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Differences in the concerns of Canadians with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic

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Differences in the concerns of Canadians with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic

by **Sébastien LaRoche-Côté** and **Sharanjit Uppal**

The COVID-19 situation is rapidly evolving in Canada. Recently, most provinces and territories have introduced plans to ease restrictions or are in the process of developing plans for reopening. However, because the virus continues to pose a risk to public health, government authorities have indicated that Canadians will likely have to follow physical distancing measures for quite some time. Therefore, it is critical that policy makers and health authorities know whether Canadians remain concerned about the pandemic, and whether they are still complying with physical distancing measures.

Between April 3 and April 25, 2020, Statistics Canada used crowdsourcing—a new data collection method—to collect information about Canadians’ concerns and the precautions they had taken. Nearly 200,000 participants answered the questionnaire during the first week of data collection (April 3 to April 9), and Statistics Canada released the results on April 23. The results indicated that these participants were almost universally concerned about health-related issues—such as overloading the health system and the health of vulnerable populations—and that the majority were following physical distancing rules.

During the second and third weeks of data collection (between April 10 and April 25), 50,000 additional participants answered the same questionnaire. The results for second-week and third-week participants were sometimes different than those for first-week participants. In particular, second- and third-week participants reported lower levels of concern about the health of others and higher levels of concern for certain social factors.

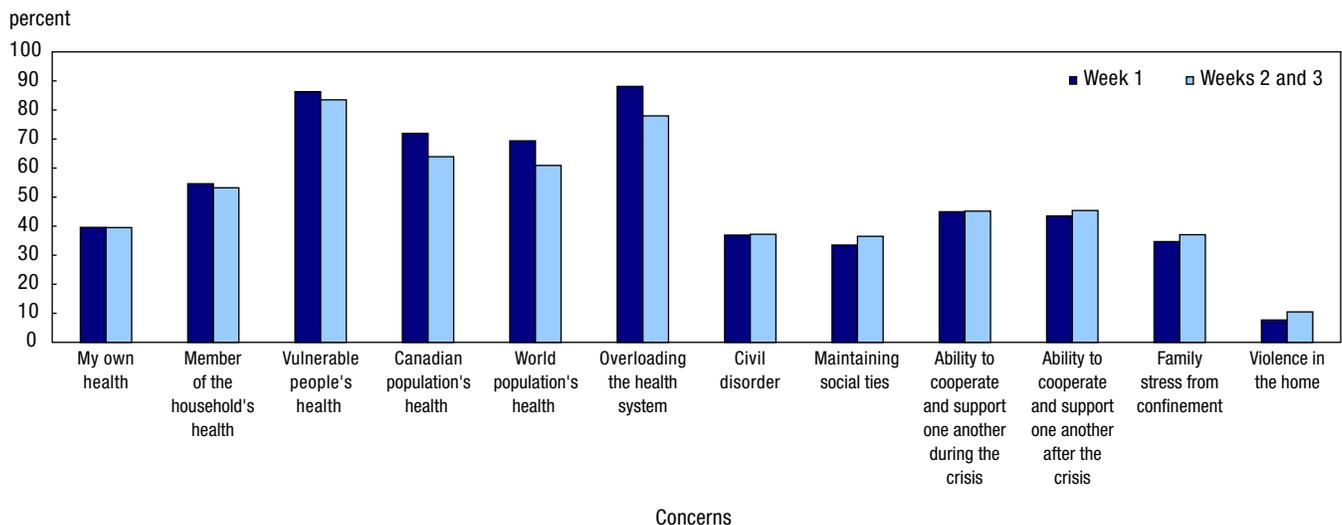
Later participants are less concerned about overloading the health system and about the health of others, and more concerned about social factors

Over the course of just one week, significant differences were found in participants’ concerns (Chart1). Specifically, second- and third-week participants were less likely to be “very” or “extremely” concerned about overloading the health system (78%, compared with 88% for first-week participants), the Canadian population’s health (64% vs. 72%), or the world population’s health (61% vs. 69%). These declines were widespread across all age groups and were seen for both men and women.



