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Concerns and precautions taken in the Canadian North during the pandemic

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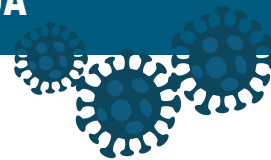
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Concerns and precautions taken in the Canadian North during the pandemic

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

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a considerable impact on the economic and social well-being of Canadians, even in regions that have not been impacted by the pandemic to the same extent as other regions. In Yukon and the Northwest Territories, only a handful of cases were recorded in the early stages of the pandemic, and as of late June, Nunavut had not recorded a single case of COVID-19. Nevertheless, these territories introduced COVID-19-related restrictions that were very similar to measures introduced in all Canadian provinces.¹

From April 3 to April 25, 2020—a period when many new cases of COVID-19 were reported in several provinces—Statistics Canada used crowdsourcing to collect information about Canadians' concerns and the precautions they were taking during the pandemic. Nearly 250,000 participants completed the questionnaire during these three weeks of data collection. Of these, 1,849 indicated that they resided in Yukon, 513 reported that they were in the Northwest Territories, and 121 stated that they were in Nunavut. Of the participants in Yukon and the Northwest Territories, the vast majority (at least 8 in 10) lived in the census agglomerations of Whitehorse and Yellowknife. In Nunavut, most participants reported that they were living in Iqaluit. Throughout this report, differences between territorial capitals and other areas will be highlighted where applicable, except for Nunavut, which did not have enough participants for these differences to be examined.

Crowdsourcing is not a probabilistic survey, and data collected via crowdsourcing cannot be used to generate conclusions about the overall population living in the territories. However, crowdsourcing data represent a unique opportunity to give a sense of how people in the Canadian North reacted as the pandemic unfolded. This report provides information on the concerns of and precautions taken by Canadians living in the North during the peak of the pandemic.

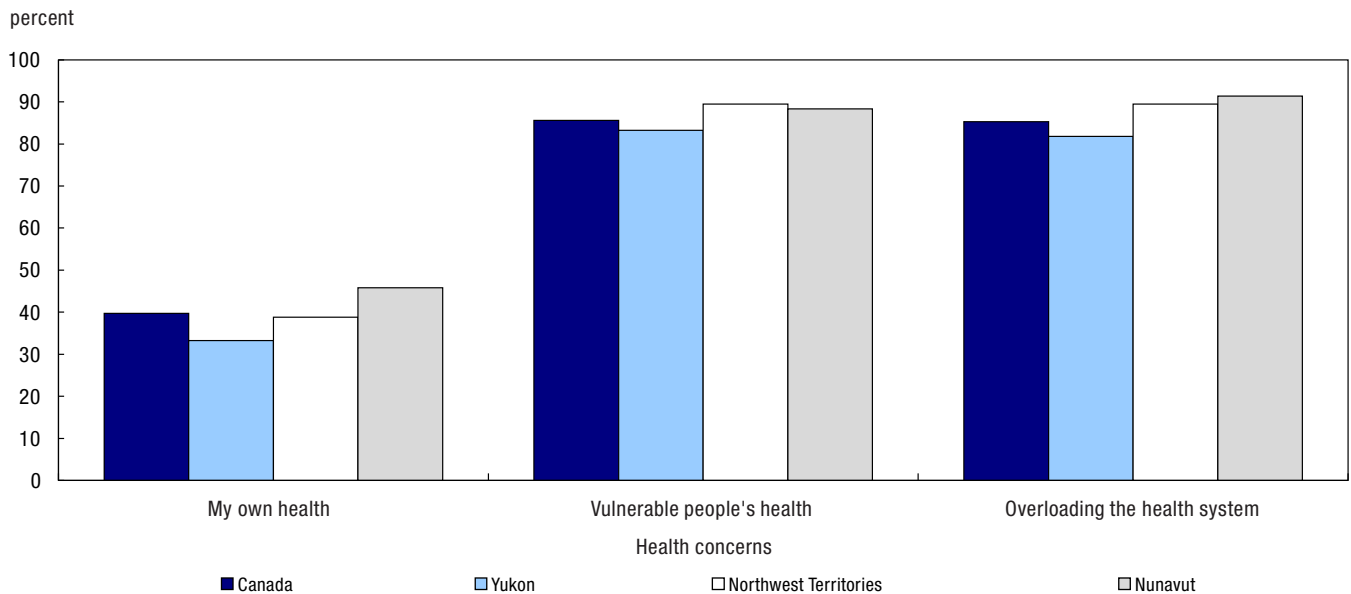
Participants from Nunavut are more concerned about the consequences of the pandemic on their own health

Despite the lower number of COVID-19 cases recorded in the territories, in the early days of the pandemic, participants living in the North were generally as concerned as Canadians in the South about the health consequences of the pandemic, including consequences on their own health (Chart 1). In Nunavut, participants were even more likely to report that they were very or extremely concerned about their own health (46%) than the Canadian average (40%). The corresponding proportions were 39% in the Northwest Territories and 33% in Yukon.

