

The Mental Health Index report

Canada, April 2020

**Spotlight on the mental
health impact of the
COVID-19 pandemic**



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Executive Summary

The April 2020 Mental Health Index comes at a unique time. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted lives and livelihoods more broadly and more quickly than anything in recent memory. As well, it looms ominously for at least the next several months. While an impact on mental health would be expected, the size of the impact is noteworthy.

The overall Mental Health Index for April 2020 is -12 points. This index represents the deviation from the benchmark of 75, where a negative score indicates poorer mental health relative to the benchmark, and a positive score indicates better mental health. The benchmark reflects mental health data from 2017, 2018 and 2019. A 12-point decrease from the pre COVID-19 benchmark¹ is unprecedented in the three years when benchmark data was being collected. The current score of 63 is equivalent to the first percentile of the benchmark.

There is a greater drop in mental health for those who are not currently employed², compared to those currently employed, and a greater drop for those who identify as female compared to male. Further, the younger the age group, the more negative the change in mental health.

The Mental Health Index sub-score with the largest drop was for the risk measure of anxiety (-14.8 points), followed by depression (-14.0), work productivity (-13.4), optimism (-12.3) and isolation (-10.6). In spite of this, there was relatively little change in self-ratings of general psychological health (-0.4), however, this measure lags the other sub-scores. As well, the financial score dropped only two points, suggesting the impact of economic change had not yet greatly depleted emergency savings. That said, those without emergency savings have experienced a more significant drop in mental health (-23.0) than the overall group. As well, people with no emergency fund have uniformly low scores on the Mental Health Index. Even those with lower household incomes, who have an emergency fund, have higher scores than those with higher income and no emergency fund.

The overall Mental Health Index for April 2020 is -12 points

¹ The raw score for the Mental Health Index benchmark is 75/100. The April 2020 score is 63/100

² All respondents had been employed within the prior six months.



The Mental Stress Change score for April 2020 is 74.7. This reflects a significant increase in mental stress compared to the prior month. While some increase in mental stress has been reported over the past three years, the current score indicates that more than half the population are experiencing more mental stress compared to the prior month, with a negligible proportion experiencing less. Considering geography, the greatest increase in stress month over month was for respondents living in Newfoundland and Labrador (82.1), followed by Alberta (77.5), Manitoba (77.4), and the Maritime provinces (76.6). Respondents living in the provinces where the increase in mental stress was less, still had significant increases. They include Saskatchewan (75.3), British Columbia (74.7), Ontario (74.5) and Quebec (72.1).

There is a much more significant increase in mental stress for those who identify as female, and those with two or more children, compared with those with one child or none.

Households with higher income experienced a greater increase in stress than lower income households. That said, the Mental Health Index shows a great drop in mental health for lower income households. This suggests that those individuals with lower incomes had higher daily stress to start but are experiencing a more significant mental health impact than those with higher income.

There are a wide range of concerns and fears related to the pandemic. The most pervasive concern having an impact on mental health relates to the financial impact of the pandemic (55 per cent), followed by the fear of a loved one passing away (43 per cent) and fear of getting ill (42 per cent), and uncertainty around how the virus will impact family and relationships (33 per cent). While financial fears are prominent, as noted above, financial risk as measured by emergency savings was only slightly lower (-1.8 points) in April 2020 than the benchmark, suggesting more financial fears than actual depletion of emergency savings at this point in time.

A significant majority of those surveyed (80 per cent) indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic specifically has had a negative impact on their mental health. About half of the total (49 per cent) believe that although they feel this impact, they also feel that they will be able to cope; 32 per cent indicate greater concern, with 16 per cent of the total indicating a very negative impact or crisis. Overall, the younger the individual, the greater the level of negative impact as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Those with children are also more likely than those without to have experienced a more negative impact.

