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Background

- Measures put in place during the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic such as physical distancing and closure of schools and businesses has had a large impact on the population's mental health
- Youth and young adults with disabilities are at particular risk of the psychological implications of the pandemic
- Youth who use coping strategies during stressful times often have lower levels of depression and anxiety
- Facilitators of coping include having a positive framework, being physically active, having a support network and staying connected with others

Objective

To understand facilitators for helping youth and young adults with and without disabilities to cope and maintain mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic

Methods

Design: Qualitative study design involved semi-structured interviews done remotely (Zoom n= 29 Phone n=5), was guided by interpretive descriptive methodology and with a purposive sample

Inclusion Criteria

- Youth aged between 15-29, with a disability or without a disability
- Employed or have work experience

Sample

- 34** Youth and young adults aged 16-29 years (Mean: 23.2)
 - 17** youth with disabilities (Mean: 24.7)
 - 17** youth without disabilities (Mean: 21.7)

Key Themes

Social Support

Youth with disabilities more commonly mentioned family as a support

Youth without disabilities described more sources of support including friends, work colleagues and extended network



"I am fortunate enough to be living with my family still; So, mentally I have been okay for the most part...We' are all going through the same things and emotions" (#10-disability).

Financial Support

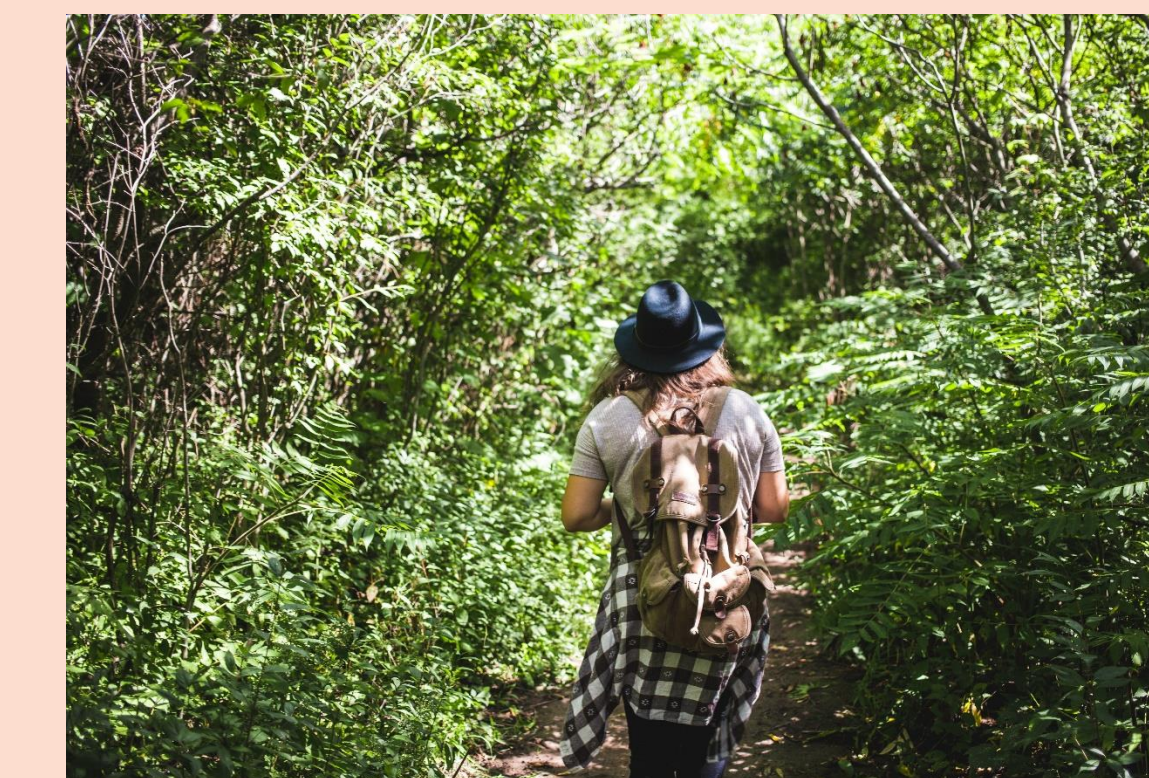
Youth with disabilities were more likely to receive government support Canadian Emergency Response benefit (CERB) and Canadian Emergency Student Benefit (CESB)

Youth without disabilities had several sources of financial supports (e.g., employment, family, CERB/CESB)

"I don't think I'm in such an urgent position to be hired right now as I'm still a student, and I'm living with my parents. I don't have to worry about rent or groceries" (#33-no disability).

