

Canadian Social Survey: COVID-19 and well-being

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Since March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted many aspects of life for Canadians. During the period from April to June 2021, one-quarter of Canadians reported experiencing high levels of stress most days, and nearly half of Canadians considered that their stress levels were worse than prior to the pandemic. This was particularly true among women; those aged 25 to 54; the LGBTQ2+ population; and those living with children. Furthermore, almost one in five Canadians aged 25 to 44 reported that because of the COVID-19 pandemic, they wanted to postpone their childbearing plans.

In the spring of 2021, Statistics Canada introduced a new survey—the Canadian Social Survey (CSS)—with the goal of understanding social issues more rapidly by collecting information on relevant social issues every three months. From April to June 2021, the Canadian Social Survey – COVID-19 and Well-being (CSS-CW) gathered data on Canadians and their personal experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The collection period coincided with pandemic closures and physical distancing measures across most provinces. As such, the data reflects the opinions of Canadians living through this time of social and economic disruption.

Women more likely to find most days quite or extremely stressful

Results from the CSS-CW show that one-quarter of Canadians experienced high levels of stress, indicating that they found most days quite a bit or extremely stressful. When asked about the amount of stress in their life, women (27%) were more likely to report that they felt quite a bit or extremely stressed most days, compared with 23% of men, which echoes trends observed in 2013 and 2014 in Canada, before the pandemic (see [The health of girls and women in Canada](#)).

Moreover, a previous study also noted that in May 2020, women were also more likely than men to report feeling stressed and having lower levels of mental health since the beginning of the pandemic (see [Gender differences in mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)). This could be linked to the fact that women were more likely to report performing most parental tasks by themselves—specifically, staying at home with children and taking children to or from school or daycare—which, in and of itself, can lead to increased stress levels (see [Caring for their children: Impacts of COVID-19 on parents](#)).

Canadians' perceived amount of stress also varied according to their age group. Canadians aged 35 to 44 (36%) were the most likely to indicate that they found most days quite stressful or extremely stressful, followed by those aged 45 to 54 (30%) and those aged 25 to 34 (29%). Canadians aged 25 to 54 were the most likely to be actively engaged in the labour market and caring for children at home, which might help explain their higher stress levels. The CSS-CW found that those living with children did experience higher levels of daily stress. Indeed, Canadians living with children under the age of 15 were more likely to indicate that most days were quite or extremely stressful (31%) compared with those not living with children (22%).

Marital status, on the other hand, did not seem to have an impact on perceived daily stress levels: those living in a couple (married or common-law) reported high levels of daily stress in similar proportions as those not living in a couple (Table 1).

LGBTQ2+ individuals more likely to report feeling quite or extremely stressed most days

LGBTQ2+ Canadians reported feeling high levels of stress most days in higher proportions (35%) than non-LGBTQ2+ individuals (24%). Before the pandemic, sexual minority, transgender and non-binary Canadians were already more likely to experience poorer mental health outcomes (see [Sexual orientation and complete mental health](#) and [Experiences of violent victimization and unwanted sexual behaviours among gay, lesbian, bisexual and other sexual minority people, and the transgender population, in Canada, 2018](#)). This could be explained by experiences of cultural stigmatization, as well as by their higher financial and housing vulnerabilities (see [Vulnerabilities related to COVID-19 among LGBTQ2+ Canadians](#)).

Those living with children experience increased levels of stress since the beginning of the pandemic

The changes stemming from the pandemic have been stressful for many Canadians. Overall, 46% of Canadians indicated that their perceived stress level was somewhat or much worse than it was prior to COVID-19. Women (49%) reported worsening stress levels in slightly greater proportions than men (44%). Results from the CSS-CW also indicate that those living with children under 15 (54%) were more likely to report that their stress levels had gotten worse since the start of the pandemic, compared with Canadians not living with children (43%). These results were expected in the context of the increased demands that were placed upon parents of young children during times of school closures and restrictions of other activities.

Furthermore, among those living in a household with children under 15, women were more likely than men to report worsening levels of stress compared with prior to the pandemic. Indeed, more than half (57%) of women living with young children reported feeling more stress than before, compared with 50% of men living with young children.

In a period when parents spent more time supervising children and their school-related activities, it is plausible that women's stress levels increased more than men's, given that they are also more likely to perform most parental tasks (see [Caring for their children: Impacts of COVID-19 on parents](#)).

In this context, Canadians belonging to the age groups that are more likely to be active in the labour market and to have young children at home—those aged 25 to 34 (51%) and those aged 35 to 44 (55%)—were also the most likely to report that the amount of stress in their life was somewhat or much worse now than before the pandemic, while those aged 65 and older most frequently reported that their level of stress had remained the same (60%).

Individuals in a couple and LGBTQ2+ individuals more likely to report increased amounts of stress than before the pandemic

Canadians living in a couple (47%) were slightly more likely than those not married or living common-law (44%) to report that the amount of stress they experienced in their life was now somewhat or much worse than it was before the pandemic.

This was also the case among LGBTQ2+ individuals, more than half of whom (52%) reported somewhat or much worse stress levels now than before the pandemic, compared with 46% of non-LGBTQ2+ individuals. This could be partly linked to the younger age profile of this population, as most LGBTQ2+ Canadians were aged 34 and under, and younger Canadians were more likely to report increased stress levels since the start of the pandemic. In addition, before the pandemic LGBTQ2+ individuals had lower income levels and were more at risk of losing their job (see [Vulnerabilities related to COVID-19 among LGBTQ2+ Canadians](#)); it is thus plausible that their stress levels increased more than those of non-LGBTQ2+ individuals in a context of increasing unemployment rates.

