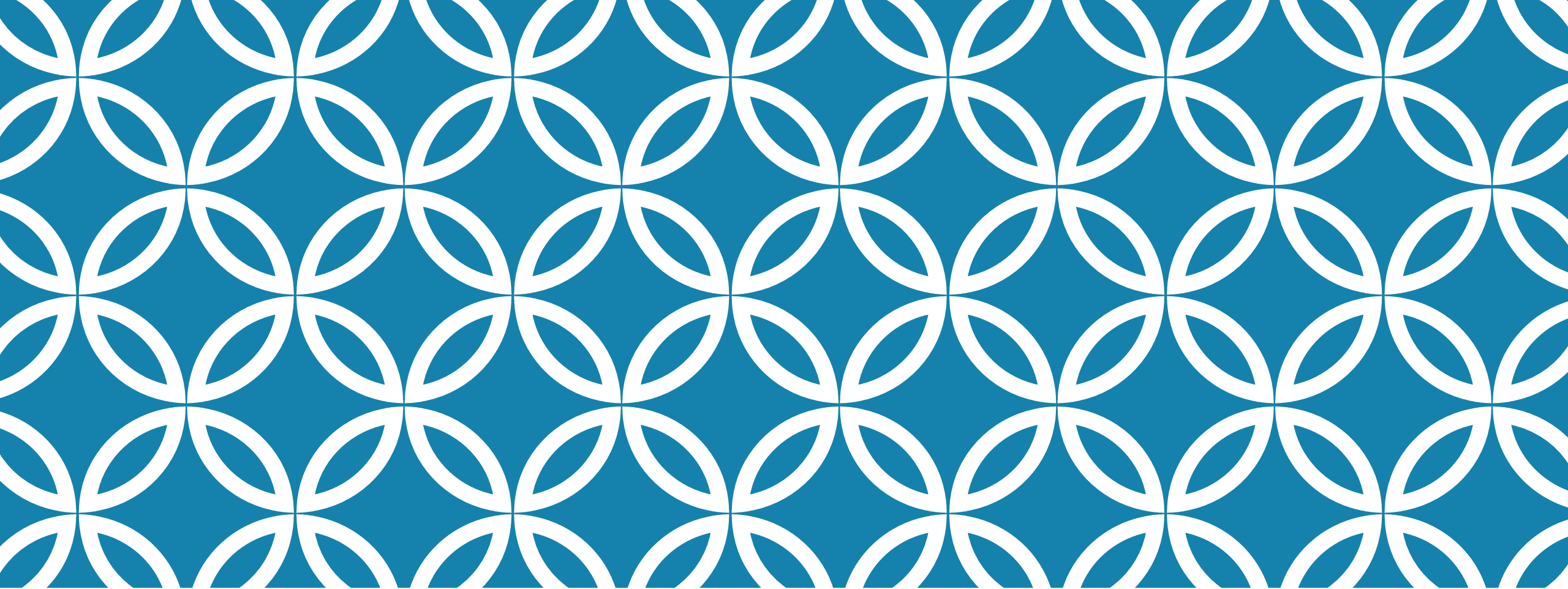




BARRIERS AND MOTIVES FOR EXERCISE / PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

