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COVID-19 on Canadians' social concerns**

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Impact of economic consequences of COVID-19 on Canadians' social concerns

by **Martin Turcotte** and **Darcy Hango**

The current pandemic has had a significant impact on how people interact with one another, both within families and communities. While individuals and families who share the same dwelling have had to learn to live together full time, networks of friends, relatives, neighbours and colleagues may have weakened because of the extended lack of face-to-face contact.

The extensive job losses and financial difficulties many Canadians have faced may have further disrupted family and social relationships. For example, some studies have shown that financial stress is often associated with an increase in family conflict or stress (Dew et al. 2012; Gudmunson et al. 2007). Furthermore, personal financial difficulties can exacerbate social concerns because economic exclusion can negatively impact social support and involvement in organizations (Mood and Jonsson 2016).

According to recently released data, many people are concerned about the various social impacts of COVID-19 (Statistics Canada 2020a). This article examines the extent to which Canadians' personal financial concerns are associated with concerns about family life and social cohesion (family stress from confinement, violence in the home, maintaining social ties, the ability to cooperate and support one another, and the risk of civil disorder). The population of interest consists of individuals aged 25 to 64, i.e., those of core working age in the labour market.¹

Canadians who reported that COVID-19 would have a major impact on their personal finances are more likely to be concerned about the social impacts of the pandemic

In late March, 17% of Canadians aged 25 to 64 reported that the pandemic would have a major impact on their ability to fulfill their financial obligations or meet their essential needs (e.g., rent or mortgage payments, utilities, and groceries), while 30% reported experiencing moderate or minor impacts.

Difficulty fulfilling financial obligations is associated with having greater social concerns (Table 1). For example, among those experiencing major impacts from the pandemic on their ability to fulfill their financial obligations, almost half were very or extremely concerned about the impacts of COVID-19 on family stress from confinement (48%). By comparison, this was the case for one in five people who did not anticipate experiencing significant financial impacts from COVID-19 (21%).

1. The people in this group are more likely to have completed their studies, hold a job, be part of a family with children and have many financial responsibilities.



Table 1
Concerns expressed by Canadians about the COVID-19 pandemic, by impacts of COVID-19 on their personal finances, individuals aged 25 to 64, March and April 2020

	People who reported being very or extremely concerned about the various impacts of COVID-19					
	Family stress from confinement	Violence in the home	Maintaining social ties	Ability to cooperate and support one another during the crisis	Ability to cooperate and support one another after the crisis	The risk of civil disorder
	percent					
Impacts of COVID-19 on your ability to meet your financial obligations or essential needs, such as rent or mortgage payments, utilities, and groceries						
Major impacts	48*	11	47*	61*	58*	61*
Moderate or minor impacts	34*	8	33*	44*	43*	44*
No impact (ref.)	21	8	24	28	28	32
Too soon to tell	37*	9	35*	44*	42*	45*
	predicted probability ¹					
Impacts of COVID-19 on your ability to meet your financial obligations or essential needs, such as rent or mortgage payments, utilities, and groceries						
Major impacts	0.47*	0.10	0.44*	0.57*	0.54*	0.56*
Moderate or minor impacts	0.33*	0.07	0.32	0.43*	0.42*	0.42
No impact (ref.)	0.23	0.09	0.27	0.32	0.32	0.36
Too soon to tell	0.36*	0.09	0.34*	0.43*	0.42*	0.45*

1. Probabilities were adjusted for sex, age group, highest level of education attained, immigration status, whether respondents lived alone or with others, and potential for job loss during the pandemic.

* Value significantly different from the estimate for the reference category.

Source: Canadian Perspectives Survey Series, March and April 2020.

Those who reported experiencing major financial impacts were about twice as likely as those who were not anticipating these impacts to be concerned about maintaining social ties and about the ability to cooperate and support one another during the crisis. Furthermore, the percentage of people who reported being very or extremely concerned about the risk of civil disorder was 61% among those anticipating major impacts on their ability to fulfill their financial obligations. This figure was 32% among those who said that the pandemic would have no impact on their personal finances.

The results described above were generally robust. Even after other characteristics that could impact a person's family and social concerns (e.g., age, sex and education) were taken into account, the people who were anticipating significant financial impacts were still more likely than those who were not to say they were very concerned about the social impacts of the pandemic (see Table 1 for predicted probabilities).

Social concerns are not necessarily higher among people who face the prospect of losing their jobs after accounting for demographic characteristics

In late March, nearly one-quarter of Canadians aged 25 to 64 reported that they would likely lose their main job or primary source of self-employment income in the four weeks that followed. Because workplaces are major social hubs, people who fear losing their job may be more concerned about certain impacts of the pandemic, such as the ability to maintain social ties.

Respondents who were not at all worried about losing their job because of the pandemic were generally less concerned about the social impacts of the pandemic than other respondents. For example, one-third of those who



were not afraid of losing their job were concerned about the ability to support one another, whereas that was true for over half of those who had the greatest fear of losing their main job or primary source of income (Table 2).