The most pervasive concern having an impact on mental health relates to the financial impact of the pandemic, followed by the fear of a loved one passing away and fear of getting ill, and uncertainty around how the virus will impact family and relationships



More than 96 per cent (96.2 per cent) indicate that they have had some personal disruption as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. At this point, the largest proportion of respondents (23 per cent) believe that the disruption to them personally will be over by June 2020; 21 per cent believe that it will be over before then; 37 percent believe it will be over either July, August or September; and 10 per cent believe that the disruption will end in 2021. Those who believe that the personal disruption of the pandemic will last longer are more likely to have the greatest negative mental health impact as a result of the pandemic.

The two key drivers of the Mental Health Index are financial risk and isolation.

Additional data and analyses

Industry scores, demographic breakdown of sub-scores, and specific cross-correlational and custom analyses are available upon request. Benchmarking against the national results or any sub-group, is available upon request. Contact MHI@morneaushepell.com

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Overview of the Mental Health Index

The mental health and well-being of a population is essential to overall health and work productivity. The Mental Health Index provides a measure of the current mental health status of employed adults in a given geography, compared to the benchmarks collected in the years of 2017, 2018 and 2019. The increases and decreases in the Index are intended to predict cost and productivity risks, and inform the need for investment in mental health supports by business and government.

The Mental Health Index report has three main parts:

- The overall Mental Health Index (MHI), which is a measure of change compared to the benchmark of mental health and risk.
- A Mental Stress Change score (MStressChg), which measures the level of reported mental stress, compared to the prior month.
- A Spotlight section that reflects the specific impact of current issues in the community: For the current and immediately foreseeable future, the measures in this section relate to the mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Collected through an on-line survey of 3000 Canadians

Methodology

The data for this report was collected through an on-line survey of 3,000 Canadians who are living in Canada and are currently employed or who were employed within the prior six months. Participants were selected to be representative of the age, gender, industry and geographic distribution in Canada. The same respondents participate each month to remove sampling bias. The respondents were asked to consider the prior two weeks when answering each question. The Mental Health Index is published monthly, starting in April 2020. The benchmark data was collected in 2017, 2018 and 2019. The data for the current report was collected between March 27, 2020 and March 30, 2020.



Calculations

To create the Mental Health Index, the first step leverages a response scoring system turning individual responses to each question into a point value. Higher point values are associated with better mental health and less mental health risk. Each individual's scores are added and then divided by the total number of possible points to get a score out of 100. The raw score is the mathematical mean of the individual scores.

To demonstrate change, the current month's scores are then compared to the benchmark and the prior month. The benchmark is comprised of data from 2017, 2018 and 2019. This was a period of relative social stability and steady economic growth. **The change relative to the benchmark is the Mental Health Index. A score of zero in the Mental Health Index reflects no change, positive scores reflect improvement, and negative scores reflect decline.**

