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I Think the Mental Part is the Biggest Factor: An Exploratory Qualitative Study of COVID-19 and Its Negative Effects on Indigenous Women in Toronto, Canada *Frontiers in Sociology* (2022)

This article explores the unique and understudied experiences of Indigenous women living in Toronto, Canada during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this study is to better document the impacts of COVID-19 on the mental health and wellbeing of Indigenous women in Toronto, Canada to better understand unmet needs, as well as lay the groundwork for more targeted research and potential interventions based on these needs. Using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with thirteen Indigenous women, we shed light on the negative effects this pandemic has had on this population. We find that COVID-19 has negatively affected people's mental health, substance use and access to health services. This research speaks to the growing body of work that discusses the harmful effects of COVID-19 generally and how this pandemic has specifically affected Indigenous peoples.



"I Think the Mental Part is the Biggest Factor": An Exploratory Qualitative Study of COVID-19 and Its Negative Effects on Indigenous Women in Toronto, Canada

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Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Indigenous, qualitative study, urban, Toronto (Canada)

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had widespread negative effects on communities across the world (Levy Economics Institute, 2020). Additionally, COVID-19 has exacerbated existing inequalities (Hu, 2020). This is especially true for the most marginalized peoples (Luna, 2020). Currently, there is little research related to how COVID-19 has negatively affected these communities. Even less research looks at how COVID-19 has negatively affected Indigenous peoples in various ways (Howard-Bobiwash et al., 2021). Scientific evidence regarding the impact of COVID-19 on people's lives is limited and still emerging; the evidence that does exist often does not include an in-depth assessment of the impact on Indigenous populations. Lack of inclusion of Indigenous populations in scientific inquiry is particularly concerning as without documentation health equity concerns can go unnoticed by public health professionals as well as governmental offices in charge of funding population health work. There is consistent emerging evidence that in addition to the physical symptoms of COVID-19, the pandemic is also negatively impacting the mental health of populations across the globe (Dong and Bouey, 2020; Fiorillo and Gorwood, 2020; Passos et al., 2020; Sheridan Rains et al., 2021). This negative impact may be exacerbated for