Chart 1

Proportion of crowdsourcing participants who reported being "very" or "extremely" concerned about certain COVID-19 issues, by week of participation



Source: Crowdsourcing: Impact of COVID-19 on Canadians, April 2020.

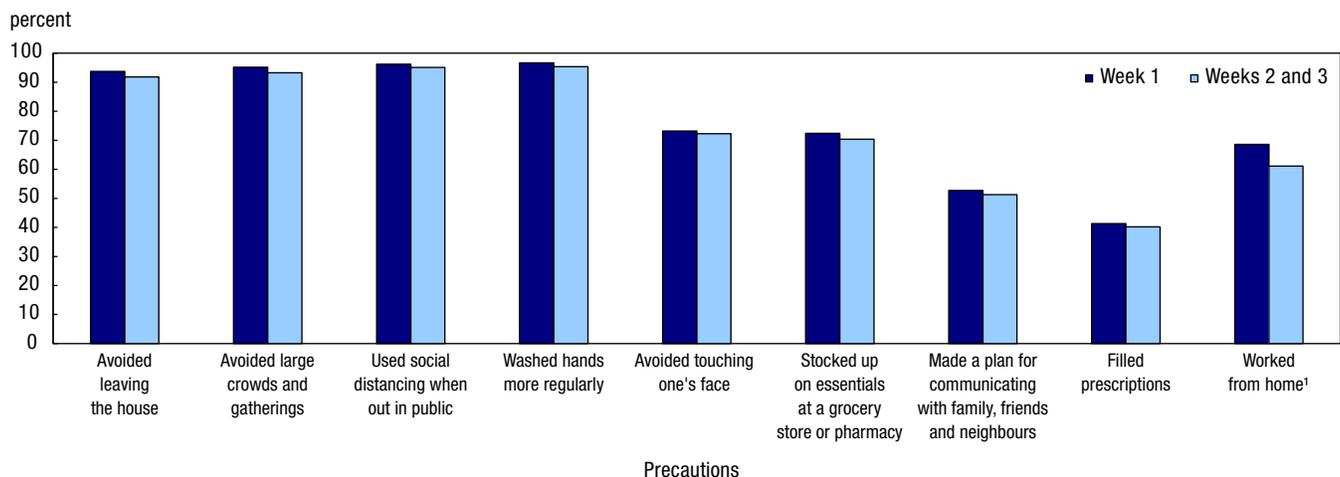
Additionally, second- and third-week participants were slightly more concerned than first-week participants about certain social factors, such as family stress from confinement (37% vs. 35%), maintaining social ties (37% vs. 34%) and the possibility of violence in the home (11% vs. 8%). Younger participants remained more likely than older participants to be concerned about family stress and violence in the home. This suggests that social concerns may have increased as the duration of isolation measures increased. Other concerns, such as personal health, varied little between first-week participants and second- or third-week participants.

Compliance with physical distancing measures remains high among second- and third-week participants

For the most part, there were few differences between precautions taken by first-week and second- or third-week participants (Chart 2). These include precautions for the three physical distancing measures mentioned in the questionnaire: avoiding leaving the house for non-essential reasons, avoiding crowds and large gatherings, and using social distancing when out in public. There was one exception: the proportion of those who worked from home (among those who had a job) was lower among second- and third-week participants (61%) than among first-week participants (69%). This suggests that working from home on an ongoing basis may not be possible for some categories of workers. The proportion of those working from home decreased by similar amounts across all age groups and among both men and women.



Chart 2
Precautions taken by crowdsourcing participants, by week of participation