However, when other factors such as age, sex and education were taken into account, the above differences became non-significant, which means that they were attributable to other factors.

Table 2
Concerns expressed by Canadians about the COVID-19 pandemic, by potential of losing their job during the pandemic, individuals aged 25 to 64, March and April 2020

	People who reported being very or extremely concerned about the various impacts of COVID-19					
	Family stress from confinement	Violence in the home	Maintaining social ties	Ability to cooperate and support one another during the crisis	Ability to cooperate and support one another after the crisis	The risk of civil disorder
	percent					
I could lose my main job or primary source of self-employment income in the next four weeks						
Strongly agree or agree	37*	8	40*	51*	48*	54*
Neither agree nor disagree	37	12	37*	47*	46*	48*
Disagree or strongly disagree (ref.)	29	7	28	34	33	37
Unemployed	34	10	33	44*	43*	42
	predicted probability ¹					
I could lose my main job or primary source of self-employment income in the next four weeks						
Strongly agree or agree	0.31	0.08	0.36	0.44	0.42	0.47
Neither agree nor disagree	0.34	0.12	0.35	0.45	0.44	0.46
Disagree or strongly disagree (ref.)	0.35	0.08	0.32	0.40	0.39	0.41
Unemployed	0.34	0.09	0.33	0.43	0.43	0.42

1. Probabilities were adjusted for sex, age group, highest level of education attained, immigration status, whether respondents lived alone or with others, and the impacts of COVID-19 on respondents' personal financial situation.

* Value significantly different from the estimate for the reference category.

Source: Canadian Perspectives Survey Series, March and April 2020.

Other groups of Canadians, such as people with low levels of education and immigrants, have greater social concerns

Less-educated individuals were more likely to be concerned about the various family and social impacts of the pandemic. For example, nearly 60% of those without a high school diploma reported being very or extremely worried about the impacts of COVID-19 on maintaining social ties, whereas this figure was approximately 30% among those with other levels of education.

Because those with the lowest levels of education are also among those most at risk of losing their job (Messacar and Morissette 2020), it could follow that education plays a significant role in social concerns. That hypothesis was tested with a regression model. Even after a number of factors were taken into account, including fear of losing one's job during the pandemic, those with the lowest levels of education were still more concerned than those with the highest levels of education (Table 3). These results suggest that the differences described in Table 2 could also be the result of differences in education levels.



Table 3
Concerns expressed by Canadians about the COVID-19 pandemic, by highest level of education attained and immigration status, individuals aged 25 to 64, March and April 2020

	People who reported being very or extremely concerned about the various impacts of COVID-19					
	Family stress from confinement	Violence in the home	Maintaining social ties	Ability to cooperate and support one another during the crisis	Ability to cooperate and support one another after the crisis	The risk of civil disorder
	predicted probability ¹					
Highest level of education attained						
No high school diploma (ref.)	0.53	0.15	0.59	0.58	0.58	0.56
High school diploma	0.34*	0.11	0.30*	0.43	0.44	0.47
Postsecondary diploma below a bachelor's degree	0.35*	0.08	0.34*	0.44	0.43	0.44
Bachelor's degree or higher	0.29*	0.08	0.31*	0.38*	0.35*	0.39
Immigration status						
Canadian-born (ref.)	0.31	0.07	0.30	0.38	0.37	0.41
Immigrants	0.42*	0.16*	0.44*	0.58*	0.56*	0.56*

1. Probabilities were adjusted for sex, age group, whether respondents lived alone or with others, potential for job loss during the pandemic, and the impacts of COVID-19 on respondents' personal financial situation.

* Value significantly different from the estimate for the reference category.

Source: Canadian Perspectives Survey Series, March and April 2020.

In addition to education, other factors are associated with the social concerns of Canadians. In particular, immigrants are more likely than the Canadian-born to worry about the social impacts of the pandemic (LaRochelle-Côté and Uppal 2020). This analysis supports these earlier findings because—even after all other factors were taken into account—immigrants still worried more than the Canadian-born. Furthermore, immigrants were more than twice as likely as people born in Canada to be worried about the potential of violence in the home.²

Methodology

To obtain up-to-date information on how Canadians are reacting to the COVID-19 pandemic, Statistics Canada developed a new online panel survey: the Canadian Perspectives Survey Series (CPSS). From March 29 to April 3, 2020, over 4,600 respondents from all 10 provinces participated in the CPSS. Because the CPSS targets a subsample of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) sample, a number of variables (age, sex, highest level of education, place of birth) were drawn from the LFS data. All of the differences presented in this release between the population subgroups are significant at the 5% level ($p < 0.05$). Bootstrap weights were used for significance tests. Logistic regression models were used to assess the extent to which the associations between the characteristics and concerns shown in tables 1 and 2 remained statistically significant if all other factors were considered at the same time. These detailed results are not presented in this article.

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2. Age was another major factor. People aged 55 to 64 were generally less concerned about the social impacts of COVID-19 than those in younger age groups, which is consistent with the findings of a previous study (Statistics Canada 2020b).



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