



CPA Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine Section Newsletter

Edited by Jennifer Gordon, PhD., R.D. Psych.

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Message from the Editor



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Dear Health Psychology and Behavioural Medicine Section Members,

I have to say, I've had a lot of fun putting this newsletter together and I can't wait for you all to read it! It's got inspiring interviews from some amazing Canadian researchers in our field — Drs. Megan McMurtry, Justin Presseau, and Tavis Campbell — and showcases exciting COVID research from across the country.

I'm perhaps most excited about two pieces that I hope you all can relate to: one written by yours truly discussing the immense challenges that academic faculty are experiencing right now amidst the pandemic, and a second written by my grad student, Ashley Balsom, that writes about the same issues from a graduate student's perspective. I hope you enjoy reading them as much as we enjoyed writing them!

You'll also find invitations to two CPA virtual events and two online studies led by CPA members, as well as a list of available Psychology Works fact sheets on coping with COVID-19, written by CPA members.

As I'm sure you all are, I'm disappointed not to be in beautiful Montreal (my hometown!) with you all right now but I'm excited to connect through the virtual event this summer. Here's hoping this time next year, we'll be in a position to connect face to face in Ottawa!

Take care and stay healthy!





VIRTUAL **VIRTUEL** 2020

MAY 2020

CPA/SCP Annual General Meeting
Friday May 29 - 11 am (EDT)

**Tap or click to
register now**

JULY & AUGUST 2020

Virtual Event
Multiple sessions over July and August

Registration: Starting June 15

Early Career Award Winner



Dr. Meghan McMurtry

Written by Natasha Gallant, PhD (Regina)

Dr. Meghan McMurtry, an Associate Professor at the University of Guelph, has devoted her academic career to understanding children's experience of pain. For example, her work on procedural pain and fear has contributed to how the World Health Organization delivers vaccinations — both in terms of recommended pain management and, more recently, in understanding and managing stress-related responses. Ultimately, Dr. McMurtry hopes that her research will encourage the public to understand a biopsychosocial model of pain and health rather than the reductionist biomedical one. Believing in the importance of staying connected to clinical practice, she can also be found at McMaster Children's Hospital, working with children, adolescents, and their families as part of the Chronic Pediatric Pain Program. Most recently, her contributions to the discipline of Health Psychology were recognized with the CPA Health Section Early Career Award.



What drew you to a career in health psychology?

I grew up in a family of healthcare practitioners: My father was a surgeon and my mother was a physiotherapist. I was initially interested in medicine, but I pretty quickly realized that I wanted to talk to patients more than is typical in medicine, so I became a little bit more interested in psychology. When I took introduction to psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University in my first year of undergraduate studies, I literally couldn't believe that people got to study these fascinating things that I got to learn! At that point, I became really passionate about psychology and pursuing psychology instead of medicine. But I was still very interested in medicine, so that's where I became really interested in health psychology because it was a perfect blend of my interests.

What do you think are the most important issues in health psychology today?

Access to health psychology in the more rural and remote areas and facilitated access to health psychology in urban centres is important. We need to really diffuse ourselves across Canada and create integration within multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary services. We also need to work on improved integration with primary health care. Psychology has so much to offer, so part of what we need to work on is continued public engagement. We need to ensure that our voices are heard because I think we have a lot of expertise that we can bring to the challenges that we face as a society.

(cont'd)



Early Career Award Winner - Dr. Meghan McMurtry



How has health psychology evolved since you began your career?

How it's evolved is a bit tricky because I think it depends on geographic location. There is some increased recognition of health psychology and integration within health care, at least in more urban centres and tertiary care, but I think there's still ways to go within smaller hospitals and health care services. When you're getting outside of major centres, I think it's very different and there's room to grow.



If you could give one piece of advice to someone who wants to start a career in health psychology, like yours, what would it be?

I would say just do it! There are a host of Canadian graduate faculty that are world renowned, so reach out to them. I also think it's really important that, once students graduate, if they don't see the career that they want, that they should know that, over time, they may be able to craft it. Sometimes the job that we would like isn't necessarily available to us at that moment, but it doesn't mean that it can't become available over time.

What does it mean to you to receive the Early Career Award for the Health Psychology Section of the Canadian Psychological Association?

