

# Experiences of serious problems or disputes in the Canadian provinces, 2021

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Tuesday, January 18, 2022

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Today, Statistics Canada released results from a new survey asking people living in the Canadian provinces about serious problems or disputes in their daily lives.

In 2021, almost one in five Canadians—18% of people aged 18 years and older, or 5.5 million people—reported experiencing at least one serious problem or civil dispute in the previous three years.

There are two key points to highlight for this survey. First, Canadians living in the provinces were asked whether they had experienced a serious problem that was not easy to fix (which could potentially require legal intervention) ranging from problems related to consumer debt, to issues with the criminal justice system, to custody or family-related disputes.

Second, Canadians were asked about the actions taken to resolve their most serious problem or dispute. Serious problems can be resolved in numerous ways, ranging from informal conversations between the involved parties to engagement with the formal justice system. The timely access to a fair and effective justice system—and the resolution of problems and disputes—helps support the well-being of individuals and communities.

Released today is the *Juristat* article, "[Experiences of serious problems or disputes in the Canadian provinces, 2021](#)." The analysis focuses on the types and frequency of serious problems experienced by people living in Canada's provinces, the actions they took to address or resolve these problems (whether they resolved the problem through informal means or through a legal process), and the impacts these problems had on their everyday life. Barriers to accessing the formal justice system are explored. Data are disaggregated to highlight the experiences of different populations in the 10 provinces wherever possible. This report is based on the 2021 Canadian Legal Problems Survey (CLPS).

## Around 5.5 million people living in Canada's provinces experience serious problems

Almost one in five people living in Canada's provinces—18% of people aged 18 and older, or approximately 5.5 million people—reported experiencing at least one serious problem measured by the CLPS in the three years before the survey. The most commonly reported problems were neighbourhood-related, such as vandalism (21% of all serious problems); problems related to harassment (16%); problems related to discrimination (16%); and receiving poor or incorrect medical treatment (16%). Experiencing a serious problem was as common for women (18%) as it was for men (18%).

According to the CLPS, of those who experienced at least one serious problem in the three years preceding the survey, more than one-half (55%) experienced only one serious problem or dispute. Similar proportions experienced two (22%) or three or more (23%) serious problems.

## One-third of people with disabilities report experiencing at least one serious problem, and people with disabilities are also more likely to experience three or more serious problems

According to the CLPS, one-third (33%) of people with disabilities reported experiencing one or more serious problems in the three years before the survey—a proportion double that of people without disabilities (16%). Furthermore, among those who experienced a serious problem, people with disabilities were more likely than people without disabilities to experience three or more serious problems (34% versus 20%).

The most significant differences in the types of serious problems experienced by people with disabilities compared with people without disabilities were seen in problems relating to poor or incorrect medical treatment (29% versus 13%), problems with receiving disability assistance (17% versus 2%), problems with receiving government assistance payments (12% versus 4%), problems related to harassment (20% versus 15%), and problems related to discrimination (19% versus 15%).



In addition, those who were Indigenous (27%) and not heterosexual (28%) also more commonly reported experiencing serious problems in the three years before the survey.

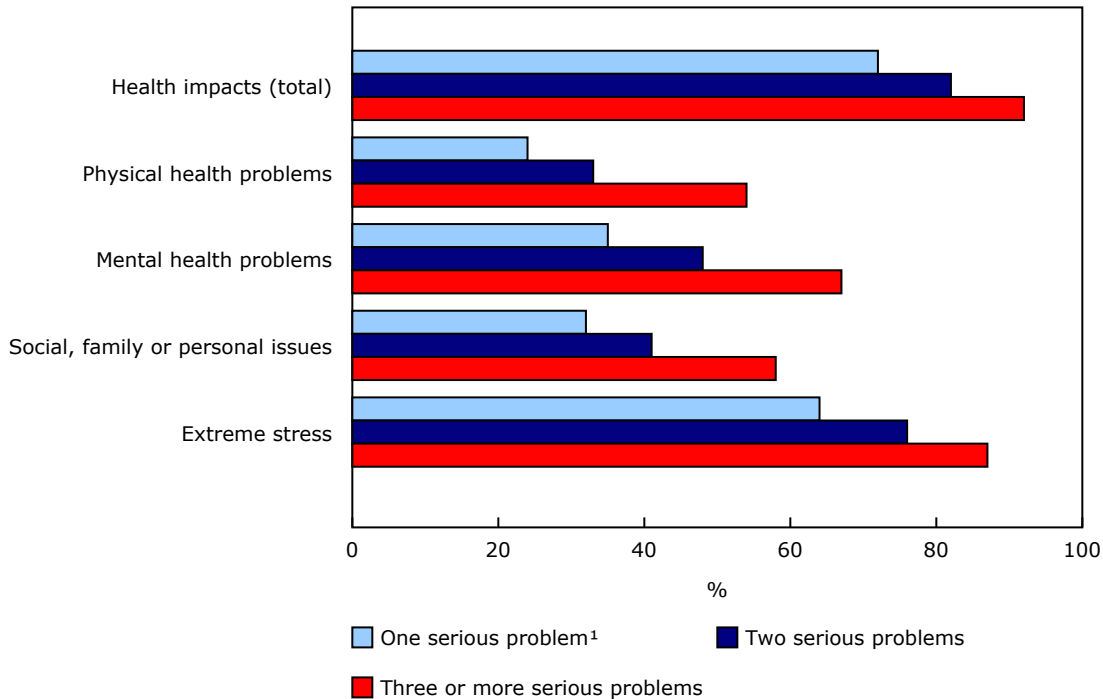
### Most Canadians living in the provinces resolve their most serious problem outside the formal justice system