1. For example, in all three territories, primary and secondary schools closed for the remainder of the 2019/2020 school year. Important travel restrictions were also introduced, and non-essential stores were closed for an extended period of time. In addition, physical distancing measures remain in effect in all three territories.



Chart 1
Participants who were very or extremely concerned about certain health concerns, Canada and the territories, April 2020



Source: Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians: Data Collection Series, April 2020.

The proportions of participants who reported being very or extremely concerned about overloading the health system and about vulnerable people’s health were also comparatively higher in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories.² In these two territories, accessing health care services can be a challenge, which may explain why participants expressed a higher degree of health-related concerns. According to 2017/2018 data from the Canadian Community Health Survey, 14% of residents in Nunavut and 37% in the Northwest Territories had access to a regular health care provider, compared with 79% of Yukon residents and 85% for Canada as a whole.

Nunavut and the Northwest Territories are also home to a large number of Indigenous people living in remote areas, many of whom face poor housing conditions—two important risk factors in the context of a pandemic.³ Indigenous people are also more likely to have certain pre-existing health conditions that increase the risk of developing complications from COVID-19.⁴ The data source used in this report does not contain information on Indigenous identity, but subsequent surveys and other crowdsourcing collections reported on the state of Indigenous people in the context of the pandemic. For instance, a recent report indicated that 60% of Indigenous participants reported that their mental health had deteriorated since physical distancing began.⁵

2. Territorial differences remained even among those living outside the census agglomerations of Whitehorse and Yellowknife. For example, participants from Yukon who were living outside Whitehorse were less concerned about health-related factors than participants from the Northwest Territories who were living outside Yellowknife.
 3. In 2016, the proportion of Indigenous people living in unsuitable housing was 56% in Nunavut and 27% in the Northwest Territories. The corresponding proportion was 12% in Yukon (Statistics Canada 2018).
 4. For more information about Indigenous people’s risk factors in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, see Statistics Canada (2020).
 5. See Arriagada et al. (2020).



Nunavut participants more concerned about violence in the home and family stress from confinement

Crowdsourcing participants were also asked about the extent to which they were concerned about certain social consequences of the pandemic. For the most part, participants living in the territories reported similar levels of concern as their Canadian counterparts. For example, about one-third of participants in all territories reported that they were very or extremely concerned about maintaining social ties, a proportion that was similar to the Canadian average (Table 1). Over 40% of participants in all territories were also very or extremely concerned about the ability to cooperate and support one another after the crisis.

Table 1
Participants who were very or extremely concerned about certain social concerns, Canada and the territories, April 2020

Social concerns	Canada	Yukon	Northwest Territories	Nunavut
	percent			
Civil disorder	36.9	32.8	39.3	34.7
Maintaining social ties	34.5	33.7	29.4	32.7
Ability to cooperate and support one another after the crisis	44.1	41.2	42.9	44.8
Family stress from confinement	35.1	34.2	31.8	38.2
Violence in the home	8.6	8.1	4.0	14.1

Source: Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians: Data Collection Series, April 2020.

However, participants from Nunavut were more likely to report that they were very or extremely concerned about the risk of violence in the home (14%, compared with 9% nationally) and family stress from confinement (38%, compared with 35% nationally). These results could be related to the higher rates of family violence in Nunavut. In 2018, Nunavut had the highest rates of police-reported intimate partner and non-intimate partner violence in Canada, as well as the highest rate of child and youth victims of police-reported family and non-family violence.⁶ Victims of domestic violence in the North also have fewer support services and facilities at their disposal.⁷

Compliance with physical distancing measures is relatively strong in all three territories

Crowdsourcing participants were also asked about the types of precautions they took in the context of the pandemic. Results showed that participants from the territories were as likely as participants from the rest of Canada to report that they avoided crowds and large gatherings, used physical distancing when out in public, and washed their hands more regularly (Chart 2). In Yukon and the Northwest Territories, similar results were found for those living in capital cities and outside capital cities, with one notable exception: participants living in rural areas were less likely to report that they avoided leaving the house for non-essential reasons.