It's a huge honour for me. There are so many talented and productive health psychologists in Canada, so I feel so fortunate to have received this award. I also work a lot within interdisciplinary teams, in terms of both my research and my clinical work, so it's extremely meaningful to me to have recognition from my psychology peers. A given researcher does not act alone, so I would also like to thank all my previous supervisors, mentors, collaborators, and students. It's pretty awesome to be within pediatric pain research in Canada and in the world.

After graduation, if you don't see the career that you want, you may be able to craft it over time.

Sometimes the job that we would like isn't immediately available to us, but it doesn't mean that it can't become available over time.

Dr. Meghan McMurtry



Mid-Career Award Winner



Dr. Justin Presseau

Written by Seint Kokokyi, PhD (Regina)

Dr. Justin Presseau is an Assistant Professor at the University of Ottawa's School of Epidemiology & Public Health, and School of Psychology. With over 100 publications and 3000 citations, his research focuses on the development and evaluation of interventions to support change in health care professional behaviours as well as health behaviours in patients and the public. Dr. Presseau is also the chair of Health Psychology and Behavioural Medicine Section within the Canadian Psychological Association. He has been recognized for his contribution to the discipline of Health Psychology with the CPA Health Psychology and Behavioural Medicine Mid-Career Award. I had the pleasure of corresponding with him to discuss his research, accomplishments, and vision for the future of the field.



What inspired you to pursue a career in research?

A few different threads aligned to inspire me to want to be a researcher. Firstly, I always wanted to be a writer growing up, and I realized that one way to do that is to be a researcher because writing is literally part of the job. Secondly, the undergraduate courses I took in psychometrics and research methods in psychology really spoke to me, highlighting the rigour with which it is possible to conduct psychological research, and that really appealed to me to the extent that it gave me focus on what I needed to learn in order to keep doing this work.

How did you come to specialize in your specific area of research?

I was lucky enough to get a summer research job working in a hospital during my undergraduate years, involving applying what I was learning in my psychology courses to a study that was using questionnaires to measure psychological constructs to understand what factors were associated with physicians' prescribing and referral activities. It was such a rewarding experience to be applying psychology to real-world research questions and I felt I finally knew what I "wanted to do when I grew up"; that helped to focus on how to approach my graduate studies.

What work or accomplishments are you most proud of?

I'm really proud of the Psychology and Health Research Group launched in 2018 in Ottawa (ohri.ca/pahrg/), and building collaboration with other great Canadian health psychology and behavioural medicine groups and labs.

(cont'd)



Mid-Career Award Winner - Dr. Justin Presseau



What lessons have you learned in your professional life so far?

My professional life is a constant learning experience, but a few things stand out so far. **Lesson 1:** 'get over myself' and recognize that critique and rejection are part of the process and not an assessment of me personally. **Lesson 2:** continuing to develop my methodological and theoretical skills has allowed me to be able to be flexible and opportunistic in the research that I conduct. **Lesson 3:** conducting and disseminating research is not sufficient for ensuring it will be used in practice for the benefit of patients and the public, and that is why I now also do research into how to move research evidence into routine practice. **Lesson 4:** work-life balance is really challenging, but essential. I ultimately do better research when I make sure to also live a balanced life.

I ultimately do better research when I make sure to also live a balanced life.

Dr. Justin Presseau



What ongoing or upcoming research are you most excited about?

I'm really interested in advancing theory, methods and designing and evaluating interventions to change multiple health behaviours. As part of that research, we were fortunate to get some funding to use Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging data to investigate how multiple health behaviours cluster together. I'm also really excited about our ongoing work on altruistic health behaviour, including organ donation, organ donation registration, and blood plasma donation, to name a few.

In what direction(s) do you see your field of research going?

There are two main areas that I foresee health psychology and behavioural medicine focusing more on in the coming years: a great focus on better understanding and promoting maintenance of health behaviour change over time, and more focus on the practical applications of dual process models that suggest that our behaviour is a result of not only our reflective decisions of which we are consciously aware but also an impulsive process that more automatically cues our behaviour.

What do you hope to accomplish throughout the rest of your career?

A big question! It is really important to me to continue to provide applied training and research career opportunities to people trained in psychology generally, including health psychology and behavioural medicine. It is an exciting time to be in health psychology and behavioural medicine, and there is much that we can contribute. I really hope to be able to contribute to raising the profile of our discipline, and the central importance of understanding and promoting behaviour and behaviour change as part of achieving that.



