

Covid19 Polling Project



Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC) is a national, registered charity dedicated to advancing knowledge in the mental health space. The organization was formed in 2017 out of the former Ontario Mental Health Foundation which has an over 50 year history in supporting knowledge and research.

Very early in the pandemic (March) MHRC identified that mental health would be the third pillar of the Covid19 crisis. After surveying the landscape and consulting with numerous stakeholders, the organization decided to contribute by ensuring large scale and in-depth data existed that tracked the mental health of Canadians during the pandemic. We also repositioned our grant strategy and now have multiple co-funded province-wide calls for innovative Covid19 related mental health research in five provinces.

MHRC has been conducting multiple polls (3 complete with a 4th in process), in partnership with Pollara Strategic Insights, which has engaged approximately 8,000 Canadians since April 2020 with a comprehensive demographic and mental health poll. To our knowledge, we are collecting and reporting on one of the largest samples on mental health in Canada. In addition to a host of mental health questions, we collect a host of demographic data including postal codes, gender, age, income, immigration status, family status, employment status, employment category, visible minority, disabilities, Indigenous, family status, and pre-existing mental health condition. We also collect ancillary information such as adherence to Covid19 social distancing guidelines and for this most recent poll, direct or secondary exposure to Covid19.

Our purpose is to inform stakeholders, share data, and contribute to the dialogue on mental health by producing the highest quality reports and unique findings that help Canadians struggling with mental health. We have partnered with multiple organizations in sharing results and multiple provincial research and government bodies to share the data itself.

What follows is a collection of slides from our ongoing public reports on the state of Mental Health in Canada.

Methodology

Methodology: This online survey was conducted among a sample of 2,004 adult Canadians. This was the third poll of this study, following a first poll conducted in April and a second conducted in August 2020. Results between the polls are compared where applicable.

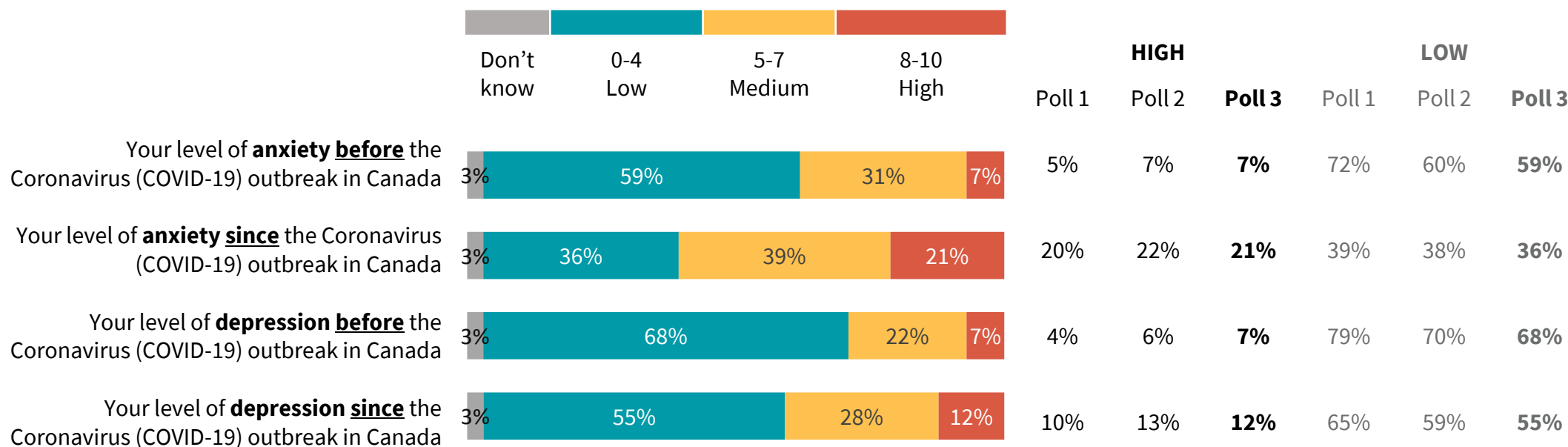
Weighting: National results have been weighted by the most current census data in terms of gender, age, & region to ensure the total sample is representative of the population as a whole