6. See Conroy et al. (2019).

7. See Moffitt et al. (2013).

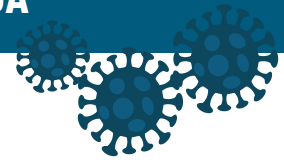
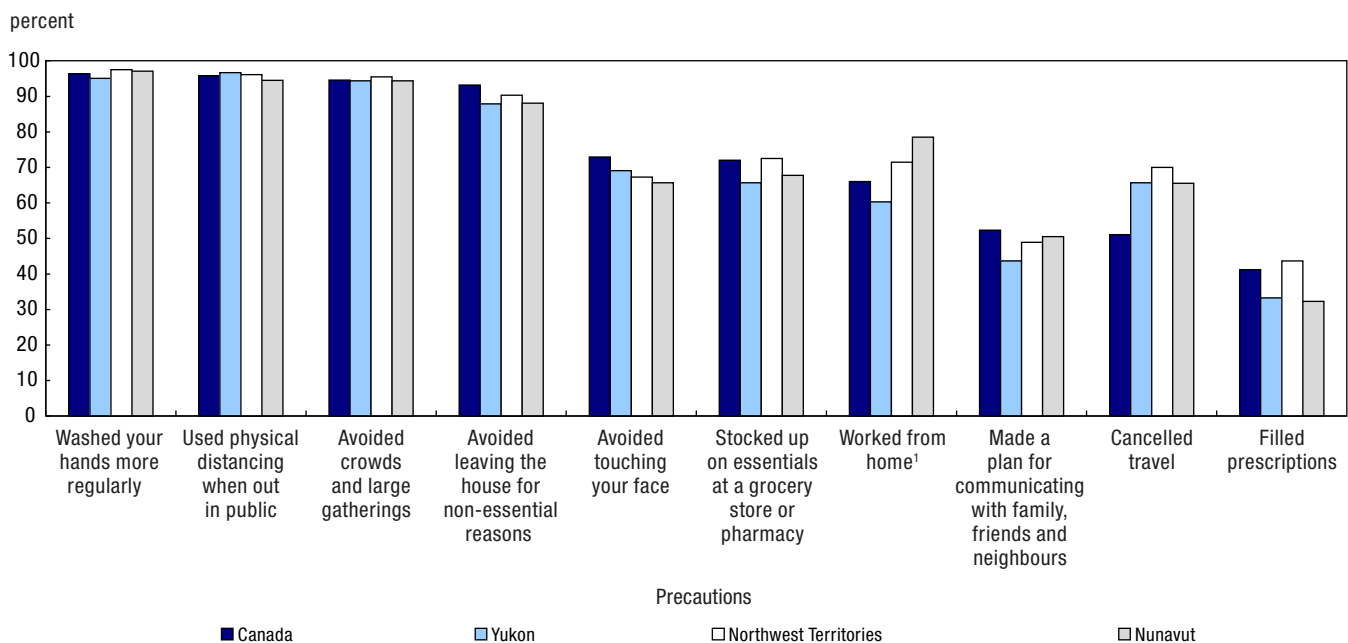


Chart 2

Precautions taken by participants in the context of the pandemic, Canada and the territories, April 2020



1. Among those who had a job.

Source: Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians: Data Collection Series, April 2020.

However, participants from the three territories were more likely than other Canadians to report that they cancelled travel. This is not surprising, given that many people living in the territories come from outside.⁸ In comparison with Yukon participants, Nunavut and Northwest Territories participants were slightly more likely to report that they worked from home. In addition, there were significant differences between capital cities and other areas. In Yukon, for instance, 46% of workers living outside Whitehorse reported that they worked from home, compared with 62% of those living in Whitehorse.