Newly Elected CPA Fellow



Dr. Tavis Campbell

Written by Jessie Young (Regina)

Dr. Tavis Campbell is a professor of both clinical psychology and oncology at the University of Calgary. His research has made extensive contributions to our understanding of the behavioural mechanisms involved in the development, progression, and management of chronic illnesses, such as cancer, hypertension and insomnia. Recently, these significant contributions were recognized when he was elected as a CPA fellow. I had the pleasure of discussing Dr. Campbell's career and hearing his wise advice for early career researchers. Here's what he had to say.



What motivated you to pursue a career in research in general and in your area of research, more specifically?

I thought about this many years ago when I was an undergraduate student at Concordia University. I was taking a social psychology class and I saw a little health psychology section and they talked a lot about randomized control trials that looked at reversing some of the consequences of heart disease. It was pretty interesting and it sort of blew me away, I've always been interested in fitness and health, and this was a bit curious to me because I had never appreciated more of the importance of prevention at all levels, including for people who are already unwell and the potential for making them well. So that got me sort of interested in the area.

Can you tell me about some of the key moments that have shaped the trajectory of your career?

I think for sure doing an honours project and realizing that as an undergraduate student you could make a contribution, a small but still a significant contribution, to the understanding of scientific questions. For sure when I started graduate studies at McGill was a big deal. That was a real change for me where I entered a program and was told that it was going to be collegial, and not taught down and that they were encouraging collaboration and exploration of ideas. It was a program that was extremely motivating in the sense that, you had a real sense of volition and they gave you skills to feel competent and you felt connected to the other people in the program and to the wider scientific community.

Is there anyone professionally or otherwise who inspires you?

Yeah, I am often inspired by researchers who are involved in work that sort of challenges notions that we are born with a fixed set of skills. I've been reading

(cont'd)



Newly Elected CPA Fellow - Dr. Tavis Campbell



Anders Ericsson who is a psychologist who does a lot of work on the role of actually engaging in delivered practice in order to improve skills. His motto, I think is something like: talent is over-rated. Much the idea that you should work hard at something and you can achieve. The other psychologist that I really quite like is Carol Dweck who everyone knows from the fixed vs. growth mindset world, and again, this notion that, you know, if we set the right circumstances people can achieve. It really resonates, I think, in the health psychology world where there are traditionally beliefs about certain illnesses that are the consequences of aging, that are unavoidable and so on and we know that it is simply not true. The kind of behaviours that people engage in on a regular basis have a great deal to do with whether we get sick or stay healthy.



What do you love most about your job?

Probably training second generation researchers - this is something I get the most enjoyment out of. I have had a number of successful former trainees that are well known in the Canadian landscape and across North America like Josh Rash, Sheila Garland, Jill Johnson, Gerald Giesbrecht, and I really enjoy seeing them launch and succeed and do better than me.

What advice would you give to early career investigators?

First of all, to remind yourself to enjoy what it is that you are doing. To have a wonderful career where you can actually spend your time engaged in trying to answer questions that are of personal interest and that benefit society. I think that sometimes you can get, as a graduate student for example, caught up in exams and grades and so on. Or as an early investigator, where are you published or impressing people with your work. I think what really matters is that you enjoy the work, you work with people who you also could learn something from and enjoy working with. The career is very much like a marathon rather than a road race. And so, you want to sit back and appreciate that your livelihood involves doing things that you, to a large extent, control and drive.

Remind yourself to enjoy what it is that you are doing... the career is very much like a marathon rather than a road race.

Dr. Tavis Campbell



Funding News

Health Psychology Research Funded by CIHR's COVID-19 Rapid Response Call



Written by Lucas Walters (Ottawa)

In February 2020, before COVID-19 had reached North America in large numbers, CIHR launched a COVID-19 rapid response funding opportunity for projects investigating issues related to the pandemic. Here, we highlight five health psychology research teams across Canada whose work was funded in this competition.



