

Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadian families and children

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in The Daily, Thursday, July 9, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically altered the way of life for Canadian families, parents and children. Because of physical distancing and employment impacts, parents have altered their usual routines and supports, and many children and families have been isolated in their homes for months. Children, in particular, may not have left their homes or seen any friends or family members other than their parents for an extended period, since children do not typically have to leave their homes for essential services. However, the impact of the pandemic on families has yet to be described. The purpose of this report is to provide a snapshot of the experiences of Canadian parents and families during this unprecedented time.

Unlike other surveys conducted by Statistics Canada, crowdsourcing data are not collected under a probability sampling design. As a result, the findings reflect only the responses of those who completed a questionnaire, and thus cannot be generalized to the entire Canadian population. In fact, readers should note that a large proportion of crowdsourcing participants who voluntarily completed this online questionnaire between June 9 and June 22 were women, were born in Canada and had a bachelor's degree or higher.

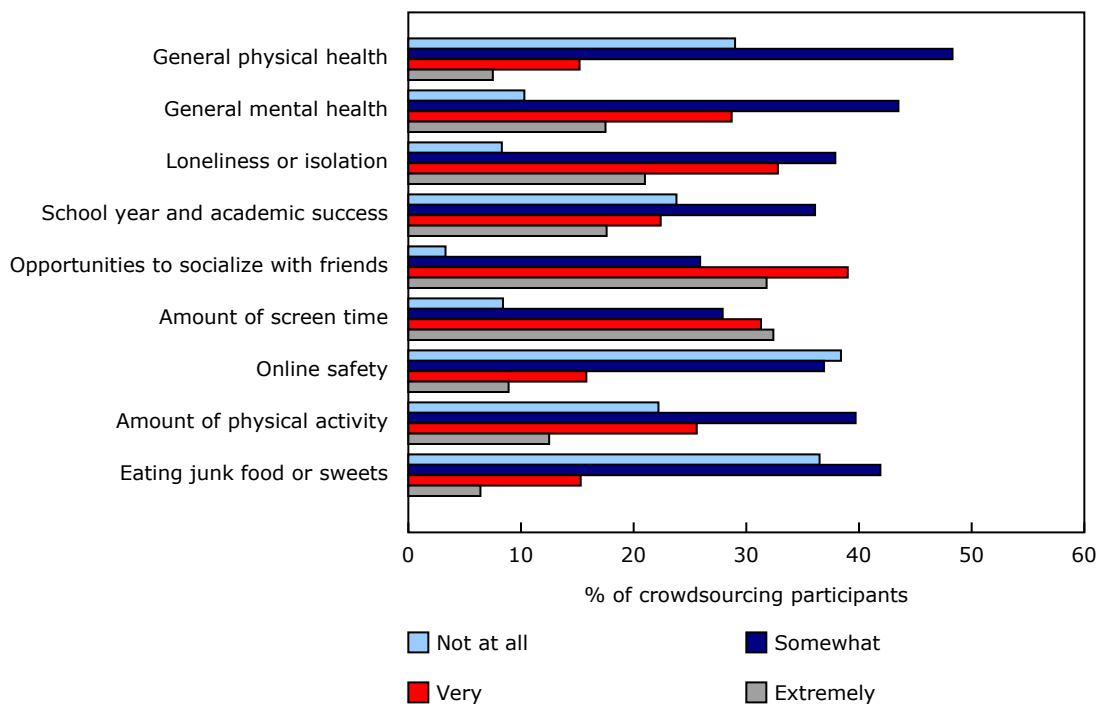
Almost three-quarters of parents are concerned about their children's social engagement during the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the closure of most schools and many child care services, and the cancellation of extracurricular activities and social events. Furthermore, physical distancing guidelines have resulted in some children and families being cut off from friends and family, leading to physical, and sometimes social, isolation. Work-life balance may have been dramatically altered, and opportunities to socially engage have been significantly reduced.