The vast majority (87%) of Canadians who experienced a serious problem reported taking some form of action to address their most serious problem, although not necessarily through the formal justice system. Canadians living in the provinces took different types of action to resolve their most serious problem, with one-third (33%) saying that they contacted a legal professional, and an additional 8% saying that they contacted a court or tribunal. The most common actions taken to resolve serious problems were obtaining advice from friends or relatives (52%), searching the Internet (51%), and contacting the other party involved in the dispute (47%).

### Women are more likely than men to cite negative health impacts from their most serious problem

In addition to questions about the types of serious problems experienced by Canadians living in the provinces and the actions taken to resolve them, the CLPS also asked about any negative impacts stemming from the most serious problem. While, as noted, women and men were equally likely to face serious problems, women were more likely to report experiencing the health impacts measured by the CLPS. For example, extreme stress was cited by almost 8 in 10 (79%) women, compared with around two-thirds (65%) of men.

**Chart 1**  
**Health impacts caused by the most serious problem, by number of serious problems, Canada, 2021**



1. reference category  
 Source(s): Canadian Legal Problems Survey (5337).

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## Indigenous people are more likely than non-Indigenous people to report experiencing certain types of negative financial impacts as a result of their most serious problem, including losing their housing

In general, three-quarters (75%) of people who experienced a serious problem reported that they suffered some type of financial impact as a result of their most serious problem. The proportion was the same for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. However, Indigenous people were more likely to report experiencing certain types of financial impacts.

Indigenous people were more likely than non-Indigenous people to say that they had to borrow money from friends or relatives (32% versus 21%), borrow money from a credit or loan agency (11% versus 6%), or miss a bill payment or pay a bill late (32% versus 20%). Indigenous people were also twice as likely as their non-Indigenous counterparts to say that their most serious problem caused or contributed to losing their housing (10% versus 5%).

### The majority of serious problems remain unresolved

Three in 10 (29%) serious problems in the Canadian provinces had been resolved at the time of the survey. The proportion of resolved problems ranged from 24% in New Brunswick, to 38% in Newfoundland and Labrador. Just over one-quarter (27%) of problems in the Canadian provinces were in the process of being resolved. Compared with the all other provinces, a higher proportion of Canadians living in Quebec (19%), Alberta (18%), Saskatchewan (16%) and Ontario (16%) stated that they had given up trying to resolve their most serious problem.

#### Note to readers

*This Juristat article is based on results from the 2021 Canadian Legal Problems Survey (CLPS). The main objective of the CLPS is to better understand the types and frequency of serious problems that people in Canada face; the actions they take to address or resolve these problems; and the financial, socioeconomic and health impacts these problems have on their everyday lives.*

*Statistics Canada conducted the CLPS for the first time in 2021. The development and collection of this survey were funded by the Department of Justice Canada and other federal partners as part of the government's strategy to measure Canada's progress in realizing United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16, providing equal access to justice for all.*

*There are two key methodological points to highlight regarding this analysis. Firstly, this survey was not conducted in Canada's territories. Secondly, respondents were asked two questions to determine whether they had experienced a problem within the scope of this survey. The first question was whether they had experienced any of a series of possible problems in the three years preceding the survey. Those who had experienced any of these problems were asked whether they considered it serious or not easy to fix. The analysis in this article focuses primarily on serious or difficult-to-resolve problems.*

*Data collection for the CLPS took place from February to August 2021. During this time, COVID-19 spread at different rates across the country, with some provinces imposing stricter restrictions than others. Respondents were specifically asked about the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to their serious problems, and the results are outlined in the Juristat article.*

#### Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5337](#).

The article "[Experiences of serious problems or disputes in the Canadian provinces, 2021](#)" is now available as part of the publication *Juristat* ([85-002-X](#)).

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; [infostats@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:infostats@statcan.gc.ca)) or Media Relations ([statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca)).