Nearly one in five Canadians aged 25 to 44 want to have children later as a result of the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has also affected Canadians' intentions to have children, as has been documented in the United States (see [Early Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Findings from the 2020 Guttmacher Survey of Reproductive Health Experiences](#)) and in some European countries (see [The impact of COVID-19 on fertility plans in Italy, Germany, France, Spain, and the United Kingdom](#)). Nearly one in five Canadians aged 25 to 44 (18%) reported that, as a result of the pandemic, they now wanted to have a child later than previously planned, while 14% indicated wanting fewer children than before. This was especially the case for Canadians who were not married or in a common-law relationship; they were more likely to report that they now want to have children later, than were Canadians in a couple (23% and 15%, respectively). Those not in a couple (18%) were also more likely than those who were married or common-law (12%) to indicate that they want to have fewer children because of the pandemic.

While these results could point to declining fertility in Canada, at least in the short term, as a consequence of the pandemic, some Canadians also declared that they now wanted to have more children, or to have them sooner. Indeed, 7% of Canadians aged 25 to 44 now want to have children sooner, while 4% want to have more children

than prior to the pandemic. Future research using the CSS will further analyze how these opposing trends in fertility intentions might impact fertility rates, and will explore the profile of individuals changing their childbearing plans because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Note to readers

The data in this release are from the first wave of the Canadian Social Survey (CSS), Statistics Canada's newest data collection project. The goal is to understand social issues more rapidly by conducting surveys on different topics every three months.

The CSS collects information on a variety of social topics such as health, well-being, impacts of COVID-19, activities, time use, and emergency preparedness. The target population for this voluntary survey is all non-institutionalized persons 15 years of age and older, living off-reserve in Canada's 10 provinces. Statistics Canada collects the statistical information by either inviting a respondent to self-respond to an electronic questionnaire, or by having an interviewer contact a respondent to collect the information using the computer-assisted telephone interviewing method.

The Canadian Social Survey – COVID-19 and Well-being (CSS-CW) focused on [COVID-19 and Well-being](#) and collected data on health, well-being and impacts of COVID-19.

The aim is to fully understand the needs of communities in order to implement suitable support measures during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistics Canada would like to thank all Canadians who took the time to answer the questions during this time of crisis.

LGBTQ2+ individuals are identified on the basis of their self-reported sexual orientation (lesbian, gay, bisexual, or other minority sexual identity) or self-reported sex at birth and gender (transgender or non-binary identities such as agender, gender fluid, genderqueer, pangender, or Two-Spirit).

Table 1
High levels of overall stress most days (quite a bit or extremely stressful), by gender, age group, being an LGBTQ2+ person or not, marital status, and living with children under age 15

	%
Total	24.8
Gender	
Men	22.5
Women	27.1 ³
Age group	
15 to 24 years	25.2 ⁴
25 to 34 years	29.2 ⁴
35 to 44 years	35.6
45 to 54 years	29.7 ⁴
55 to 64 years	22.0 ⁴
65 years or older	11.7 ⁴
LGBTQ2+	
Yes	35.2 ⁵
No	24.2
Marital status	
In a couple ¹	24.6
Not in a couple ²	25.0
Living with children under age 15	
Yes	30.6
No	22.3 ⁶

1. Includes married people or people in a common-law relationship.
 2. Includes widowed, separated, divorced or single people.
 3. Significantly different from reference category (Men) (p is less than 0.05).
 4. Significantly different from reference category (35 to 44 years) (p is less than 0.05).
 5. Significantly different from reference category (No) (p is less than 0.05).
 6. Significantly different from reference category (Yes) (p is less than 0.05).
- Source(s):** Statistics Canada, Canadian Social Survey – COVID-19 and Well-being, 2021 ([5354](#)).

Table 2
Amount of stress in life, most days, compared to before COVID-19 pandemic, by gender, age group, being an LGBTQ2+ person or not, marital status, and living with children under age 15

	Somewhat or much better now	About the same	Somewhat or much worse now
	%		
Total	7.6	46.3	46.1
Gender			
Men	7.2	49.3	43.5
Women	7.9	43.5 ³	48.6 ³
Age group			
15 to 24 years	10.6	42.3 ⁴	47.2 ⁴
25 to 34 years	9.2	40.3 ⁴	50.5
35 to 44 years	9.4	35.7	54.9
45 to 54 years	6.6 ⁴	43.5 ⁴	49.9 ⁴
55 to 64 years	6.6 ⁴	51.7 ⁴	41.7 ⁴
65 years or older	4.4 ⁴	59.5 ⁴	36.1 ⁴
LGBTQ2+			
Yes	9.9 ^E	38.3 ⁵	51.8 ⁵
No	7.4	46.8	45.7
Marital status			
In a couple ¹	6.9 ⁶	45.8	47.3 ⁶
Not in a couple ²	8.6	47.1	44.3
Living with children under age 15			
Yes	9.1	37.3	53.5
No	7.1 ⁷	49.7 ⁷	43.2 ⁷

E use with caution

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 4. Significantly different from reference category (35 to 44 years) (p is less than 0.05).
 5. Significantly different from reference category (No) (p is less than 0.05).
 6. Significantly different from reference category (Not in a couple) (p is less than 0.05).
 7. Significantly different from reference category (Yes) (p is less than 0.05).
- Source(s):** Statistics Canada, Canadian Social Survey – COVID-19 and Well-being, 2021 (5354).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 5354.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).