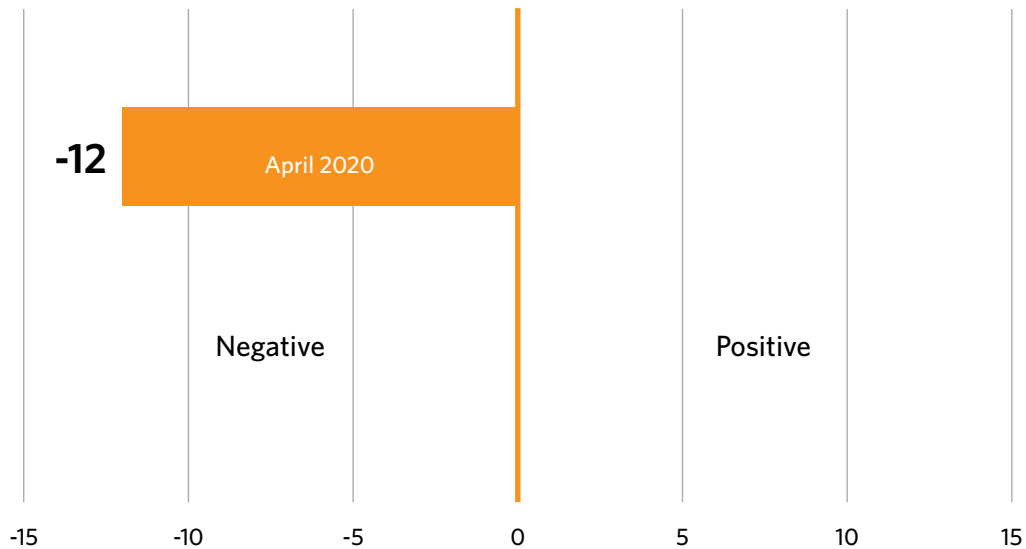
A Mental Stress Change score is also reported given that increasing and prolonged mental stress is a potential contributor to changes in mental health. It is reported separately and is not part of the calculation of the Mental Health Index. The Mental Stress Change score is $(\text{Percentage reporting less mental stress} + \text{Percentage reporting the same level of mental stress} \times 0.5) \times -1 + 100$. The data compares the current to the prior month. **A Mental Stress Change score of 50 reflects no change in mental stress from the prior month. Scores above 50 reflect an increase in mental stress, scores below 50 reflect a decrease in mental stress.** The range is from zero to 100. A succession of scores over 50, month over month, reflects high risk.



The Mental Health Index – Canada

The Mental Health Index (MHI) is a measure of change compared to the benchmark³ of mental health and risk.

Mental Health Index	
Current Month	-12
Mental Health Index Sub-scores ⁴	
Anxiety	-14.8
Depression	-14.0
Work productivity	-13.4
Optimism	-12.3
Isolation	-10.6
Financial risk	-1.8
Psychological health	-0.4



The overall Mental Health Index dropped 12 points from the benchmark. Such a change is statistically significant and unprecedented in the three years when benchmark data was being collected. The current score of 63 is equivalent to the first percentile of the benchmark.

There is a greater drop in mental health for those who are not currently employed, compared to those currently employed, and a greater drop for those who identify as female compared to male. Further, the younger the age group, the more negative the change in mental health.

³ The benchmark reflects data collected in 2017, 2018 and 2019.
⁴ The demographic breakdown of sub-scores are available upon request.

**Employment status**

Employed currently	-11.4
Employed within the past six months but not currently	-15.5

Age group

Age 20-29	-22.0
Age 30-39	-16.5
Age 40-49	-12.9
Age 50-59	-7.0
Age 60-69	-4.1

Number of children

No children in household	-10.3
1 child	-13.6
2 children	-15.3
3 children or more	-11.9

Province

Alberta	-14.3
British Columbia	-11.0
Manitoba	-13.5
Newfoundland and Labrador	-10.9
The Maritimes	-12.4
Quebec	-12.2
Ontario	-10.7
Saskatchewan	-12.9

Gender

Male	-8.8
Female	-14.6

Income

Household Income <\$30K/annum	-21.0
\$30K to <\$60K/annum	-15.7
\$60k to <\$100K	-12.2
\$100K and over	-6.8

Number of adults in household

One adult in household	-15.9
2 adults	-10.0
3 adults	-11.7
4 adults	-10.6
5 adults or more	-16.4

Numbers highlighted in **orange** are the most negative scores in the group.

Numbers highlighted in **green** are the least negative scores in the group.

