

ASSESSING AND SELF-ASSESSING THE STATE OF CANADIANS MENTAL HEALTH IN THE POST COVID PERIOD

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INTRODUCTION

Mental Health Awareness Month takes place across Canada in May every year. During the month, Canadians can learn about mental illnesses and how they affect people's lives in different ways. In addition, the public can learn more about how to reduce the stigma around mental illnesses.

Since the beginning of the pandemic there has been much concern expressed about mental health challenges owing in part to the growing isolation that has arisen from Covid 19 mitigation measures (such as lockdowns, school closures and the resulting limit to interaction with family and friends).

Over the past few years mental health self-assessments connected to perceived Covid impacts have consistently revealed in surveys that Quebecers had far better mental health self-assessments than other Canadians. What was not tested was whether it was a language issue (French vs English) or a territorial one (Quebec vs. Canada) An oversampled survey by Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies reveals that it was there as little difference along language lines in Quebec thus suggesting it was a territorial difference. That said there was also little difference in reported depression diagnosis between Quebec and the rest of Canada. But a troubling finding in this study arises from the correlation between mental health negative self-assessments and depression diagnosis with an important percentage that reported very bad self-assessed mental health not being diagnosed with depression. Without questioning the accuracy of the self-assessment (it doesn't imply a depression diagnosis) it raises the possibility of many people falling through the cracks and not getting a medical assessment if needed). The study also reveals that in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada groups that are especially vulnerable to mental health challenges are the women, unemployed persons and students.

METHODOLOGY

- The web based survey was conducted between February 20th to March 3rd, 2023 with 1843 Canadians including an oversample for Quebec (572 respondents) and specifically for anglophone Quebecers (247 respondents). A margin of error cannot be associated with a non-probability sample in a panel survey for comparative purposes a probability sample of 1 843 respondents would have a margin of error of $\pm 2.5\%$, 19 times out of 20 and for the Quebec sample $\pm 4.08\%$, 19 times out of 20

QUEBECERS MENTAL HEALTH SELF ASSESSMENTS WERE FAR BETTER THAN THE REST OF CANADA OVER THE COURSE OF THE PANDEMIC

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, how would you rate your mental health?	Total	QC	ON	BC+Territories	AB	ATL	MB+SK
NET GOOD (1-2)	57%	78%	50%	50%	48%	51%	56%
Very good	22%	39%	17%	15%	15%	21%	22%
Good	34%	39%	33%	35%	33%	29%	34%
Average	29%	16%	33%	30%	34%	36%	32%
Total Bad	13%	5%	16%	18%	16%	12%	11%
Bad	11%	4%	13%	17%	9%	11%	9%
Very Bad	2%	1%	3%	1%	7%	1%	2%
I don't know	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	2%	2%

MENTAL HEALTH SELF ASSESSMENTS BETWEEN FRANCOPHONE AND ANGLOPHONE QUEBECERS ARE ROUGHLY SIMILAR

Quebec Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, how would you rate your mental health?	French	English	Total Quebec
Very good	38.1%	34.2%	39.1%
Good	40.0%	39.5%	39.1%
Average	15.6%	18.4%	15.6%
Total Bad	5.3%	5.2%	5.2%
Bad	4.4%	2.6%	4.3%
Very Bad	.9%	2.6%	.9%
I don't know	.9%	2.6%	.9%

BOTH QUEBEC MEN AND WOMEN HAVE BETTER MENTAL HEALTH SELF-ASSESSMENT THAN OTHER CANADIAN COUNTERPARTS.