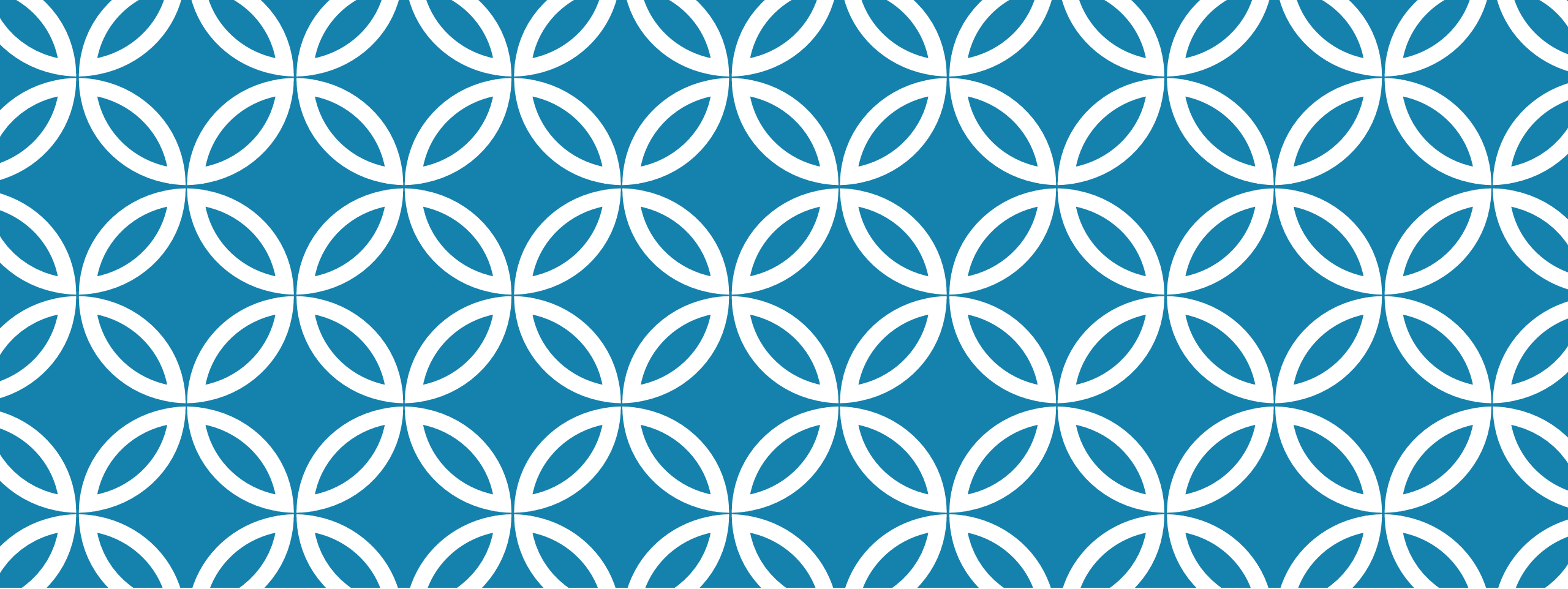
MARASHI ET AL. (2021)

Aimed to determine what it is about the pandemic that is making people less active. What were the most pertinent motivators reported by those continuing to meet daily PA targets?

They examined shifts in people's perceived barriers and motivators to being physically active during the pandemic.

Using an online survey, the present study gathered information from 1669 respondents pertaining to their physical activity, sedentary behaviour and mental health before and during the initial lockdown of COVID-19.