Available upon request:

Industry scores
Specific cross-correlational and custom analyses



The Mental Stress Change Score – Canada

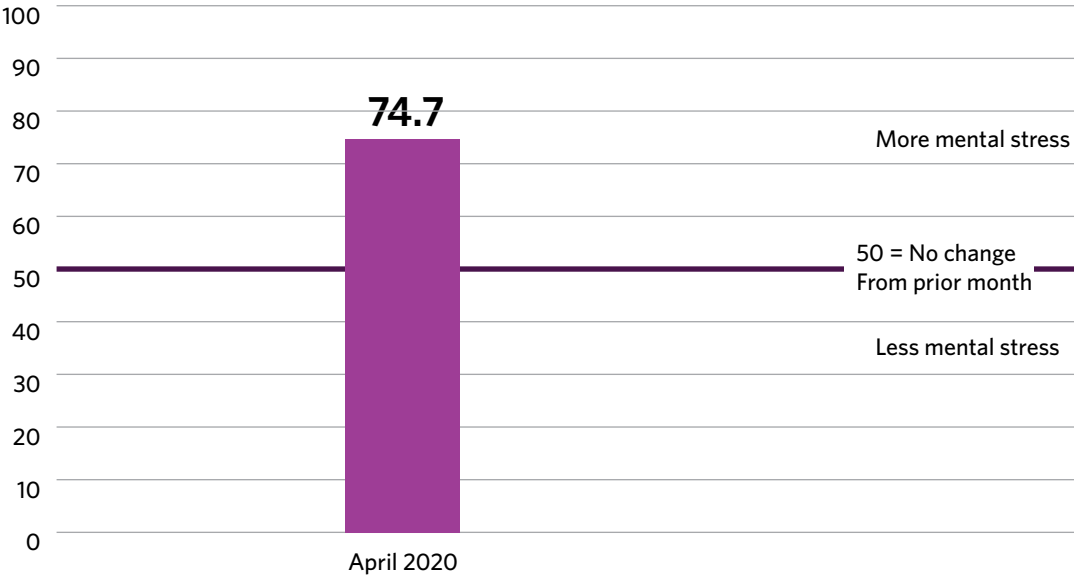
The Mental Stress Change Score (MStressChg) is a measure of the level of reported mental stress, compared to the prior month.

Mental Stress Change	
Current Month	74.7

The Mental Stress Change score for April 2020 is 74.7. This reflects a significant increase in mental stress compared to the prior month.

There is a much more significant increase in mental stress for those who identify as female, and for those with two or more children, compared with those with one child or none.

Households with higher income experienced a greater increase in stress than lower income households. That said, the Mental Health Index shows a greater drop in mental health for lower income households. This suggests that those with lower income had higher daily stress to start but are experiencing a more significant mental health impact than those with higher income.



**Employment status**

Employed currently	74.5
Employed within the past six months but not currently	76.5

Age group

Age 20-29	75.2
Age 30-39	76.4
Age 40-49	75.8
Age 50-59	74.6
Age 60-69	70.5

Number of children

No children in household	74.3
1 child	73.5
2 children	77.4
3 children or more	77.1

Province

Alberta	77.5
British Columbia	74.7
Manitoba	77.4
Newfoundland and Labrador	82.1
The Maritimes	76.6
Quebec	72.1
Ontario	74.5
Saskatchewan	75.3

Gender

Male	70.5
Female	78.8

Income

Household Income <\$30K/annum	71.5
\$30K to <\$60K/annum	72.2
\$60k to <\$100K	75.2
\$100K and over	76.4

Number of adults in household

One adult in household	75.4
2 adults	74.6
3 adults	74.9
4 adults	72.9
5 adults or more	72.4

Numbers highlighted in **orange** are the most negative scores in the group.

