



FACTUM

COVID Continues to Take Heavy Toll on Canadians' Mental Health

Younger Canadians, Those with Kids, and Canadians in Atlantic Canada, Ontario, and Saskatchewan/Manitoba Feeling Particularly Stressed

Toronto, ON, February 20, 2021 – In the midst of a cold snap in many parts of the country and a second wave of COVID-19, Canadians are feeling the toll on their mental health. Canadians are feeling more anxious, more stressed, and increasingly lonely due to physical or social distancing. The largest increases are in Saskatchewan/Manitoba and Ontario, where case loads have increased and stricter lockdowns have been put in place, as well as among younger Canadians aged 18-34 and those with children at home. As job anxiety, especially among younger Canadians, has taken hold and as home schooling has persisted in many jurisdictions, Canadians in these groups are feeling particularly vulnerable with some turning to drugs, alcohol, or other substances to help cope.

Stress and anxiety have increased

A majority (56%) say they are feeling increased stress or anxiety as a result of COVID-19. Younger Canadians (18-34) report being particularly affected, with 63% saying they are feeling increased stress or anxiety, while older Canadians (55+) are taking things more in stride: 46% report increased stress or anxiety. Regionally, Atlantic Canadians (68%) and prairie residents in Saskatchewan and Manitoba (65%) are most likely to say they're feeling increased stress or anxiety, while British Columbians (46%) are the least. Women (58%) are feeling more stress or anxiety than men (52%), as are Canadians with kids at home (64%), compared to those without (53%).

While the national number has not changed much since November 2020 (56% in February compared to 55% in November) there have been considerable regional and demographic shifts, most notably in Manitoba/Saskatchewan and Atlantic Canada, where stress and anxiety levels have risen since November. Additionally, more men are reporting stress and anxiety in 2021 than they were experiencing in November 2020, while slightly less women are.

Agreement with "I am experiencing increased stress or anxiety as a result of COVID-19"

	Agree February 2021	Agree November 2020	Change
National Average	56%	55%	+1%
British Columbia	46%	50%	-4%
Alberta	59%	63%	-4%
Saskatchewan/Manitoba	65%	48%	+17%
Ontario	62%	57%	+5%
Quebec	43%	49%	-6%
Atlantic	68%	58%	+10%
18-34	63%	62%	+1%
53-54	60%	62%	-2%
55+	46%	42%	+4%
Men	52%	45%	+7%
Women	59%	63%	-4%
Kids	64%	70%	-6%
No kids	53%	50%	+3%

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A decline in how Canadians feel about their mental health

Close to a majority (44%) also report that their mental health is in bad shape during these (2021) winter months. This is especially true of younger Canadians aged 18-34 (61%) and women (50%). Residents of Saskatchewan/Manitoba (58%) and Atlantic Canada (53%) were more likely to agree that their mental health is in bad shape during the 2021 winter. Canadians with kids at home (57%) are also much more likely to agree than those without (40%).

The data also show the second wave of lockdowns appears to be taking a heavier toll than the first. Forty-four per cent of Canadians (44%) agree that the second wave is impacting their mental health more than the first back in the spring. This is acutely true for those aged 18-34 (53%) and less true for Canadians aged 55+ (36%). Residents of Saskatchewan/Manitoba (50%) and Ontario (49%) are more likely to agree, as are those with kids (56%, compared to 41% without kids).

Close to three-in-ten (28%) say that their mental health has been worse during these (2021) winter months, while 63% say it has been about what they expected. Only nine percent (9%) say it has been better. Those most likely to say it has been worse include Canadians aged 18-34 (35%) and residents of Saskatchewan/Manitoba (42%). However, those with children at home are more likely (17%) to say that their mental health has been better, compared to those without kids at home (7%), suggesting that Canadians with kids at home expected a greater strain on their mental health that hasn't materialized.

The data suggest several possible causes for declining mental health. A majority (54%) say physical distancing has left them feeling lonely or isolated. Once again, this is particularly true of younger Canadians aged 18-34 (60%) and less true among older Canadians aged 55+ (47%). Residents of Saskatchewan/Manitoba (66%), Ontario (59%) and those with kids (61%) are also more likely to feel this way.

The effects of physical distancing

There has been a slight increase in those who feel that physical (or social) distancing has left them feeling lonely or isolated. In November 2020, 45% of Canadians felt this way, compared to 54% now. However, across all demographics, more Canadians are feeling more lonely or isolated now (February 2021) than they were in late 2020. Residents of Saskatchewan/Manitoba (+14%) and Ontario (+11%), Canadians over 55 years in age (+14%), men (+11%) and those with kids at home (+13%) saw the biggest change. The combination of the duration of the lockdowns and cold weather may account for the increased sense of loneliness or isolation.

Agreement with "Physical (social) distancing has left me feeling lonely or isolated."

	Agree February 2021	Agree November 2020	Change
National Average	54%	45%	+11%
British Columbia	44%	43%	+1%
Alberta	53%	45%	+8%
Saskatchewan/Manitoba	66%	49%	+17%
Ontario	59%	45%	+14%
Quebec	47%	47%	No change
Atlantic	56%	42%	+14%
18-34	60%	56%	+4%
53-54	55%	50%	+5%

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55+	47%	33%	+14%
Men	52%	41%	+11%
Women	55%	49%	+6%
Kids	61%	48%	+13%
No kids	51%	44%	+7%

Struggles with addiction

Sixteen per cent (16%) of Canadians report they find themselves struggling with addiction issues such as alcohol or drugs, more than they did before the pandemic. That number is most acute among younger Canadians aged 18-34, where close to a quarter (24%) say they are struggling with addiction issues. Middle aged Canadians (35-54) also report challenges as two in ten (20%) say they are struggling with addiction issues. There are no significant variations by region, gender or by those who have kids at home.

The national number for those who report struggling with addiction is relatively unchanged since November (19% in November compared to 16% in February), but men (24% in November compared to 18% in February) and those with kids at home (25% in November compared to 19% in February) appear to be faring better now than they were before. Nonetheless, a significant portion of the population in certain groups appear to be facing down not only COVID-19 and the anxieties and mental health challenges that come with it, but also issues around dependency that may persist after the pandemic.

In Conclusion

Overall, these data suggest that the toll of COVID goes beyond the virus itself for many Canadians. Canadians are reporting increased stress and anxiety, and concerns about their mental health. They are feeling the isolation effects of physical distancing, and some are turning to drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism. Certain groups – particularly younger Canadians and those with kids at home – appear to be especially vulnerable to the mental health and addiction challenges brought on by COVID-19.



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About the Study

These are some of the findings of an Ipsos poll conducted between February 8-10, 2021, on behalf of Global News. For this survey, a sample of 1,000 Canadians aged 18+ was interviewed online. Quotas and weighting were employed to ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the Canadian population according to census parameters. 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 aged 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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