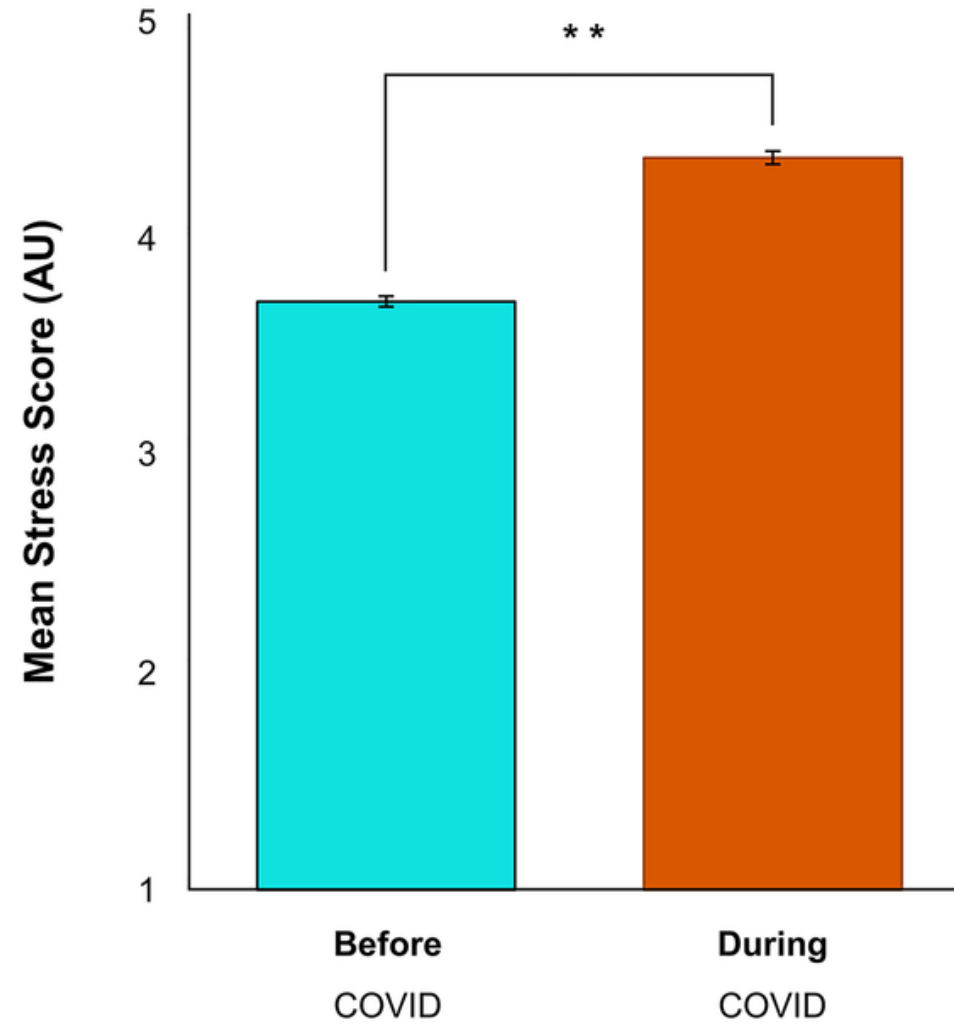
Results from this survey not only describe changes in barriers and motivators to PA, but provide concrete factors practitioners