

Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth, 2019

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The current pandemic has reinforced the need for additional information on the health of Canadian children and youth, particularly for those younger than age 12.

Efforts to address this important data gap were well under way prior to the pandemic. Results from the new Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth (CHSCY) indicate that 4% of children and youth aged 1 to 17, as reported by their parents, had fair or poor mental health in 2019, one year prior to the pandemic. The survey also found that poor mental health among children and youth was associated with adverse health and social outcomes, such as lower grades and difficulty making friends.

Recently released crowdsourced data suggest that the perceived mental health of Canadian youth has declined during the pandemic, with over half (57%) of participants aged 15 to 17 reporting that their mental health was somewhat worse or much worse than it was prior to the implementation of physical distancing measures.

Although data from the CHSCY were gathered prior to the pandemic, they will serve as an important benchmark to better understand the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of Canadian children and youth.

Nearly one in five youth aged 15 to 17 report that their mental health was "fair" or "poor" in 2019

Youth aged 12 to 17 were asked to rate their own mental health using five broad categories: excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor.

Almost one in five youth aged 15 to 17 (17%) reported that their mental health was "fair" or "poor" in 2019, more than double the rate for those aged 12 to 14 (7%).

More female youth reported fair or poor mental health compared with male youth. Girls aged 12 to 14 (10%) were more than twice as likely as boys (4%) to report fair or poor mental health. The difference was even larger among youth aged 15 to 17, with 24% of girls and 10% of boys reporting fair or poor mental health.

Youth often do not share the same perspective as their parents on their own mental health

The survey also asked parents to rate the mental health of their children aged 1 to 17. Parents of younger children were less likely than parents of older children to report that their child's mental health was fair or poor.

Specifically, 1% of children aged 1 to 4 were deemed by their parents to have fair or poor mental health. This figure rose to 4% among children aged 5 to 11, while 5% of youth aged 12 to 14, and 8% of youth aged 15 to 17 were considered by their parents to have fair or poor mental health.

However, a comparison of answers given by parents and answers given by youth aged 12 to 17 showed that youth often do not share the same opinion as their parents regarding their own mental health.

In almost half of the cases (48%), parents and youth reported the same mental health status.

For the remaining half (52%), there was a discrepancy between the parent's and the youth's perception of the youth's mental health. When a difference occurred, almost two-thirds (65%) of youth rated their mental health less positively than their parents did.

These results suggest that parents may not always be aware of the mental health struggles experienced by their children.

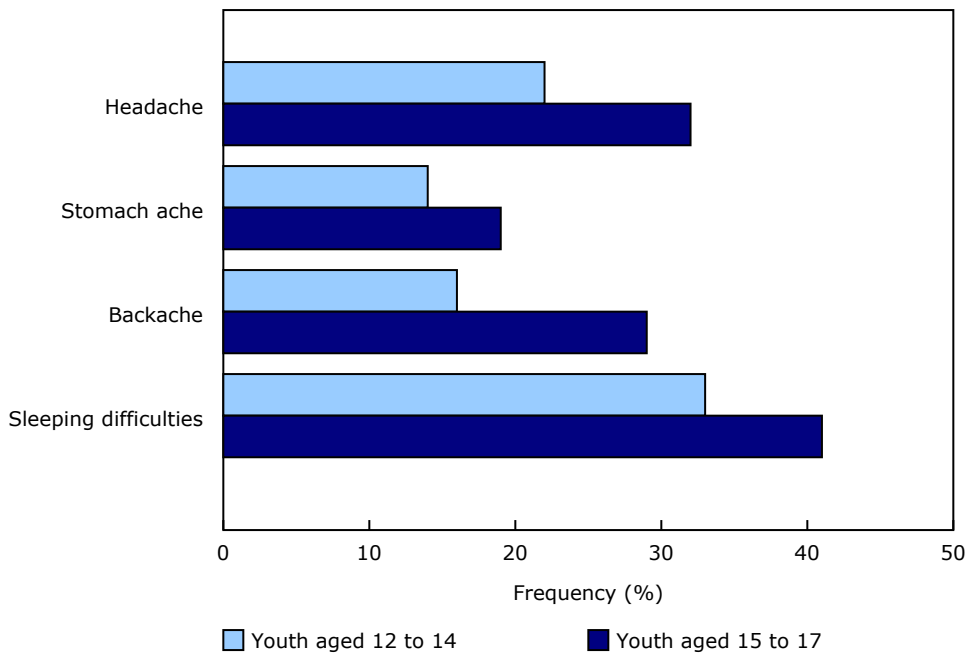


Youth with recurrent pain or sleeping difficulties are more likely to report fair or poor mental health

Studies have shown that sleeping difficulties and recurrent pain, such as headaches, stomach aches and backaches, are common among youth and may indicate mental health issues.

Just over one-third (35%) of 12- to 14-year-olds and almost half (48%) of 15- to 17-year-olds reported experiencing at least one type of recurrent pain at least once a week in 2019. Additionally, 33% of 12- to 14-year-olds and 41% of 15- to 17-year-olds reported having sleeping difficulties at least once a week.