Principal investigators Drs. Asmundson and Taylor with their research team

COVID-19: The Role of Psychological Factors in the Spreading of Disease, Discrimination, and Distress

Principal Investigators: Drs. Gordon Asmundson and Steven Taylor
Institution: University of Regina and University of British Columbia

Out of the University of Regina and the University of British Columbia, researchers are exploring various psychological factors that may influence the way we all experience the COVID-19 pandemic. The proposed studies will investigate the factors contributing to the spread of this virus, corresponding psychological distress, and the ways in which various populations face discrimination during these unprecedented times. A multi-wave longitudinal study of a large Canadian and American population-representative sample will be used to meet these goals. The first study in this project, now published in the *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, presents the development and validation of the COVID-19 Stress Scales, which capture fears and xenophobia that many are currently experiencing. Further to this, the COVID-19 Stress Scales will be used in a second study to identify other critical psychological constructs needed to better understand the impact and course of the pandemic. Additional studies will be published as the second and third waves of data become available. The hope is that this project will inform the creation of an online platform for public health assessments and for the dissemination of key information. The development and potential expansion of this platform could greatly contribute to our response to this virus and could help foster greater understanding and research into the impacts felt across the world.



Principal investigator Dr. Yue Qian

City Shutdown as a Response to COVID-19: Understanding Human Experiences and Mental Health Consequences of the Quarantine in Wuhan

Principal Investigator: Dr. Yue Qian
Institution: University of British Columbia

At the epicenter of this pandemic, the city of Wuhan recently experienced the largest and most aggressive human quarantine ever recorded, with 56 million residents in and around the city mandated



to stay home for over two months. Though heralded as the reason for the largely successful containment of the virus in China, Dr. Yue Qian from the University of British Columbia hypothesizes that such a quarantine is not without its negative mental health impacts. In five waves of an online study with a diverse sample of 8,000 adults in Wuhan, Dr. Qian will explore how a municipal quarantine affected participant's mental health. Further to this, the project hopes to identify unique challenges faced during quarantine, and the ways in which communities have responded with services and resources. Using this data, supplemented with in-depth interviews, trajectories of post-quarantine recovery will be explored to help us learn about how we, as individuals and communities, may mitigate the psychological impact felt from these quarantine measures. Many of these in-depth interviews are designed to capture data from vulnerable populations with unique healthcare needs, as well as their primary caregivers, in an effort to further our understanding of how quarantines as a public health response affect the mental health of citizens and their communities.



PI Dr. Roxane de la Sablonnière

La cohésion sociale est-elle possible en situation de crises multiples? L'influence des politiques publiques entourant le coronavirus (2019-nCoV) et les préjugés envers certains citoyens et citoyennes

Principal Investigator: Dr. Roxane de la Sablonnière

Institution: Université de Montréal

While this virus has spread across the world, researchers at the Université de Montréal are looking more closely at the impacts felt by Canadians, specifically those that may be marginalized or are experiencing xenophobia. With increases in persecutory attitudes and hateful feelings towards many of our citizens and immigrants, the current project hopes to understand the connection between this rise in prejudice and our emerging public health policies. With an emphasis on social cohesion, the researchers hope to expand beyond the analysis of public health policies to also include the study of social media and fake news. Using a longitudinal sample of 3500 Canadians recruited online, researchers hope to further understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed social cohesion in Canada. This research also aims to investigate the general adaptation mechanisms used by the population, and how we, as a country, have changed. Following this, a series of six experimental studies will be done to explore how effective public health officials and social media have been when producing messages related to COVID-19. Dr. Sablonnière explains: "Millions of people suffer everyday of [social] change, all over the world, even worse change than the COVID-19 crisis (colonization, wars, etc.). The good news is that because it touches us now, we might turn a closer eye to the psychology of social change and its impact on communities and individuals.





PI Shelby Yamamoto

Assessing and addressing the psychosocial impacts of COVID-19 among pregnant women and health care providers in Anhui, China

Principal Investigators: Drs. Shelby Yamamoto, Keith S Dobson, Shahirose S Premji, Fang-Biao Tao, and Beibei Zhu
Institution: University of Alberta