Keeping Busy

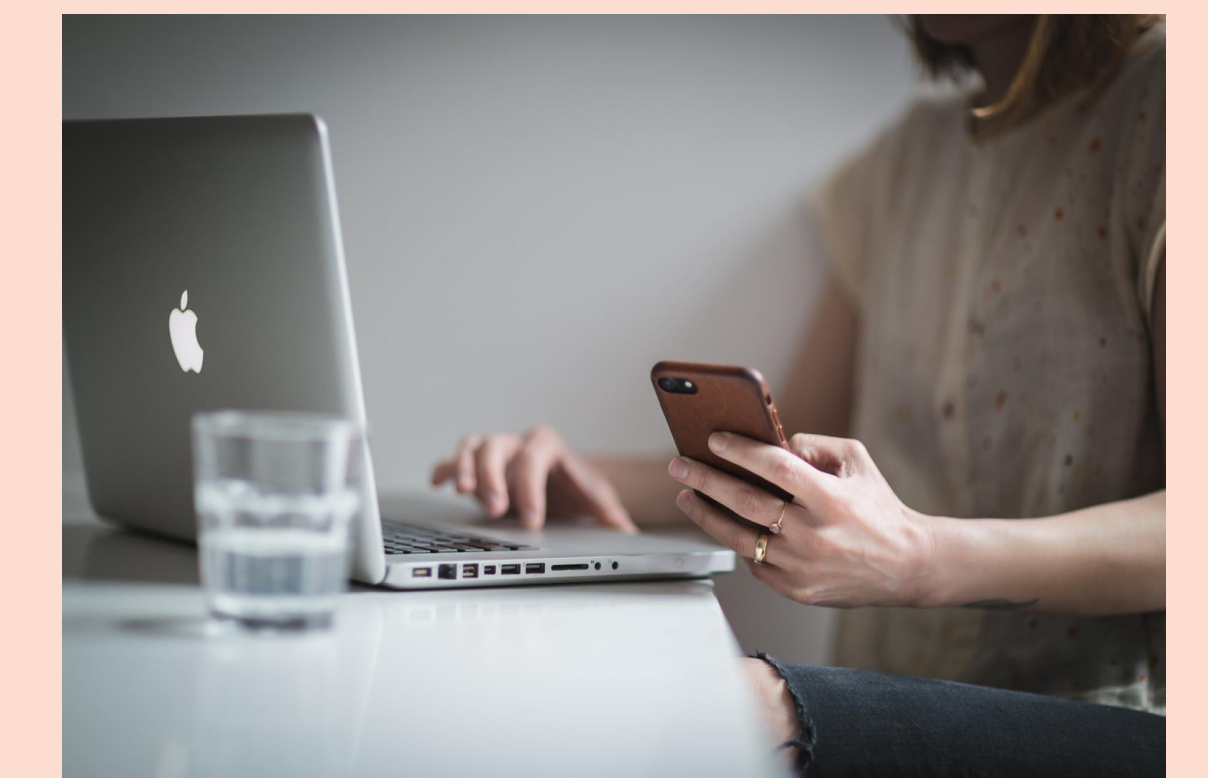
Most youth explained how keeping busy prevented boredom, which was important for their mental health



"If I have certain things to do even on a weekly basis, it helps me to keep track of time, but also for me to have a schedule...Having classes occupied my time rather not having anything to do at all" (#4-disability).

Work- life Balance

Most youth described how they had more time to focus on their well being



"I benefited from it being online and at home because transportation is a big barrier for me because I can't drive. I'd either have to get a ride or use (accessible) transit...Even with my family I hate having to schedule rides...I always feel I have to rely on someone." (#9-disability)

Implications

- Understanding youths' coping strategies is important because the impact of the pandemic could have longer-term negative health effects
- The successful management of stress could lead to personal growth, which can reinforce sense of competence and become a protective factor for coping with future stressors



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