Chart 1
Recurrent pain and sleeping difficulties experienced once a week or more, Canada, 2019

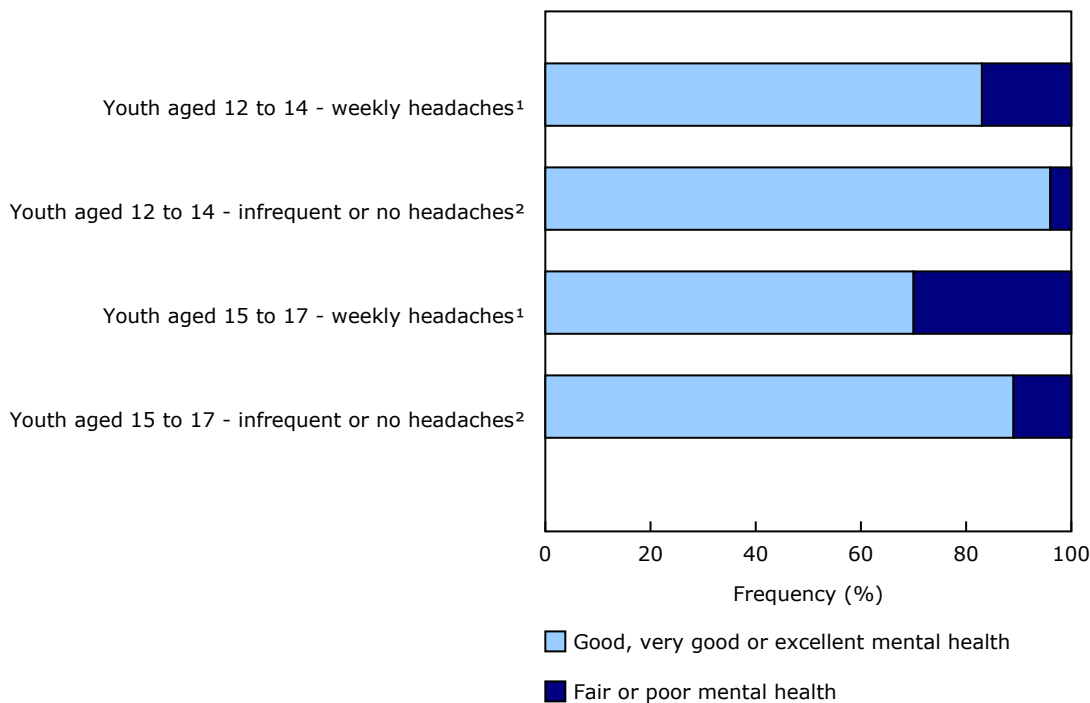


Source(s): Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth, 2019 (5233).

Youth with recurrent pain were more likely to report fair or poor mental health. Youth aged 12 to 14 who experienced headaches at least once a week were over four times more likely (17%) to rate their mental health as fair or poor compared with those who experienced headaches once a month or less (4%). Similarly, among youth aged 15 to 17, 30% of those who experienced headaches at least once a week rated their mental health as fair or poor, compared with 11% among those who reported headaches once a month or less.

Chart 2

Perceived mental health and reported headaches, youth aged 12 to 14 and 15 to 17, Canada, 2019



* Note(s):

¹ Headaches about once a week, more than once a week or most days.

² Headaches about once a month or rarely/never.

Source(s): Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth, 2019 (5233).

Having frequent difficulty falling asleep can be another sign that youth are experiencing a mental health issue. Among youth aged 12 to 14 who had difficulties falling asleep at least once a week, 14% rated their mental health as fair or poor, compared with 4% of those who had sleeping difficulties once a month or less. The difference persisted among youth aged 15 to 17, with 29% of those who experienced sleeping difficulties at least once a week rating their mental health as fair or poor, compared with 9% among those who experienced sleeping difficulties once a month or less.

Poorer mental health among children is associated with lower grades and difficulty making friends

The effects of poor mental health can touch upon many aspects of a child's life, and can have lasting impacts on their developmental skills, school performance and capacity to build social relationships.

In 2019, children and youth with fair or poor mental health had lower overall grades than children with very good or excellent mental health.

Specifically, almost one-third (32%) of children and youth aged 3 to 17 with fair or poor mental health had average grades of C or lower. In comparison, 9% of children and youth with very good or excellent mental health had average grades of C or lower.

Children and youth with fair or poor parent-perceived mental health were also more likely to have difficulty making friends than those with very good or excellent mental health. In 2019, approximately one-quarter (25%) of children and youth aged 5 to 17 with fair or poor mental health had difficulty making friends, compared with 1% of children and youth with very good or excellent mental health.

Looking ahead

Given various physical distancing measures, the pandemic will most likely continue to impact the mental health of Canadians for the foreseeable future. Statistics Canada is committed to continuing to monitor this situation through various data collection initiatives.

Note to readers

The 2019 Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth was developed by Statistics Canada in collaboration with the Public Health Agency of Canada and Health Canada. The data were collected from February 11 to August 2, 2019.

Data were collected from the person most knowledgeable (PMK) about the preselected child or youth aged 1 to 17. The PMK was usually the birth, step or adoptive parent (98%) of the selected child or youth. For simplicity, the term "parent" is used in this release. Data were also collected directly from youth aged 12 to 17.

In this release, when two estimates are said to be different, this indicates that the difference was statistically significant at a 95% confidence level (p-value less than 5%).

The total sample size for this survey was 91,796. The survey response rate was 52%, which resulted in 47,871 complete cases. Survey sample weights were applied so that the analyses would be representative of the Canadian population.

Crowdsourcing data are from Statistics Canada's questionnaire, "Crowdsourcing: Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians: Your mental health." Between April 24 and May 11, 2020, over 46,000 people participated in the crowdsourcing survey. Methodological adjustments have been made to account for age, sex and provincial differences.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5233](#).

Available tables: [13-10-0763-01](#) to [13-10-0765-01](#) .

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).