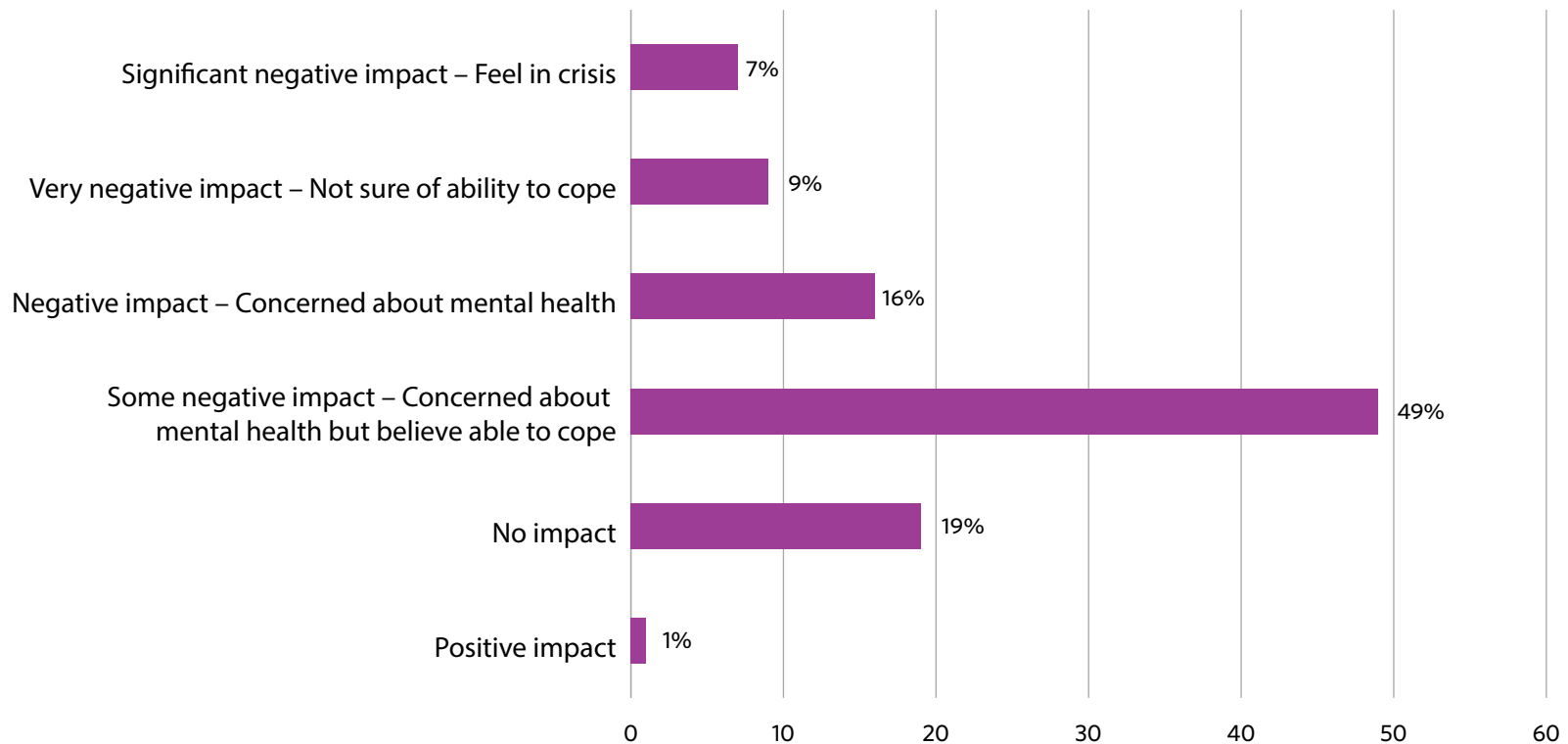
Numbers highlighted in **green** are the least negative scores in the group.