| Region | Number of Interviews | Margin of error | Number of Interviews | Margin of error | Number of Interviews | Margin of error |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| | Poll One April 22 to 28, 2020 | | Poll Two August 21 to 31, 2020 | | Poll Three October 22 to 28, 2020 | |
| National | 1,803 | ±2.3% | 4,010 | ±1.5% | 2,004 | ±2.2% |
| British Columbia | 251 | ±6.2% | 275 | ±5.9% | 271 | ±6.0% |
| Alberta | 252 | ±6.2% | 273 | ±5.9% | 270 | ±6.0% |
| Prairies | 200 | ±6.9% | 701 | ±3.7% | 231 | ±6.5% |
| Ontario | 701 | ±3.7% | 826 | ±3.4% | 801 | ±3.5% |
| Quebec | 300 | ±5.6% | 394 | ±4.9% | 356 | ±5.2% |
| Atlantic Canada | 99 | ±9.8% | 1541 | ±2.5% | 75 | ±11.3% |

A note to readers: not all data collection is equal. The data collected here is via a controlled online sample via Leger Opinion Panel. Respondents are incentivized to participate. As an online panel, however, we are aware of a response bias that only people with internet access can respond. We consider all of our results to ensure statistical significance and the margin of error referenced above.

Anxiety & Depression levels - Polls 1 to 3

- Following the COVID-19 outbreak, the proportion of Canadians reporting high levels of anxiety increased from 5% to 20%. As time has continued, **21% still say they have high anxiety.**
- The proportion of Canadians reporting high depression doubled following the COVID outbreak (12%) and remains at this level.



A2A. Please rate each of the following using the scale 0-10 where “10” is Extremely high and “0” is None. Base: (Total N=2,004)

Kessler 10 - Poll 2

- A majority of Canadians who indicate that they have high levels of depression or anxiety since COVID-19 are likely to be classified as moderate (21%) to severe (42%), using the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10).
- Only a fifth (21%) of those who feel they have a high level of stress or depression are likely to be classified as having no mental health condition.

Psychological Distress 1-5 Point Scale Items*

| NONE OF THE TIME 1 point | A LITTLE OF THE TIME 2 points | SOME OF THE TIME 3 points | MOST OF THE TIME 4 points | ALL OF THE TIME 5 points |
|---|----------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | | | (All/Most) | (None/Little) |
| Tired out for no good reason | | | 44% | 21% → |
| That everything was an effort | | | 41% | 33% |
| Nervous | | | 37% | 22% |
| Depressed | | | 33% | 33% |
| Restless or fidgety | | | 28% | 31% |
| Hopeless | | | 26% | 45% |
| Worthless | | | 25% | 57% |
| So sad that nothing could cheer you up | | | 20% | 52% |
| So restless you could not sit still | | | 14% | 59% |
| So nervous that nothing could calm you down | | | 13% | 60% |

Mental Health Score

| | |
|-----|---|
| 21% | Likely to have no mental health disorder (10-20) |
| 16% | Likely to have a mild mental disorder (20-24) |
| 21% | Likely to have moderate mental disorder (25-29) |
| 42% | Likely to have severe mental disorder (30-50) |

Canadians most likely to be classified with a severe mental disorder include:

- Males (49% vs. 37% females)
- Younger (18-34: 52%) compared with older (35-54: 38%; 55+: 33%)
- Canadians living alone (56% vs. 37%)

Summary of Major Findings

Poll 1 – April 2020



- Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the levels of very high **anxiety have quadrupled (from 5% to 20%)** while the levels of high **depression have doubled (from 4% to 10%)**. Subsequently, those who had low levels of anxiety before the outbreak, have been cut in half (72% to 39%), whereas the proportion of Canadians who described their level of depression as low decreased from 79% to 65%. **Among those with an anxiety disorder or depression, say their high levels of anxiety and depression have doubled since the outbreak (16% to 38% and 12% to 28% respectively)**
- While the number of people who responded that they had a previous diagnosis of depression is higher in Rural Canada (24%) than Urban Canada (16%), we found that the current level of those indicating a high level of depression is approximately the same for both.
- Concern is highest for the economy (48%) and the impact that the outbreak is having on their jobs – many are worried about losing work hours or pay (42%), getting laid off themselves (38%) or having a family member lose their job (43%), and some have already suffered a recent job loss (57%). These factors are having a strong negative impact on their mental health (as noted above).