Many parents reported that they were concerned about their children's social engagement. Almost three-quarters of participants (71%) were very or extremely concerned about their children's opportunities to socialize with friends, and more than half (54%) of participants were very or extremely concerned about their children's loneliness or social isolation. Approximately 64% of participants were very or extremely worried about the amount of screen time their children were engaging in; 8% of participants were not at all concerned about the amount of screen time.



Chart 1
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, how concerned are you about the following for your child or children aged 0 to 14 years?



Note(s): Percent calculations exclude both "not applicable" and "not stated" responses. The pattern of results was similar when "not applicable" responses were included.

Source(s): Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians: Parenting during the Pandemic - Data Collection Series (5323).

Parents are also concerned about their families, especially their ability to balance multiple responsibilities

Turning to parents' concerns about their families, their top concern was about balancing child care, schooling and work, with 74% of participants reporting feeling very or extremely concerned in this regard. This likely stems from the demands that have been placed on some parents to keep up with their own work responsibilities (either from home or at their usual place of work), take care of their children without any external support such as child care or school, and help their children with academic activities. Families with only young school-aged children (i.e., children aged 11 and younger) were the most likely to be concerned about balancing child care, schooling and work (80% of these participants were very or extremely concerned, compared with 55% of participants with only older school-aged children).

Table 1
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, how concerned are you about the following for your family?

	Not at all	Somewhat	Very	Extremely
	%			
Staying connected with family or friends	8.9	48.1	32.8	10.1
Getting along and supporting each other	21.5	41.1	27.6	9.8
Balancing child care, schooling and work	6.8	19.3	30.0	44.0
Managing your child's or children's behaviours, stress levels, anxiety and emotions	7.8	31.5	34.5	26.1
Feeling lonely in your own home	34.6	35.7	18.7	11.1
Having less patience, raising your voice, scolding or yelling at your children	14.7	39.7	27.1	18.5

Note(s): Percent calculations exclude "not stated" missing responses.

Source(s): Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians: Parenting during the Pandemic - Data Collection Series (5323).

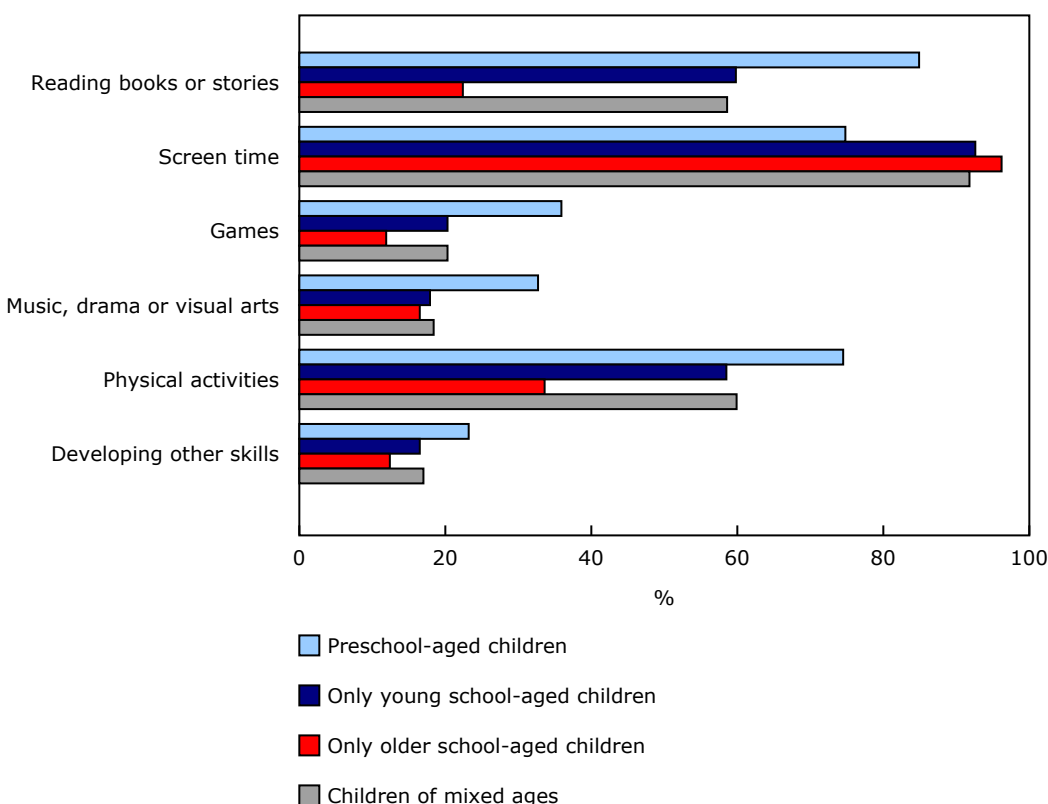
Specific aspects of the demands of parenting were explored in the crowdsourcing survey. Almost two in three parents were very or extremely concerned about managing their children's behaviours, stress levels, anxiety and emotions, and almost half of parents were very or extremely concerned about having less patience, raising their voice, and scolding or yelling at their children. Again, differences were found based on the ages of the children in the household: families with preschool-aged children or only young school-aged children were more likely to report feeling very or extremely concerned about these factors. Previous results on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have suggested that there may be mental health consequences for individuals, likely parents, who feel additional stress related to family responsibilities during the pandemic.

