The COVID-19 Pandemic and Stress

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected individuals, families, and communities in several ways. Almost 7 out of 10 Canadians reported being negatively impacted by COVID-19. Almost 2 out of 5 Canadians reported some level of distress in the past month. With social distancing and repeated lockdown measures, feelings of isolation and loneliness can increase levels of anxiety and depression.

Symptoms of anxiety (GAD) and depression (MDD) in Canadians aged 18+

13% of Canadians screened positive for GAD.

Higher among women than men

16% women
10% men

Highest among those aged 18-34

23% women
19% men

Groups with higher prevalence

A higher proportion screened positive for GAD and/or MDD:

- Those who experienced a traumatic event during their lifetime 1.5X higher than those who did not experience any traumatic events
- Those with decreased income due to the COVID-19 pandemic 1.5X higher than those who had increased income
- Indigenous identity 2X higher among Indigenous groups compared to non-Indigenous groups
- Frontline workers 1.5X higher than those who are not frontline workers

Alcohol and cannabis

Since before the pandemic, 16% of Canadians reported an increase in alcohol consumption, and 5% reported an increase in cannabis use. Compared to those who did not screen positive for GAD and/or MDD, those who screened positive were more likely to report:

- 2.5X Daily or almost daily heavy drinking
- 2.5X Daily cannabis use

Anxiety and depression

Feelings of anxiety and depression are some of the most common symptoms of mental health conditions. Anxiety symptoms may include:

- Excessive and constant feelings of nervousness
- Worry and fear

Depression symptoms may include:

- Lack of energy
- Agitation
- Lowering of a person’s mood

Diagnosing a disorder related to symptoms of anxiety or depression requires a trained and licensed clinician. The Survey on COVID-19 and Mental Health used symptom-based screening tools to identify individuals with moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety and depression (i.e., those who would screen positive for generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) or major depressive disorder (MDD)).

REFERENCES & NOTES:


4. The COVID-19 Pandemic and Stress Anxiety and depression. During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Awareness resources / Wellness Together Canada

5. Heavy drinking is defined as 4+ alcoholic drinks for women and 5+ alcoholic drinks for men in one sitting.

6. Indigenous identity refers to the First Nations, Inuit, and (A)Inuk (Inuktitut) groups. The target population of the survey only included persons living off reserves.

7. A frontline worker was defined as “an individual who has the potential to come in direct contact with COVID-19 by assisting those who have been diagnosed with the virus”. Examples provided were “police officers, firefighters, paramedics, nurses or doctors.”