Summary of Major Findings

Poll 2 – August 2020



- Teachers in K-12 education indicate a 500% increase (5% to 25%) in the number of people who indicate a high level of anxiety compared to pre-Covid levels.
- Despite the dramatic reduction in restrictions and cases of the virus between April and August 2020, there is no reduction in the level of people who have high levels of anxiety and depression. We will conduct this poll again in mid-October to assess if these levels will continue to rise with a potential second wave of the virus emerging.
- Nearly two-thirds of Canadians who indicated a high degree of anxiety or depression would be classified as having a moderate to severe level of psychological distress (as diagnosed through the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)). Notably a higher number of men and people living alone were in the severe category.
- While some factors that were negatively affecting mental health have been reduced (notably economic related stresses) we see a dramatic reduction in the positive impact of the many of the coping mechanisms Canadians were utilizing, including spending time with family members, entertainment, physical exercise and interacting with friends.
- Prescription medication is by far the largest method that Canadians are managing mental health, with a full 60% of people who indicated a mood or mental disorder diagnosis indicating they were managing this way.
- 2 in 5 Canadians who were getting treatment for mental health condition are no longer accessing those services, with a major drop in one-to-one counselling and visits to family doctors dramatically reduced.

Summary of Major Findings

Poll 3 – October 2020

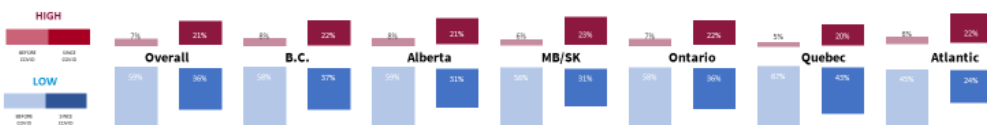


- **Being outside** is the best activity to support positive mental health, with 39% of Canadians indicating a positive impact on their mental health. This compares to a host of indoor activities that 9% to 29% indicate have a positive impact.
- Despite evolving Covid-19 case counts and restrictions, the number of people indicating a high degree of anxiety and depression has remained relatively stable since the onset of the pandemic. It became highly elevated when the pandemic and lockdown started, and has moved only marginally since then.
- The small group of Canadians who do not adhere or believe in Covid19 guidelines and restrictions indicate a high level of anxiety and depression. This group indicates that the primary driver of their negative mental health is economic concerns.