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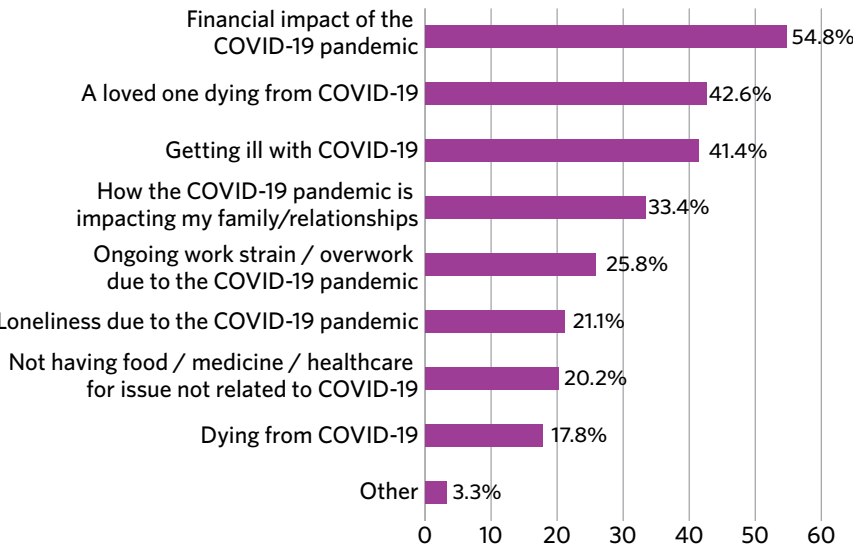
The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic – Canada



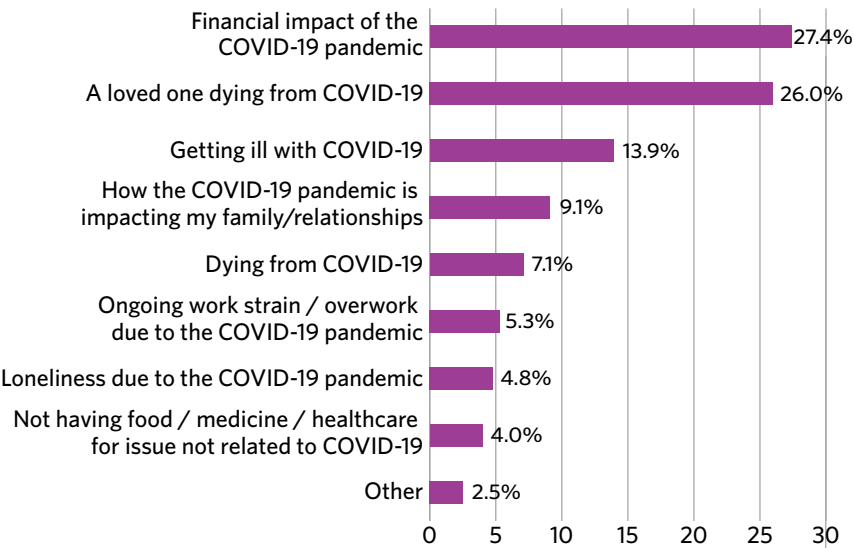
A significant majority (80 per cent) indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic specifically has had a negative impact on their mental health. About half of the total (49 per cent) believe that although they feel this impact, they also feel that they will be able to cope; 32 per cent indicate greater concern, with 16 per cent of the total indicating a very negative impact or crisis.