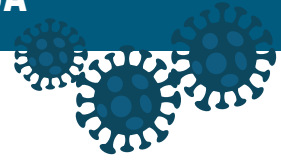
Participants from Nunavut are less concerned about the economic impacts of the pandemic

The pandemic is also having a strong economic impact in the territories, not least because a number of restrictions were imposed to limit the spread of COVID-19. The territories have strong economic ties with the rest of the country, and, like the provinces, were affected by a reduction in economic activity. This is supported by crowdsourcing results, which showed that participants in Yukon and the Northwest Territories were as likely as other Canadians to report that they were very concerned about the possibility of losing their job (about one-quarter) or to report that the crisis would have a major impact on their ability to meet their financial obligations (about one-third) (Chart 3).⁹

However, participants from Nunavut were less likely than participants from the other territories to report that they were concerned about losing their job or meeting their financial obligations. One potential explanation for these

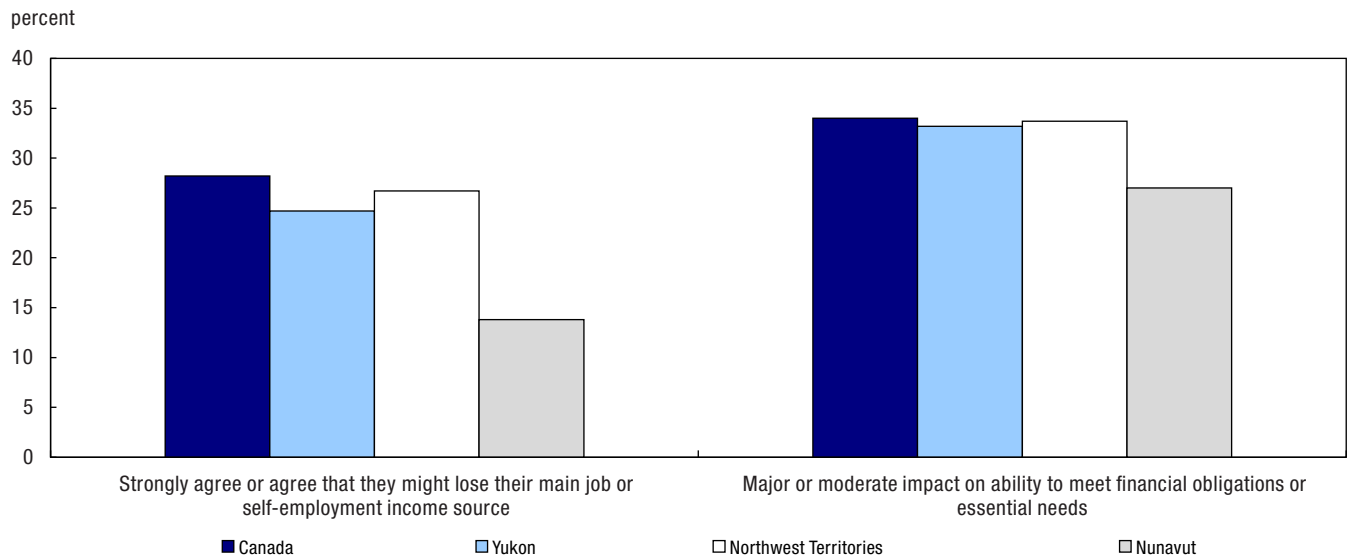
8. According to data from the 2016 Census, 50% of Yukon residents, 37% of the Northwest Territories residents and 51% of Nunavut residents were born in a province (or another territory) (Statistics Canada 2018).

9. In Yukon, participants living outside Whitehorse were more likely to be concerned about losing their jobs or to be financially affected than those living in Whitehorse.



results is that the employed labour force in Nunavut is more likely to be employed in the public sector, which includes public administration, health care and education.¹⁰ In the context of the pandemic, public sector employees are more likely to retain their jobs than private sector employees.

Chart 3
Proportion of participants who reported that their job or family finances would be affected by the crisis, Canada and the territories, April 2020

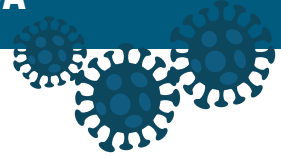


Source: Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians: Data Collection Series, April 2020.

Methodology

Data in this release are from Statistics Canada’s questionnaire “Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians: Data Collection Series.” This crowdsourcing questionnaire collects data on the current economic and social situation 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 three weeks of data collection (April 3 to April 25), nearly 250,000 people living in Canada voluntarily answered the questionnaire. Statistics Canada will continue to launch crowdsourcing initiatives to gather timely information about other important issues. Canadians are invited to continue visiting the Statistics Canada website to participate.

10. According to special tabulations from the Labour Force Survey, the proportion of workers employed in the public sector in 2019 was 58% in Nunavut, 45% in the Northwest Territories and 43% in Yukon.



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