Dr. Yamamoto and a team of healthcare professionals from multiple Canadian and Chinese sites are working together to investigate the psychosocial impacts felt by pregnant women, infants, and health care providers in Anhui, China. Pregnancy is a well-known period of vulnerability for many women, most certainly during pandemic. Many women are faced with making difficult decisions to protect themselves and their loved ones whilst public health continues to implement restrictions and precautions. Similarly, healthcare providers also face heightened levels of risk and vulnerability during this pandemic. Working on the front lines, delivering services, and caring for others can have immense impacts on the physical, social, and mental wellbeing of our healthcare providers. Dr. Shelby Yamamoto and the entire research team hope to first assess potential impacts of this global pandemic on pregnant women in Ma'anshan, China. This first part of the study will be assessing depressive symptomology felt amongst these women, with the aim to implement a perinatal depression screening and management program. Following this, the team will evaluate the efficacy of a cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) intervention in reducing these mental health concerns. This study will then go beyond this intervention to explore potential adverse birth outcomes such as preterm births and various complications that may result from births during and after COVID-19. Similarly, anxiety in healthcare providers will then be assessed to further understand perinatal health care not only from the patient perspective, but also from that of the provider. By studying pregnant women, infants, and healthcare providers, this study will illuminate how COVID-19 continues to impact some of the most vulnerable members of our communities and healthcare systems during this global pandemic.



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Understanding and mitigating real-time differential gendered effects of the COVID-19 outbreak

Principal Investigators: Drs. Kelley Lee, Julia Smith and Clare Wenham
Institution: Simon Fraser University

Those identifying as women are disproportionately affected by the impact of public health policies related to COVID-19. Researchers at Simon Fraser University are working to make gender and health a spotlight in their conversations about the current viral pandemic. Using a gender analysis to understand the differential effects experi-



enced by women, this project hopes to map infection and mortality rates in Canada. With approximately 70% of global healthcare workers being female, it is predicted that COVID-19 will disproportionately affect women. This project is being done to identify these gendered gaps in healthcare and our social response to COVID-19, in an effort to address these inequalities a priori, rather than post-pandemic. In collaboration with public health, this project will document gendered differences and patterns within the data through chatroom and social media analyses. Even further, an analysis of national and global responses will then be done to understand how these effects interact with policies made here in Canada, and around the world. The cumulative work produced will help create an online tool; the COVID-19 Gender Matrix, which will help inform future policies and public health bodies as they respond to global pandemics and potential outbreaks.



The Grad Student's Guide

to Surviving the Pandemic



Written by Ashley Balsom, MA(c)

When I moved from my home province, Newfoundland and Labrador, to pursue graduate training in Clinical Psychology at the University of Regina, I was ready to tackle a long list of stressors. I had been warned about the busy schedule and the struggle to juggle coursework, research, and clinical training. I fully expected to battle the impostor syndrome and feel the need to prove myself to my professors, my supervisor, and fellow classmates. I was certain that I would miss my friends, family, and fiancé, all of whom I was leaving behind. One thing I was not prepared for was an international pandemic. And like a lot of graduate students, I've been struggling to maintain my productivity – and sanity – during this unexpected and challenging time. In an effort to find my way, I've had many conversations with fellow graduate students across the country about how to cope. Here, I've consolidated lessons learned and advice into a survival guide for grad students.



[Follow Ashley on Twitter @Ashley_Balsom](#)

1. Expect to be less productive.

The most frequent conversation I have had with my colleagues has surrounded productivity. Due to the closure of many universities and in-person research projects, graduate students have found an increase in free time. For many of us, this increase in “free time” has not increased productivity. As graduate students, we often define our worth as our ability to be productive. When we take time for ourselves, we may feel that we are not doing as much work as we should be like other students or that our supervisors are disappointed. It is important during these unprecedented times that we allow ourselves space to not be as productive as we may have

hoped. We may need to let go of any guilt we associated with what we feel we “should” or “must” be doing. Productivity might not need to be our most important concern during a pandemic, and it is okay to take some time for yourself if that is what you need to be okay and stay safe.

2. Take breaks.

When my self-isolation first began, I had a pretty unproductive first two weeks. Due to some of the guilt about my lack of productivity, I then felt I had to make up for that time. So, I hunkered down and focused all of my energy on school and research. This method also did not work for me, and I experienced burn out very quickly. This was a great reminder of the importance of taking breaks. Having a rigid schedule and not allowing any flexibility was not realistic nor helpful. When I began to allow myself to go for a physically distant walk in the afternoon or have a dance party with my roommate when I was frustrated with SPSS, I finally felt like I was beginning to function as a graduate student at home.