**Contributors to the mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
(multiple selections)**



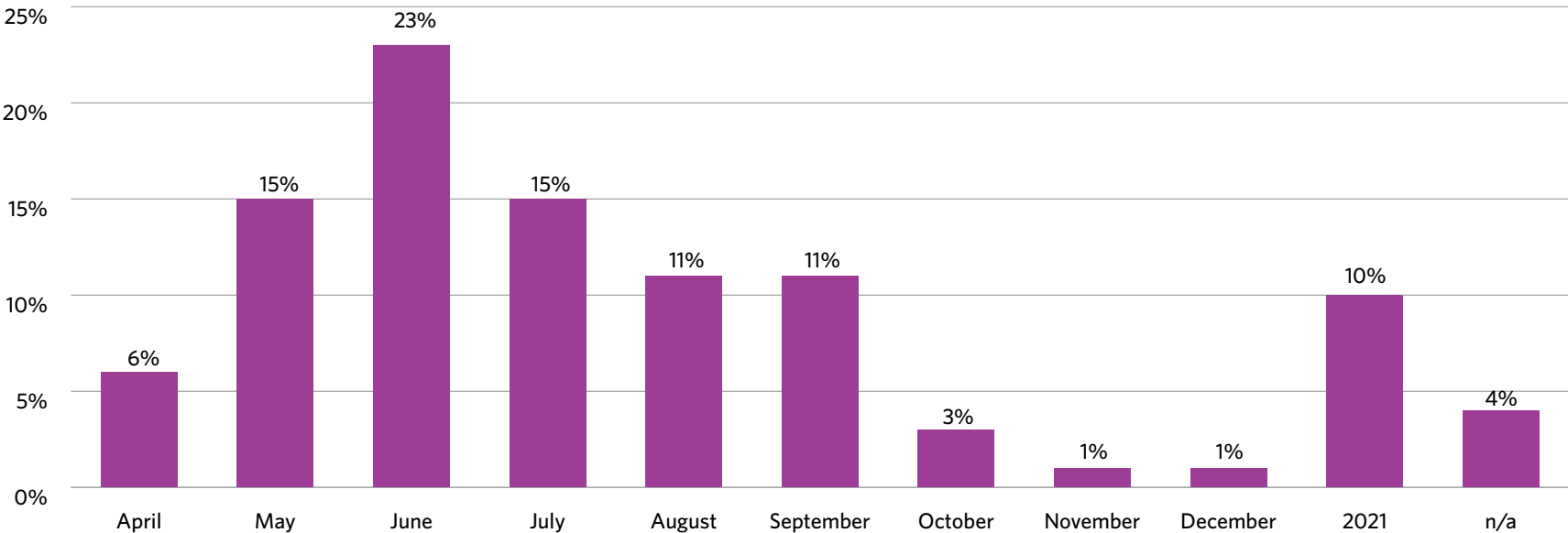
**The single greatest contributor to the mental health
impact of the COVID-19 pandemic**



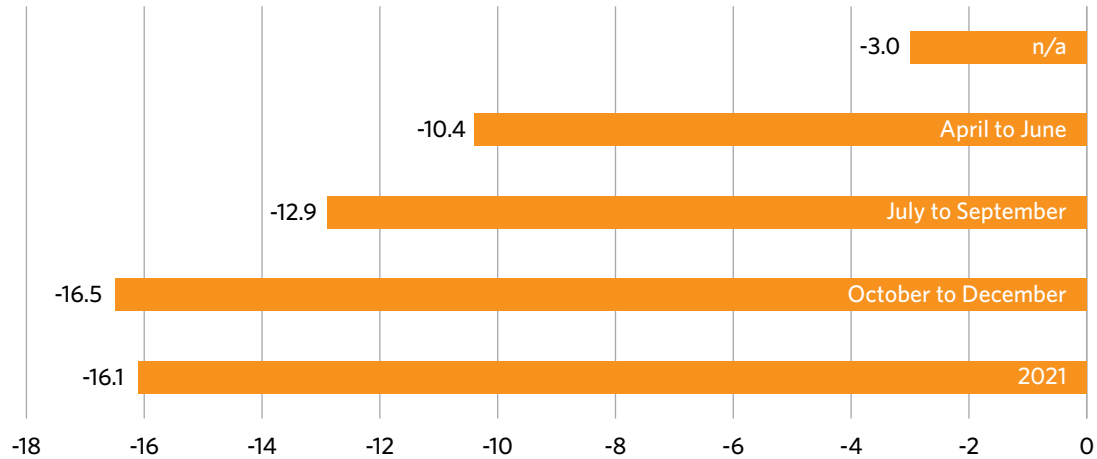
Where there was a mental health impact as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the most prevalent concern, and the top concern impacting mental health is related to finances. The death of a loved one and fear of dying follow, with concern regarding the impact of the pandemic on family/relationship being next.



Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, when do you think that most of the disruption to you personally, will be over?



Mental Health Index by expected end of disruption



As of April 2020, the most prevalent belief is that the personal disruption, as a result of the pandemic, will last until June 2020. The longer the disruption is believed to last, the more negative the Mental Health Index score.

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