AMONGST CANADIANS DESCRIBING THEIR MENTAL HEALTH AS BAD IN THE MONTH OF MARCH 2023 IT IS UNEMPLOYED, STUDENTS, HOMEMAKERS AND PERSONS WITH LOWER INCOME THAT ARE MOST VULNERABLE

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, how would you rate your mental health?						
March 2023 Total Bad	Total	Men	Women	Workers	Student	Unemployed
Canada	13%	10%	15%	13%	24%	35%
Quebec	5%	4%	6%	NS	NS	NS
NS=Sample not sufficient for purposes of analysis						

OVER THE COURSE OF THEIR LIFETIME ONE IN FIVE CANADIANS REPORT THAT THEY HAVE BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH DEPRESSION

Have you ever been diagnosed with depression?	Canada	QC	ON	BC+Ter ritories	AB	ATL	MB+SK
Yes	21%	20%	20%	21%	23%	16%	22%
No	76%	78%	76%	73%	73%	82%	75%
I don't know / Prefer not to answer	3%	2%	4%	5%	4%	2%	2%

QUEBEC FRANCOPHONES MORE LIKELY THAN ANGLOPHONES TO REPORT THAT THEY'VE BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH DEPRESSION

Quebec	French	English	Total
Have you ever been diagnosed with depression?			
Yes	22.3%	17.9%	19.8%
No	74.9%	79.5%	77.9%
I don't know / Prefer not to answer	2.8%	2.6%	2.4%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

IN QUEBEC AND IN CANADA ON THE WHOLE, WOMEN WERE FAR MORE LIKELY THAN MEN TO REPORT THAT THEY WERE DIAGNOSED WITH DEPRESSION BUT BOTH IN QUEBEC AND ACROSS CANADA PERSONS WHO ARE UNEMPLOYED WERE THE MOST LIKELY TO HAVE BEEN DIAGNOSED AS SUCH

Have you ever been diagnosed with depression?	Men	Woman	Working full time	Student	Unemployed
Canada	16	24	15%	25%	39%
Quebec	13	26	10%	27%	37%

OVER ONE IN FIVE CANADIANS THAT SAY THAT RATED THEIR MENTAL HEALTH AS VERY BAD SINCE COVID WERE NEVER DIAGNOSED WITH DEPRESSION (THAT'S THE CASE FOR 46% THAT RATED THEIR MENTAL HEALTH AS 'BAD' (IN QUEBEC SOME 42% THAT RATE THEIR MENTAL HEALTH AS BAD SAY THEY WERE NEVER DIAGNOSED WITH DEPRESSION))

Have you ever been diagnosed with depression? Canada	Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, how would you rate your mental health?				
	Very good	Good	Average	Bad	Very Bad
Yes	7.8%	12.5%	26.5%	47.9%	73.3%
No	91.2%	85.5%	70.2%	46.4%	22.2%
I don't know / Prefer not to answer	1.0%	2.1%	3.4%	5.7%	4.4%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Have you ever been diagnosed with depression? Quebec	Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, how would you rate your mental health?			
	Very good	Good	Average	Bad
Yes	10%	21%	35%	50%
No	90%	78%	62%	42%
I don't know / Prefer not to answer		1%	3%	8%

QUEBECERS SAY THEY ARE LEAST LIKELY TO HAVE FRIENDS THAT ARE NOW SUFFERING FROM MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS THEY DID NOT HAVE BEFORE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Do you have any friends who are now suffering from mental health problems they did not have before the COVID-19 pandemic?	Total	QC	ON	BC+Territories	AB	ATL	MB+SK
Yes	22%	17%	23%	24%	23%	23%	24%
No	61%	71%	59%	61%	60%	52%	57%
I don't know / I prefer not to answer	17%	12%	19%	16%	17%	25%	20%

QUEBEC ANGLOPHONES WERE SOMEWHAT LESS LIKELY THAN FRANCOPHONES TO REPORT HAVING FRIENDS NOW SUFFERING FROM MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS THAT WERE NOT DURING COVID

Quebec	French	English	Total
Do you have any friends who are now suffering from mental health problems they did not have before the COVID-19 pandemic?			
Yes	19%	16%	17%
No	70%	64%	71%
I don't know / Prefer not to answer	11%	20%	12%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

