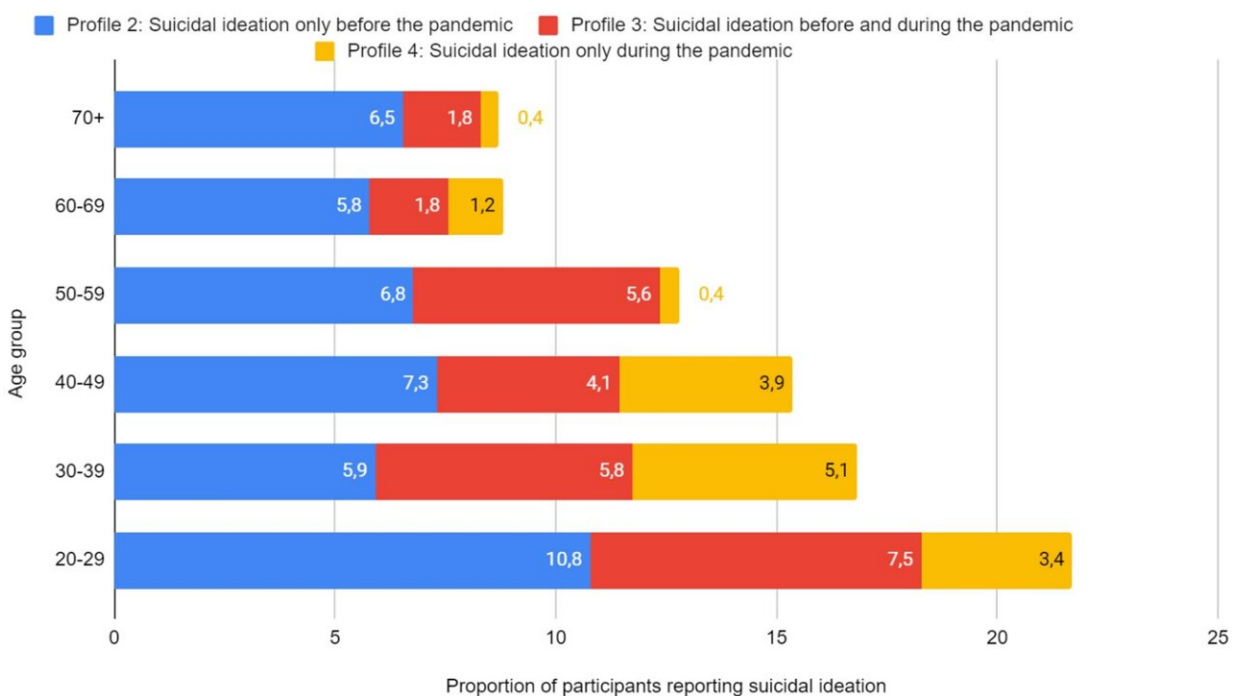


Global COVID-19 outbreak and job loss resulted in surge of suicidal ideation, especially in young people, finds study

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Proportion of suicidal ideation profile, by age group—% (n = 1793). Credit: *Scientific Reports* (2024). DOI: 10.1038/s41598-024-68823-8

Nearly three times as many Canadians—close to 8%—thought of killing themselves in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic than in previous years, a new study led by Université de Montréal researchers suggests.

Based on an [online survey](#) of nearly 1,800 Canadian adults, the study also found that suicidal ideation was nearly twice as high (almost 11%) among young people in their 20s than in people aged 30 and older (6.6%).

The results are [published](#) this month in *Scientific Reports*.

"It's a sensitive subject," acknowledged the article's first author, Guillaume Dubé, who was an [undergraduate student](#) in sociology at UdeM at the time of the study and is now about to begin a Ph.D. in epidemiology.

"Why did the pandemic make people think about committing suicide? There are a number of reasons, losing their job because of the crisis being a major one," said sociology professor Éric Lacourse, who co-supervised the study with psychology professor Roxane de la Sablonnière.

"And that's not surprising given the context of dramatic social change caused by COVID-19, which affected not only society as a whole but also individual behaviors," said de la Sablonnière.

Members of UdeM's Laboratory on Social Changes, Adaptation, and Well-being, she and Lacourse conducted the study with Dubé aided by colleagues at McGill University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Israel's Ben-Ilan University.

A national survey

The study drew on data from a survey of 3,617 Canadians called "COVID-19 Canada: The end of the world as we know it?" done by the polling firm Delvinia between April and May 2021. For the study, data from 1,793 of those individuals were analyzed.

Suicidal ideation turned out to be high in the pandemic's first year, with an age-adjusted incidence rate of 7.6%—nearly three times the annual pre-pandemic rate of 2.7%, Dubé and his colleagues found.

The mere fact of being of a younger age, combined with [economic factors](#) like losing their job during the pandemic, made people more likely to think of suicide than they did before, the study suggests.

Suicide is very much a young person's concern. Overall, 21.7% of people in their 20s said they'd thought of suicide at some point in their lives, compared to 13.1% of those surveyed who were aged 30 or older.

'A vital indicator'

For the study, suicidal ideation "served as a vital indicator for evaluating levels of psychological distress among individuals in the Canadian population during the pandemic period," Dubé and his co-authors noted in their article.

"Our study aligns with existing scientific literature indicating that the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted younger generations," they added, noting its "exceptional impact ... on this demographic."

As well, "job loss during the pandemic, indeed, played a role in influencing [suicidal ideation](#) among Canadians," they said. Even accounting for that, however, "age remained a significant factor in this analysis."

The authors concluded, "Given the ongoing sociopolitical challenges posed by the COVID-19 [pandemic](#), our findings highlight the imperative to prioritize the mental well-being of young adults for future public health strategies and policymaking."

More information: Guillaume Dubé et al, Evidence of higher suicidal ideation among young adults in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Scientific Reports* (2024). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-024-68823-8](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-68823-8)

For more information, in French, on suicidal intentions and how to cope with them, go to the [Projet InterCom website](#).

Provided by University of Montreal

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