can explore with clients in an effort to promote PA behaviour during a global pandemic.



RESULTS:

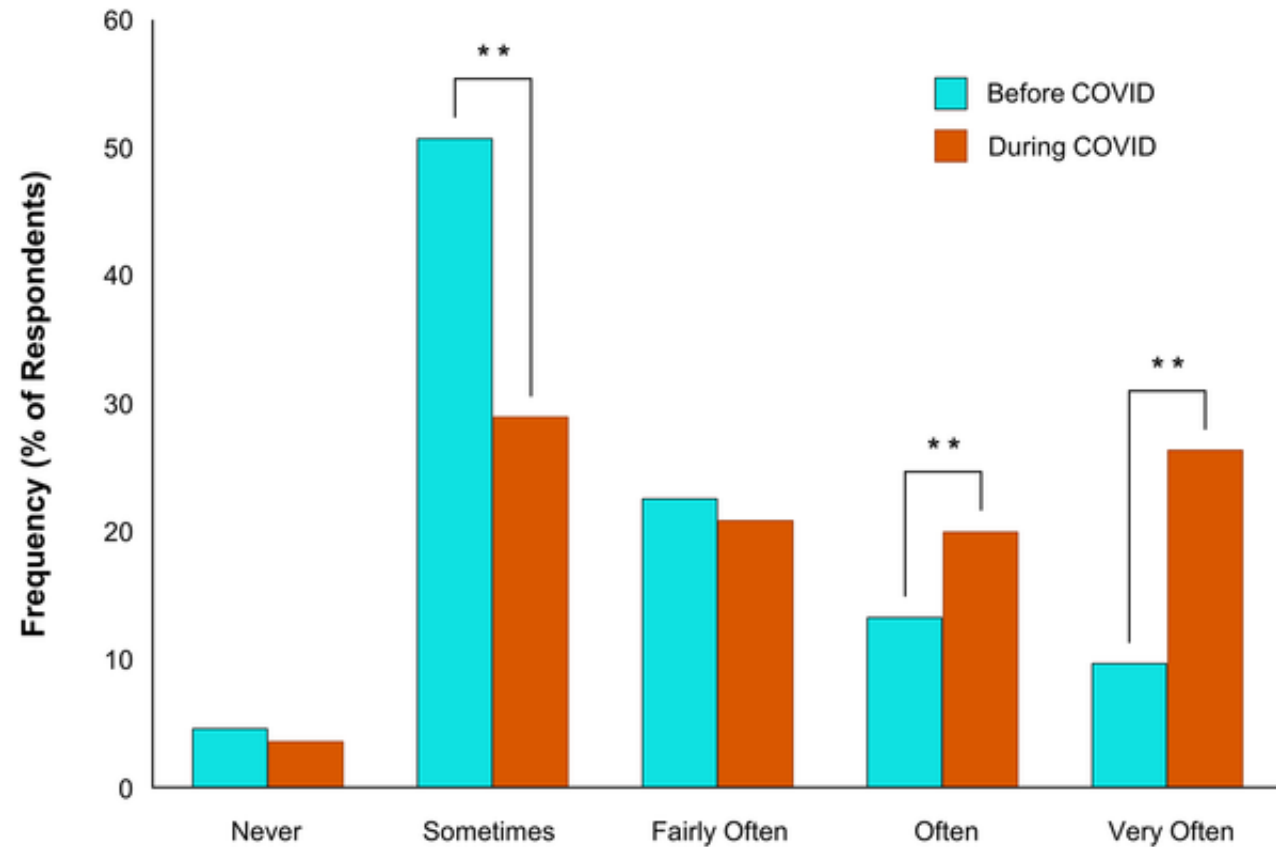
What did the research show?