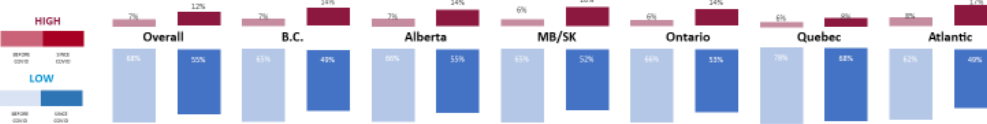
Sampling of Additional Findings

Levels of anxiety and depression are similar across the country

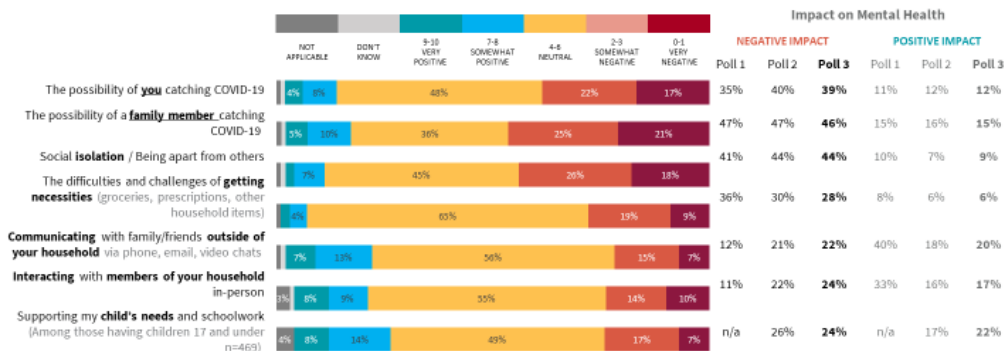
ANXIETY DISORDER



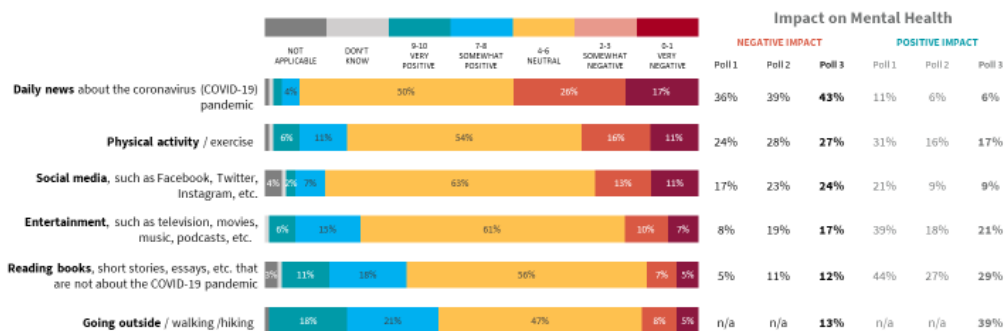
DEPRESSION



Fear of the spread of COVID-19 and social isolation continue to have a negative impact on mental health (2/2)

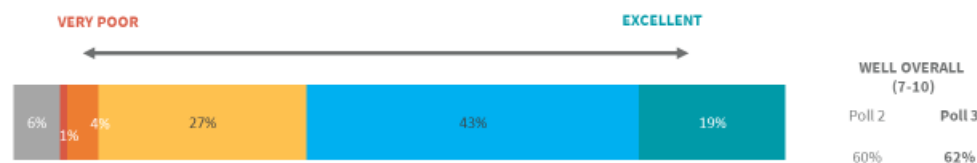


The positive impact of activities on mental health has stabilized after a decline in Poll 2 (1/2)



Canadians are feeling confident about their ability to recover from the challenges presented by COVID-19

- While three-fifths of Canadians feel somewhat confident about their ability to bounce back from the challenges in life, (62% rate this 7 to 10, when 10 means excellent), less than one-fifth are feeling very confident (19% rating this a 9 or 10) and only 8% give their ability to do so a 10 out of 10. Results are similar to Poll 2 findings.
- Those who are not monitoring government guidelines are more likely to feel they are able to recover from challenges (rated 9-10: those do not monitor 33%, those who try to follow 19%, those who do follow 18%).



Specific Questions



In the invitation to appear, we noted some specific questions about various groups. Our response:

- While we do see some differences in the self-reporting of those who are identifying as a visible minority and newer immigrant, the stronger correlation to high anxiety and depression is low income and to a lesser extent education level.
- While we do have some specific findings regarding Indigenous Canadians, we have chosen not to broadly report most of them because of concerns about sampling bias and sample size. We continue to collect more data here.
- Indigenous Canadians are more likely to rate as having high anxiety and depression and more likely to indicate a previous diagnosis of various mental disorders. We found a higher percentage indicating increased alcohol use during the pandemic. We also found Indigenous Canadians indicated a higher likelihood of accessing mental health services in the past compared to non-Indigenous populations.
- We found both visible minorities and Indigenous Canadians were more willing to be influenced to seek help when needed by a variety of messengers.
- A area of concern for us is low-income Canadians who are less likely to be covered by any benefits or private insurance. Access to benefits was a significant indicator of previous diagnosis. As such, for low income Canadians our data indicates a likely gap in mental health diagnosis. Among this group we also found increased negative mental health concerning the economic fallout of the pandemic and lockdowns.

Next Steps



- We are hope to continue this work until March 2022. We will implement every 8 weeks.
- We are running a poll right now with a report to be released the first week of January.
- Our next area of focus will be employment categories and increasing sample sizes for indigenous and visible minority population. We also will be collecting data specific to those touched by the virus itself.
- Looking farther ahead – we hope to increase our baseline sample size, add in more positive mental health states and consider how the vaccine is impacting mental health.
- We always welcome additional input, and collaboration. We respond to requests for additional insight into our data.