is worse, 41% reported high stress (quite a bit stressful or extremely stressful). In contrast, 13% of those reporting no change or better mental health reported high stress.

Note to readers

Over the next few weeks, new crowdsourcing initiatives will be launched to get timely information about other important issues, such as the extent to which COVID-19 is affecting the lives and well-being of different groups of Canadians. Canadians are invited to keep coming to the website in order to participate.

Methodological adjustments have been made to account for age, sex and provincial differences.

Physical distancing was defined as making changes in everyday routines in order to minimize close contact with others, including: avoiding crowded places and gatherings, avoiding common greetings such as handshakes, limiting contact with people at higher risk, and keeping a distance of at least two arms' length from others (approximately two metres).

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is a condition characterized by a pattern of frequent, persistent worry and excessive anxiety about several events or activities. Those with a score of 10 or higher on the GAD-7 were considered to have moderate to severe symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder in the two weeks prior to completing the survey. The data reported do not necessarily reflect a professional diagnosis of GAD. In the context of the COVID-19 outbreak where the population has been unexpectedly exposed to an unprecedented global crisis with wide-ranging impacts including significant disruption to employment, schooling, and routines, and increased health risk, it is important to note that feelings of anxiety can be understood as natural reactions and not necessarily indicators of a long-term mental health disorder.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5323](#).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).