(cont'd)



3. Set attainable goals.

While letting go of some of our guilt associated with productivity is important, we also must take into account the reality of graduate training and the importance of still doing work. As one student put it “Evidently, productivity and worthiness are not synonymous; however, I quickly realized a global pandemic did not mean that my floors no longer needed to be mopped, nor did it mean my thesis would write itself.” It may not be helpful or realistic to believe that productivity would not be impacted by an international pandemic, but we may be able to adjust to find ways to continue to do some of our work. Unfortunately, this task is not a one-size-fits-all kind of solution. There may be some trial and error to find what works best for you. Personally, I have been making small frequent goals to achieve so that each day I have a plan for something I would like to accomplish. I find goal setting to be beneficial for me and it helps me stay on track working on my thesis. One important aspect of goal setting for me is to ensure that the goals I am creating are specific, attainable, and have a deadline.

4. Establish structure while working from home.

Working from home has taken some getting used to for many students. I, for one, enjoyed the structure that comes with working in the lab and have found the transition challenging. One student described their experience as “a difficult transition and in the beginning, I found myself going to bed at night feeling incredibly unproductive and down on myself because of it.” For me, after about two weeks of not feeling well I decided I needed a change. I started to develop a routine for myself that wasn't too rigid and allowed flexibility in my days. I started each day by doing a quick free workout I found on YouTube or a fitness app. I found it helpful to start my day having felt like I already achieved something by getting my body moving. I also learned that I was more productive when I had a separate place where I do my work. As a graduate student I do not have the luxury of a huge space so I designated the kitchen table as my workspace and would only do my work there. Being able physically separate my spare time and work time was something I found beneficial. “I started writing out concrete, step-by-step goals for each day. Immediately after I complete a task, I place a checkmark beside it. Some days, I finish off the whole list and those days are great. Other days, I struggle to check off half of my goals, and that's OK! Because we are existing during a pandemic! It is much easier to challenge those late-night thoughts of “All I do is procrastinate...” when I have a physical list proving that is not the case.”

5. Seek social support.

I have been reminded time and time again of the importance of having social supports. The importance of social supports during this time is a sentiment shared by many graduate students. One student shared: “I ended up returning from a conference when the pandemic was declared and immediately went into quarantine upon my return. So not only have I been away from my social support while at a conference, but I am unable to see them for the foreseeable future.” The idea of being away from my friends and family while not in my home province was quite difficult to grasp until I remembered all of the technology that is available at our fingertips. Since entering into



quarantine every weekend, myself and a few students in my program have been meeting virtually for a themed party using what we have in our homes. So far, we have managed to have a 90's, survivor, and formal dinner themed hangout on video software (e.g., Zoom, FaceTime, Skype). We have enjoyed taking advantage of Zoom's ability to change the background of the video. As we have been apart for quite some time, we have also celebrated multiple birthdays on Zoom as well. Now you don't have to be as silly about video chatting as we are, but the ability truly is endless for us today to remain socially connected while physically distant." One student shared: "On days when I am having a hard time focusing or just need some company, I have facetedimed with one of my cohort members. We both find we can better focus on our work if we have someone on the other side holding us accountable for staying focused. It is also a nice way to stay close with classmates I haven't seen since the beginning of the pandemic."

6. Stay in contact with your supervisor.

The pandemic has brought with it much uncertainty for a lot of people. Everyday there seems to be new developments on what Universities, provinces, and the country are doing to respond to the pandemic. It is quite easy to become overwhelmed with this information with many of the important questions not being answered. If you are uncertain in how to proceed with your research, confusion about your program, or progress on your thesis, remaining in contact with your supervisor can be helpful. Throughout this pandemic, my supervisor has been a source of support and her guidance to remain on track with my thesis has been especially helpful. Supervisors can be a source of support during this time and provide guidance on next steps for research and program requirements. If you are having a hard time concentrating or being productive during this difficult time, your supervisor may have advice on how to self-motivate.

7. It's okay to mourn what would have been.

Many people are suffering and at times it can seem difficult to recognize our own hardships as others are suffering. I have heard many graduate students say things like "I am really sad that my convocation ceremony will not be happening but that is selfish of me as people are dying or I am upset that I have spent all of this time on my thesis and now I have to defend my thesis on Zoom". We can be both cognisant that people in the world are suffering while also being sad and mourning the special moments we have now lost or that might look different then we imagined.



