

## Disruption & The Impact on Rural Mental Health

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Socio-demographic inequities in mental health were exaggerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with women experiencing greater household burden with less support in Canada and globally. While these patterns have been observed globally, there is a research gap in rural mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada. We hypothesize that there is a disparity in mental health decline during the COVID-19 pandemic between men and women. In rural Ontario, mental health was measured through a survey of approximately 18,000 individuals living in seven counties. In 2021, survey respondents were asked to rate their mental health prior to and during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Responses to survey questions regarding, social, financial, and mental health support were then evaluated. We found significant disparities in mental health ratings before and during the pandemic between men and women. Women reported poorer mental health, increased substance use, and increased worry about social, financial and community stressors. Respondents who self-identified as a woman were associated with poorer mental health outcomes and therefore interventions should be specific to geographic communities as well as individual needs.

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