THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 LOCK-DOWN ON MENTAL HEALTH

Today is June 14th, 2020 and we are still in lock-down, which began in the middle of March, here in Canada for the COVID-19 pandemic. As research and information becomes more readily available we learn more and more about mental health and how it affects individuals everyday life. Mental health issues are becoming more widely recognizable and diagnosable. The 21st Century is truly the dawn of the internet era which provides people much more access to information they might never have had before. Google was founded in 1998 and today there are approximately 5.6 billion searches per day[1], many of which are related to mental illnesses and the resources provided to help with them. Since lock-down began in March for us people have had more access and free time to use the internet and make these searches. As well, we expect there to be an increase in mental illness awareness due to the paranoia of a global pandemic along with other major problems we've experienced in 2020 thus far. Therefore our assumption would be that lock-down should show a steady increase in the amount of searches for mental illnesses and/or the resources to help with them.

We took data from 'COVID-19 and Mental Health Search Terms'[2] which looked at the search interest of keywords related to mental illness from before the pandemic to current. We used the Canadian lock-down date from 'COVID-19 useful features by country'[3]. We looked at the mental health search term data from before this date as well as after to see what kind of trend we would find. Based on our predictions we should find that there is an increase in these search terms from right before the lock-down to right after. We also assume that with every year as technology and research progresses we would see an upward trend in searches from that as well.

However, what we seemed to discover is that although the beginning of 2020 did have a higher average search interest of these terms in comparison to 2019, like our assumption predicted, we did not see an increased search interest post lock-down date. In fact what we saw was the exact opposite. Prior to the lock-down there was a very high average search interest, even higher than the year prior at the same times, and then just as lock-down hit there was a drastic decrease in this average. If we look at 2019 for comparison we see that in general averages are higher during months other than summer, where we see a decrease. Whereas in 2020 these low averages are now seen at exactly when lock-down hit, which is at the split between Winter and Spring, a time when we expect averages to be high.

It seems as though with everyone practicing social distancing and going through quarantine that this lock-down has actually had a positive effect towards peoples' mental health issues and thus the interest in these search terms has decreased for the time being. Mental health will always be an issue of concern, so even though there is a decrease right after lock-down, we should remain aware and focus on improving everyone's welfare.

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[1] https://seotribunal.com/blog/google-stats-and-facts/
[2] https://www.kaggle.com/luckybro/mental-health-search-term/data
[3] https://www.kaggle.com/ishivinal/covid19-useful-features-by-country