Academia during the Pandemic



Struggling during the pandemic? You're not alone!

By Jennifer Gordon, PhD (Regina)

I'm not ashamed to admit: the idea for this article was absolutely inspired by my own personal experience. As a mom of three kids – ages 2, 4, and 7 – and partner to an accountant who's been working a mandatory 50-60 hours a week, to say that I've found this pandemic "difficult" is the biggest understatement of all time. The kids are driving me crazy, my partner and I fight over child-care, and everyone is sick of each other after months of being cooped up in the house. I also miss my colleagues – lucky enough to work in a department full of people that I love, I miss our daily chats. I miss my lab's weekly meetings and I've been finding it hard to supervise at a distance, especially when my students are struggling with motivation themselves. I've wondered: "how on earth is everyone doing it?". Self-presentation on social media would suggest that families are bonding, homeschooling's going great, and that everyone's enjoying this little break from the daily grind... but I assume there must be others struggling like me, right? Right!?!

Turns out I wasn't the only one wondering how everyone's managing. When I pitched the idea for this piece to Justin Pousseau, section chair and father of a 2-year old, he said "hey, this would make a great study – let's survey profs across Canada about how they've been coping". So that's what we've been doing and the response has been amazing. Thanks so much to all those who've responded! We're aiming to publish the results soon but in the meantime, here's a sneak peek at some preliminary findings.

1. Mental health and work satisfaction have suffered

Over three quarters of respondents report that their mental health has been negatively affected by the pandemic and that work satisfaction has dropped. On average, respondents report a 20% drop in quality of life. When asked what some of the biggest challenges have been, many found that days had become monotonous and lonely. Among parents of young children, juggling childcare and work, and negotiating childcare duties with one's partner, were by far the most highly-cited challenges (See Box 1).



Day 2 of "working from home" during lockdown, back when interruptions were cute.

Box 1 - The Biggest Challenges

"Loneliness. I don't know how to fill the hours."

"The [lack of] childcare, but also the conflicting messages. People are like, "Oh, you just can't work right now. That's OK! Stop pressuring yourself!" when they have no clue what your deadlines are."

"Getting my spouse and kids to understand that I am 'at work' even though I'm at home and respecting that"

"Trying to figure out who is parenting when, given we have three young kids and both are still working full-time."

"Feeling like I'm failing my marriage, children, and students."



2. Productivity has dropped, particularly among parents of young children

Unsurprisingly, 80% of respondents report that data collection has been negatively impacted by the pandemic and a little over half report a drop in senior-author papers. However, other aspects of academic output appear to be differentially impacted depending on the respondent's family circumstances: 80% of parents of young children report drops in first-author publications versus only 40% of respondents with no children or older offspring. Similarly, 70% of respondents with young children report a drop in grant submissions versus only 30% of respondents with no children or older offspring. These findings paralleled a self-reported drop in work hours: parents of young children report a 50% drop in weekly work hours, on average; those without report only a 10% drop.

3. Everyone's coping as best they can

The most highly endorsed strategies to maximize productivity during the pandemic included publishing existing data and conducting online research, with one third of



Setting up a routine that includes physical activity and getting outside was the most highly endorsed strategy for maintaining mental health.

Box 2 - Strategies found to be most helpful in dealing with the challenges

"I tell everyone who asks something of me that I am working remotely with no daycare. I think it's important to repeat that to as many people as possible"

"Re-adjust expectations and acknowledge that everyone around the globe is doing the same."

"Breaking the rules and hiring a babysitter for three hours per day. Sorry Public Health!"

"Spending a lot of time trying to do things that make me happy each day."

"I have consciously made an effort to be forgiving of myself during this time - if I'm distracted, struggling with my mental health, need to seek comfort in something else, I've let myself do that."

"Reach out to colleagues and talk about stressors."

respondents reporting that they relied on these strategies "very much". Among parents of young children, encouraging kids to play independently, relying on one's partner and working evenings and weekends were all endorsed by over 80% of respondents. In terms of coping strategies to improve psychological wellbeing, nearly all endorsed setting a routine, getting regular physical activity and trying to enjoy the positive changes that the pandemic had brought (e.g. a more quiet life). When asked what the most helpful coping strategies have been, managing one's own expectations and the expectations of others came up frequently, as did reaching out for social support. See Box 2 for quotes.