Other than parenting, participants were also very or extremely concerned about staying connected with family or friends (43%), getting along with and supporting each other (37%), and feeling lonely in their own home (30%).

Almost nine in ten participants said that their children are engaged in screen time on a daily basis, but many are also reading and doing physical activity

Children and families were spending most, if not all, of their time at home and had few opportunities for activities outside the home. The results suggest that, despite limited space or resources, many children were still engaged in a variety of different activities. About two in three participants (62%) with children aged 0 to 14 were reading books or stories daily or almost daily, and another 16% were reading three to five days per week. Furthermore, six in ten participants reported that their children were participating in physical activity daily, 26% reported that their children were participating in physical activity three to five days per week, and 12% reported that their children were participating in physical activity one to two times per week. About half of all participants with children aged 0 to 14 said their children were playing games; participating in music, drama or art activities; or developing other skills at least three times per week.

Chart 2
Children's daily participation in activities during the COVID-19 pandemic



Note(s): Percentage calculations exclude both "not applicable" and "not stated" responses. The pattern of results was similar when "not applicable" responses were included.

Source(s): Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians - Parenting During the Pandemic: Data Collection Series (5323).

As reflected by their top concerns, many participating parents were worried about the amount of screen time that their children were engaging in during the pandemic. Screen time may be one of the few options by which children can connect with others, including teachers and friends. However, screen time may also be the result of a lack of other activities to occupy children's time, or of parents needing a break to work. Crowdsourcing results suggest that almost nine in ten participants said that their children were engaging in screen time daily or almost every day. The questionnaire did not ask for the amount of screen time per day, although current guidelines suggest that screen time is not recommended for children younger than 1 year of age, and should be limited to no more than one hour per day for children aged 1 to 2 years, and no more than two hours per day for children aged 3 years and older.

Patterns were found for activity participation, based on the age of the children in the home. Participants with very young (preschool-aged) children in the home were the most likely to report that their children participated daily in most activities, including reading books or stories (85%); physical activity (75%); playing games (36%); music, drama or visual arts (33%); and developing other skills (23%). These participants were also the least likely to report daily screen time, although three in four still reported daily screen time.

Note to readers

This study is based on data from the Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians: Parenting during the Pandemic: Data Collection Series. This online crowdsourcing questionnaire was designed to collect information about family concerns and activities during COVID-19 from parents of children aged 0 to 14 living in Canada. From June 9 to June 22, more than 32,000 participants completed the voluntary online questionnaire. Readers should note that crowdsourcing data are not collected under a probability sampling design. As a result, the findings cannot be applied to the overall Canadian population. A benchmarking factor based on demographic projections by province as of January 2020 of the number of families with children aged exclusively 0 to 5 or 6 to 14 years, or a mixture of both age groups, was used for every participant to compensate for the over- or under-representation of participants.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5323](#).

Also released today is an infographic titled, "[The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Canadian families and children](#)," which is part of the series *Statistics Canada – Infographics (11-627-M)*.

For more information 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).

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