1. Among those who had a job.
 Source: Crowdsourcing: Impact of COVID-19 on Canadians, April 2020.

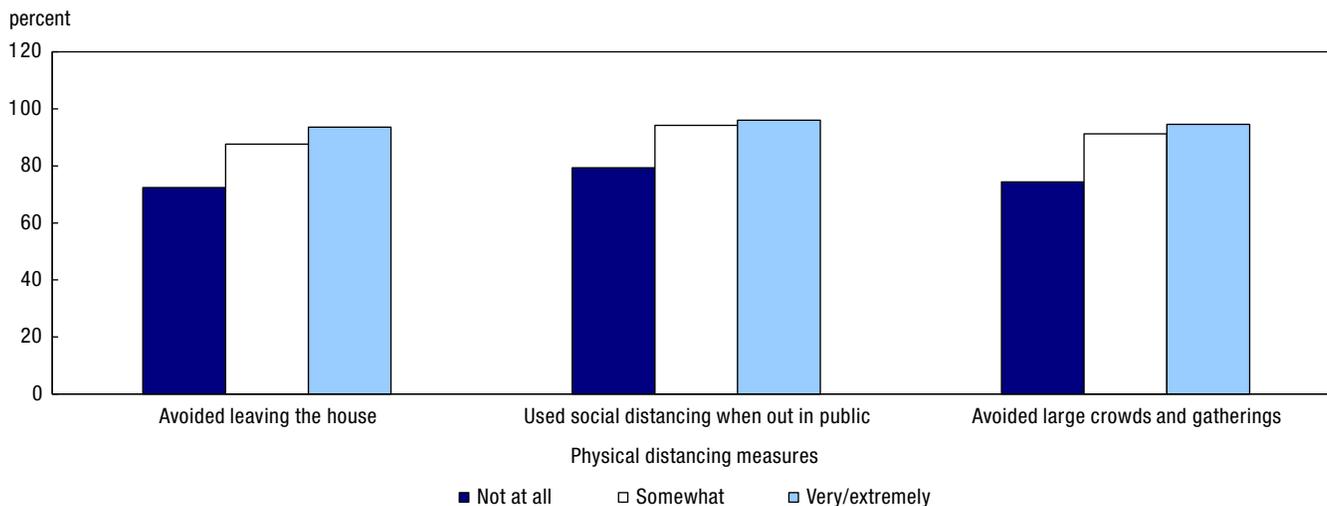
People who are not concerned about the health of others are less likely to follow physical distancing rules

Even though the proportion of people who expressed higher levels of concern about the health of others declined between the first week and the second and third weeks, the majority of second- and third-week participants remained at least “somewhat” concerned about overloading the health system or about the Canadian population’s health. Compliance with physical distancing remained relatively high among those who were at least “somewhat” concerned about these issues, and this may explain why compliance with physical distancing remained high among second- and third-week participants.



Chart 3

Compliance with physical distancing measures among crowdsourcing participants, by level of concern about overloading the health system, weeks 2 and 3



Source: Crowdsourcing: Impact of COVID-19 on Canadians, April 2020.

Compliance with the three physical distancing measures was lower among those who were “not at all” concerned about overloading the health system or about the Canadian population’s health. For example, among those who were not concerned about overloading the health system, 72% avoided leaving the house for non-essential reasons, compared with 88% among those who were somewhat concerned and 94% among those who were very or extremely concerned (Chart 3). It should be noted that, in the second and third weeks, only a small proportion of participants were not concerned about overloading the health system or about the Canadian population’s health (about 3% for each concern). However, these proportions were approximately two times higher than those found among first-week participants and were significantly higher among men. These results suggest that physical distancing could become a challenge if these proportions continue to rise.

Methodology

Data in this release are from Statistics Canada’s questionnaire, “Crowdsourcing: Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians.” The crowdsourcing questionnaire collects data on the current economic and social situation, as well as on people’s physical and mental health, to effectively assess the needs of communities and implement suitable support measures during and after the pandemic. This alternative information collection method can be used to supplement data obtained from more traditional sources, particularly because of its relatively low implementation cost and its ability to increase the granularity of data in a timely manner. During the first week of data collection (April 3 to April 9), nearly 200,000 people living in Canada voluntarily answered the questionnaire. Over the following two weeks (from April 10 to April 25), 50,000 more people participated. Methodological adjustments have been made to both groups of participants to account for age, sex and provincial differences. Over the next few weeks, new crowdsourcing initiatives will be launched to gather timely information about other important issues, such as the extent to which COVID-19 is affecting the lives and well-being of different groups of Canadians. Canadians are invited to continue visiting the website to participate.



References

Statistics Canada. 2020. "[Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians: First results from crowdsourcing.](#)" *The Daily*. April 23. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-001-X. Available at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200423/dq200423a-eng.htm>.