WOMEN MORE SO THAN MEN IN QUEBEC AND ACROSS CANADA WERE MORE LIKELY TO SAY THAT THEY HAD FRIENDS WHO ARE NOW SUFFERING FROM MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS THEY DID NOT HAVE BEFORE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. BUT STUDENTS AND UNEMPLOYED PERSONS WERE FAR MORE INCLINED TO SEE A RISE IN MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS SINCE THE OUTSET OF THE PANDEMIC

Do you have any friends who are now suffering from mental health problems they did not have before the COVID-19 pandemic?						
March 2023	Total	Man	Woman	Working full time	Student	Unemployed
Canada	22%	16%	27%	24%	37%	37%
Quebec	17%	11%	22%	18%	42%	27%



HOW SEVERE WAS THE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS IN
CANADA DURING THE PANDEMIC: THE QUESTION THAT
REMAINS TO BE FULLY ASSESSED

DECLINE IN NEGATIVE MENTAL HEALTH ASSESSMENTS EMERGED BETWEEN MARCH 2022 AND OCTOBER 2022 AND PERSISTS INTO MARCH 2023

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, how would you rate your mental health?	Canada				March 2023 (NB)
	March 2021	October 2021	March 2022	October 2022	
Excellent	13.4%	12.4%	12.4%	15.4%	
Very Good	24.6%	22.0%	22.8%	30.3%	
Good	41.8%	42.6%	42.0%	39.2%	
Total Bad and Very Bad	17.4%	19.8%	19.4%	12.7%	13.0
Bad	13.0%	13.9%	14.3%	9.5%	11.0
Very Bad	4.4%	5.9%	5.1%	3.2%	2.0
I don't know	2.0%	2.3%	2.5%	1.7%	1.0
I prefer not to answer	0.6%	0.9%	0.9%	0.8%	
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
For the March 2023 Leger changed the scale and replaced excellent, very good and good with very good, good and average					

MENTAL HEALTH: HOW SERIOUS WAS THE 'CRISIS'

- A McGill University-led study found that, contrary to many other reports, the COVID-19 pandemic has not taken a great toll on most people's mental health. Billed as the "world's most comprehensive study on COVID-19 mental health," the research team included members from McMaster University, the University of Toronto and others. It looked at data from 137 other studies in multiple languages from around the globe, primarily from high or middle-income countries. Three-quarters of the participants were adults, and a quarter were between 10 and 19 years old. "Claims that the mental health of most people has deteriorated significantly during the pandemic have been based primarily on individual studies that are 'snapshots' of a particular situation, in a particular place, at a particular time," said lead researcher Brett Thombs. "They typically don't involve any long-term comparison with what had existed before or came after."

SEVERAL WAYS OF ASSESSING MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES

- The study did find that some women experienced the greatest drop in mental health during the pandemic, with anxiety, depression and general mental health issues increasing in some. "They weren't huge, but they were there,". Despite the global study spearheaded by McGill there are alternative means of evaluating mental health changes over the course of the pandemic. Our four large scale tracking surveys asking people in Canada, the US and Mexico to self-evaluate their mental health over the course of the pandemic offers another manner in which to make such an assessment. As we'll see in that which follows it provides some support for the McGill study but nonetheless points to some significant areas for concern.

CONCLUSION

All this to say that we need to do a proper post mortem in regards to the mental health impacts arising from the pandemic to effectively determine whether they were situational or transitory as some of the data based findings above infers or whether the international study in which McGill and McMaster were partners suggesting there was no real crisis to begin with- which runs counter what most experts have said. We also need to understand why Quebecers mental health self assessments were collectively better over the course of the period than those of other Canadians. Were Quebecers more resilient and, if so to what might that have been attributable? Finally we need look at how those mental health self assessments which were used frequently over the period as a basis for establishing the scale of the problem. How do such assessments intersect with diagnosed/clinical depression given that our data reveal that many people reporting bad mental health over the period were not clinically depressed. Hence, we need to know if many people that might be deemed were situationally depressed and/or clinically depressed with a condition in the latter case that went unanswered

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