

COVID-19 survey shows almost eight out of 10 adults are worried, bored, stressed, lonely or sad

4 May 2021, by Lou Corpuz-Bosshart



Credit: [Nik Shuliahin](#) on [Unsplash](#)

The pandemic continues to take an emotional toll on people in Canada, with 77% of adults reporting negative emotions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the latest mental health survey by UBC researchers, in partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA).

The five most common [emotional](#) responses to the pandemic across Canada were "worried or anxious," "bored," "stressed," "lonely or isolated" and "sad," says lead researcher Dr. Emily Jenkins, a professor of nursing at UBC who studies [mental health](#) and [substance use](#).

"The pandemic has been incredibly hard for many people," said Jenkins. "There has been significant loss—of loved ones, of connection, of [feelings](#) of security. This can contribute to very challenging emotions and it is important to acknowledge and process."

The data, released today to mark CMHA's 70th annual Mental Health Week, was compiled in late

January 2021 using a representative sample of 3,037 people ages 18 and older living in Canada.

"While it's discouraging to think that so many Canadians are feeling upset, difficult emotions may actually be an appropriate response to a major event like a global pandemic," says Margaret Eaton, national CEO of CMHA. "The good news is, being able to experience a range of emotions is healthy. Recognizing, understanding and processing our feelings—even the uncomfortable ones—is actually a sign of positive mental [health](#)."

Managing emotional responses

The researchers emphasize that good mental health is not about being happy all the time, but having appropriate emotional and behavioural responses to stressors and life events.

However, it's important to know when anxious feelings become a cause for concern.

"It's time to seek help if you are feeling overwhelmed for prolonged periods of time or have persistent feelings of worry, anger or despair," says Dr. Anne Gadermann, co-lead researcher and professor at the school of population and public health at UBC.

"Or, if challenging emotions are interrupting your daily functioning, negatively impacting your relationships, your ability to work or enjoy life or causing you to rely on substances to cope. If you are having thoughts or feelings of suicide, you should seek help for your mental health."

Mental health challenges

The survey found that those experiencing the most challenging emotions related to the pandemic are

also the most likely to report a decline in their mental health as well as suicidal thoughts.

Suicidal thoughts and feelings in the general population remain elevated at 8%, compared to 6% in spring 2020 and 10% in the fall of 2020—substantially higher than the 2.5% observed pre-pandemic in 2016.

Overall, a large number of Canadians (41%) report their mental health has declined since the onset of the pandemic, compared to 38% in the spring and 40% in the fall of last year. Also, consistent with the first and second rounds of data, the decline is more pronounced in those who are unemployed due to COVID-19 (61%), younger aged 18-24 (50%), students (48%), those who identify as LGBTQ2+ (46%) those with a pre-existing mental health condition (54%) and those with a disability (47%).

Exercise and social ties help

Canadians also report they have increased their screen time (57%), are consuming more food (28%), are doing more [online shopping](#) for things they don't need (18%), and are using more substances like drugs and alcohol due to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic (13%).

The good news is most Canadians (79%) say they are coping at least fairly well with the stress of the pandemic, using approaches such as: walking or exercising outside (51%), connecting with family and friends virtually (43%), maintaining a healthy lifestyle (40%), keeping up to date with relevant information (38%) and doing a hobby (37%).

"Investments in mental health are more important than ever right now. They need to be front and centre in Canada's approach to [pandemic](#) recovery," said Dr. Jenkins.

More information: The survey findings are available online: cmha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2021-11-10-CMHA-2021-Mental-Health-Survey-Findings-FINAL-EN.pdf

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