

Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19 on Diverse Youth and Families in Canada

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Abstract : Introduction: This mixed-methods study focuses on the experiences of ethnocultural youth and families in Canada, identifying key barriers and opportunities to inform service programming and policies that can better meet their mental health needs during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Methods: Mental Health Commission of Canada's Headstrong initiative administered the youth survey (April - June 2020) and family survey (June - August 2020) with a total sample size of 137 and 481 respondents, respectively. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify key challenges faced, coping strategies used, and help-seeking behaviours. A similar approach was also applied to the family survey data, but instead, a representative sample was collated to analyze geographically variable and ethnically diverse subgroups. Results and analysis: Multiple challenges have impacted families, including increased feelings of loneliness and distress from border travel restrictions, especially among those navigating pregnancy alone or managing children with developmental needs, which is often understudied. Also, marginalized groups were disproportionately affected by inequitable access to communication technologies, further deepening the digital divide. Some reported living in congregated homes with regular conflicts, thus leading to increased anxiety and exposure to violence. For many families, urbanicity and ethnicity played a key role in how families reported coping with feelings of uncertainty while managing work commitments, navigating community resources, fulfilling care responsibilities, and homeschooling children of all ages. Despite these challenges, there was evidence of post-traumatic growth and building community resiliency. Conclusions and implications for policy, practice, or additional research: There is a need to foster opportunities to promote and sustain mental health, wellness, and resilience for families through social connections. Also, intersectionality must be embedded in the collection, analysis, and application of data to improve equitable access to evidence-based and recovery-oriented mental health supports among diverse families in Canada. Lastly, address future research on the long-term COVID-19 impacts of travel border restrictions on family wellness.

Keywords : mental health, youth mental health, family wellness, health equity

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