(cont'd)



Take-Away

Hopefully these findings bring some comfort: if you're having a tough time with changes brought on by the pandemic – whether it be loneliness or struggling to balance work and family life – you certainly aren't alone. Don't believe what you see on social media: most people are likely struggling a lot more than they're letting on!

So what are we to do? At the very least, we can collectively lower our expectations for research output during this time. In my view, being a primary caregiver during the pandemic should be allowed to be included as a “disruption to one's productivity” in grant applications, just as parental and sick leaves are. Allowances should (and no doubt will) be made for disruptions in data collection. Says Justin: “We hope the final results of this study will serve to advocate for such allowances, if needed. We also hope that it will serve to identify possible informal strategies that colleagues may benefit from, considering what may have worked for others, and to identify potential formal supports that could be put in place, especially in preparation of any future waves or other epidemics.” While we recognise that this is only a snapshot of one segment of academia, and we fully support any efforts to explore the experiences of students, trainees, post-docs, research assistant and coordinators, and others in academia and research settings, we at least want faculty members to know: you are seen.



COVID-19 Psychology Works Fact Sheets



Psychology Works Fact Sheets are written by CPA members and designed to give you information that you can trust. Here are some COVID-related Fact Sheets you might want to check out!

- ◉ Coping With and Preventing COVID-19
- ◉ Grief, Bereavement and COVID-19
- ◉ Research Funding Information as relates to COVID-19
- ◉ Guidance for Psychology Students as Relates to COVID-19
- ◉ Guidance for Psychology Faculty and Researchers as Relates to COVID-19
- ◉ Emotional and Psychological Challenges Faced by Frontline Health Care Providers During the COVID-19 Pandemic
- ◉ Psychological Practice and the Coronavirus (COVID-19)
- ◉ Student Wellness and COVID-19
- ◉ Helping Teens Cope with the Impacts of and Restrictions Related to COVID-19
- ◉ Psychological Impacts of the Coronavirus (COVID-19)
- ◉ Working from Home During COVID-19, With and Without Children

Find all the Psychology Works fact sheets at:
cpa.ca/psychologyfactsheets

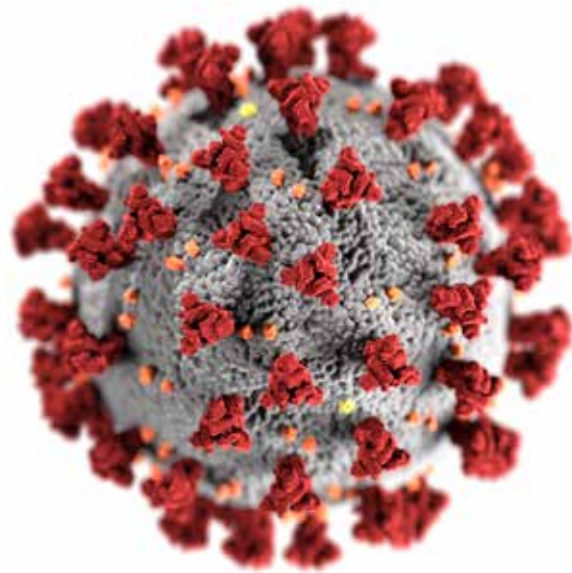


Image by CDC on Unsplash

Studies Seeking Participants



iCARE Study (Survey 2)

International assessment of COVID-19-related attitudes, concerns, responses and impacts in relation to public health policies



The iCARE study is recruiting participants for Survey 2

44,50 people have been recruited over 140 countries so far!

Now let your voice be heard! **Click the map** to participate, learn more, and see exciting preliminary findings!

Tap or click the map to take the survey

mbmc-cmcm.ca/covid19

How are Canadian academics coping?

Struggling to get anything done with the kids at home? Disappointed that data collection is on hold? Or maybe you're enjoying this distraction-free time to write or disconnect from work?

Tell us how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting you and your research!

- We're recruiting academic faculty to participate in a short survey about the experiences of Canadian academics during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Survey duration: 20 minutes
- Participants will be entered into a draw to **win a \$100 gift card** for SkipTheDishes or UberEats (odds of winning are 1 in 20).

Tap or click to take the survey