

FACTUM

COVID-19: A Mental Health Pandemic. Three-Fifths (59%) of Canadians Report That Their Mental Health Has Been Negatively Affected by the Coronavirus

Yet Only One in Five (21%) Whose Mental Health Has Been Negatively Affected Have Sought Healthcare for Their Issues

Toronto, Ontario, May 14, 2020 — By staying at home and social distancing for so many weeks, it is possible that many Canadians are beginning to feel lonely, isolated, depressed, anxious, or experiencing other mental health issues due to the coronavirus pandemic. Indeed, the results of an Ipsos poll conducted on behalf of Sun Life reveal that we may, in fact, be dealing with another pandemic within the coronavirus pandemic. More specifically, as many as three-fifths (59%) indicate that their mental health has been negatively affected by COVID-19, a figure which jumps to two-thirds among women (66% vs. 51% of men) and adults aged 18-55 (65% vs. 49% 56+). For some, though a considerably smaller proportion (10%), being at home has given them peace of mind, as this group reports that their mental health has actually improved, as a result of COVID-19. Three in ten (31%) say the pandemic has had no impact on their mental health.

Many others have simply been spending too much time on the couch, as half of Canadians (49%) report that their physical health has been negatively impacted by COVID-19. Conversely, fourteen percent (14%) claim that COVID-19 has had a positive affect on their physical health whereas nearly two in five (37%) say that it has *not been affected at all*. Boomers (56+) are among the most likely to report feeling *not at all affected* by the coronavirus pandemic, both mentally (44% vs. 24% 55 & under) and physically (47% vs. 32%). Women (53%) are more likely than men (45%) to feel as though coronavirus has had a negative impact on their physical health.

Only one in five who feel negatively affected, either mentally (21%) or physically (21%), by the coronavirus pandemic have sought healthcare for their issues. Canadians aged 18-55 who think their mental health has been negatively affected by the coronavirus are more than twice as likely (at 26%), compared those aged 56+ (9%), to have sought healthcare for their issues.

Healthcare During COVID-19 & Beyond: The Increasing Salience of Virtual Care

With most of the population confined to their homes, engaging in virtual activities, such as working from home or having virtual parties with friends and family, is becoming an increasingly normal and important part of everyday life. The results of this poll indicate that these behaviours are extending into the healthcare realm, as well. For starters, nearly half (44%) of those who sought healthcare for mental health issues list online self-help as their method of treatment for their mental health issues, with equally as many indicating that they had video calls with healthcare professionals (36%) as went to actual in-person appointments (37%). A plurality (39%) of those who sought healthcare for physical issues did so in person, though as many as one in three had a virtual appointment (31%) or cite online self-help (31%) as their method of treatment.

FACTUM

Around half of those who did not seek healthcare support for mental (52%) or physical (46%) health issues caused by COVID-19 cite a belief that none was needed. Aside from this, the most common reasons mentioned for not seeking support for physical health issues include: a lack of access (21%), affordability (10%), and being too busy (9%) or embarrassed (8%) to do so. Similarly, the most frequently stated reasons for not seeking mental health support include: a lack of access (12%), affordability (10%), not knowing where to go (10%) or feeling too embarrassed (12%).

Awareness of virtual care is relatively high, as three-quarters (72%) of Canadians claim to have heard of it, though only seventeen percent (17%) have used it. Women (76% vs. 68% of men) and those who have sought healthcare for mental health issues (82% vs. 68% of those who have not) are among the most likely to report awareness of virtual care. In fact, a vast majority (92%) of those who have never used virtual care do not rule out the possibility of using it in the future, including nearly half (42%) who say they would strongly consider it.

When asked what is appealing about virtual care, convenience (54%) tops the list followed by not having to wait in a waiting room with others (50%), the speed at which an appointment can be booked (40%), and the cost (36%). Gen Z (18-23) is far less likely to view not having to wait in a waiting room with others (32% vs. 52% aged 24+) as a benefit of virtual care.

Nearly nine in ten (87%) Canadians have a healthcare provider that they see on a regular basis. And yet there is some ambiguity that exists in terms of virtual care and how it relates to healthcare providers. Although nearly half (45%) of Canadians feel like they know where to find virtual care, a majority (56%) of those with healthcare providers admit they are unsure as to whether or not virtual care is something they can receive from their provider. Only about one in four (27%) report that the healthcare provider they see on a regular basis provides it and just seventeen percent (17%) can say, rather conclusively, that their healthcare provider does not offer virtual care.



FACTUM

About the Study

These are some of the findings of an Ipsos poll conducted between May 8th and 11th, 2020 on behalf of Sun Life. For this survey, a sample of 1,001 Canadians aged 18+ were interviewed. Weighting was then employed to balance demographics to ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the adult population according to Census data and to provide results intended to approximate the sample universe. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll is accurate to within ± 3.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, had all Canadians 18+ been polled. The credibility interval will be wider among subsets of the population. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.

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