Psychological stress increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Marashi MY, Nicholson E, Ogrodnik M, Fenesi B, Heisz JJ (2021) A mental health paradox: Mental health was both a motivator and barrier to physical activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. PLOS ONE 16(4): e0239244. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0239244>

Changes in self-report psychological stress before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

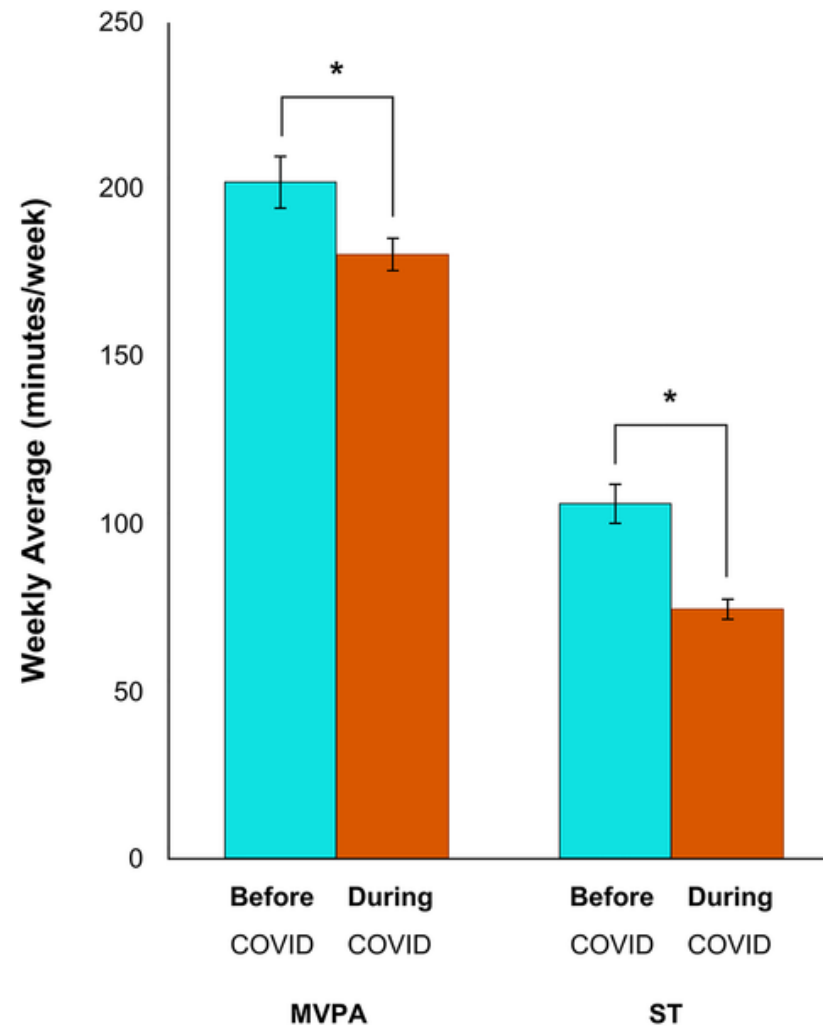


**Self-Reported Frequency of Feeling Nervous and Stress
Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Marashi MY, Nicholson E, Ogrodnik M, Fenesi B, Heisz JJ (2021) A mental health paradox: Mental health was both a motivator and barrier to physical activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. PLOS ONE 16(4): e0239244. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0239244>

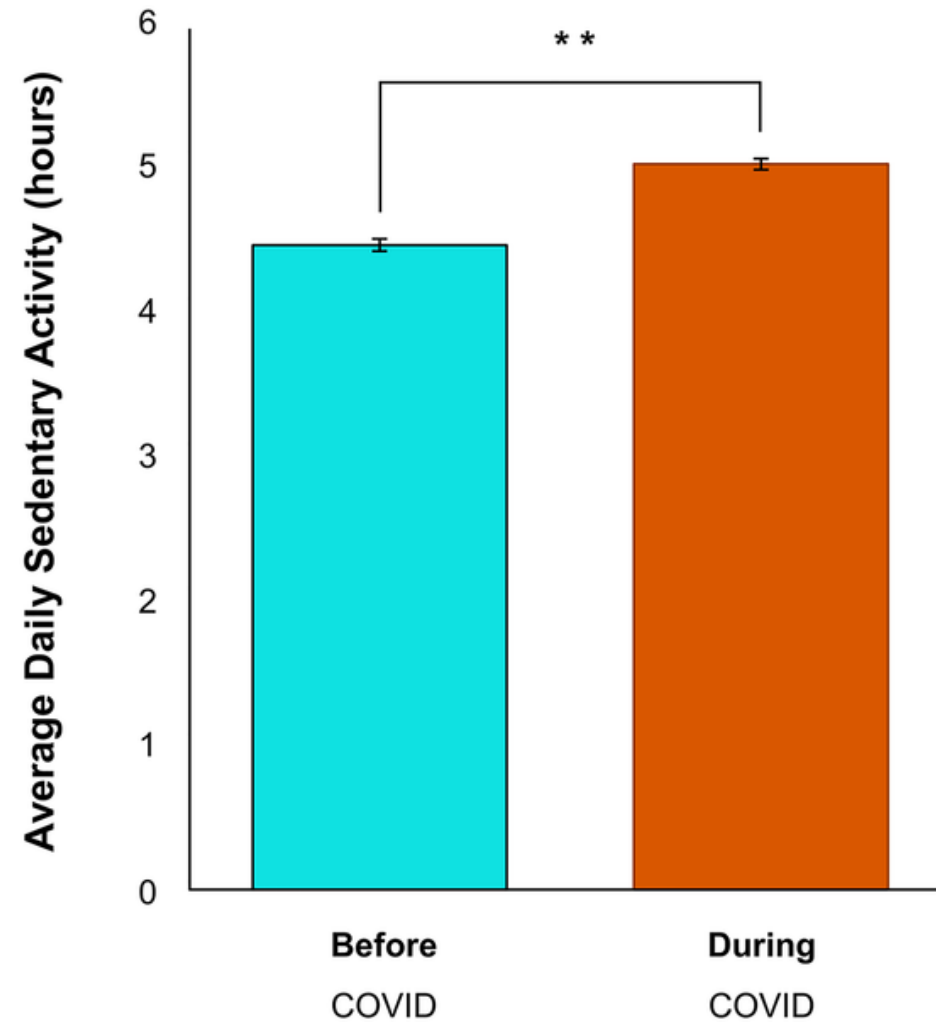
Changes in physical activity levels before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Physical activity

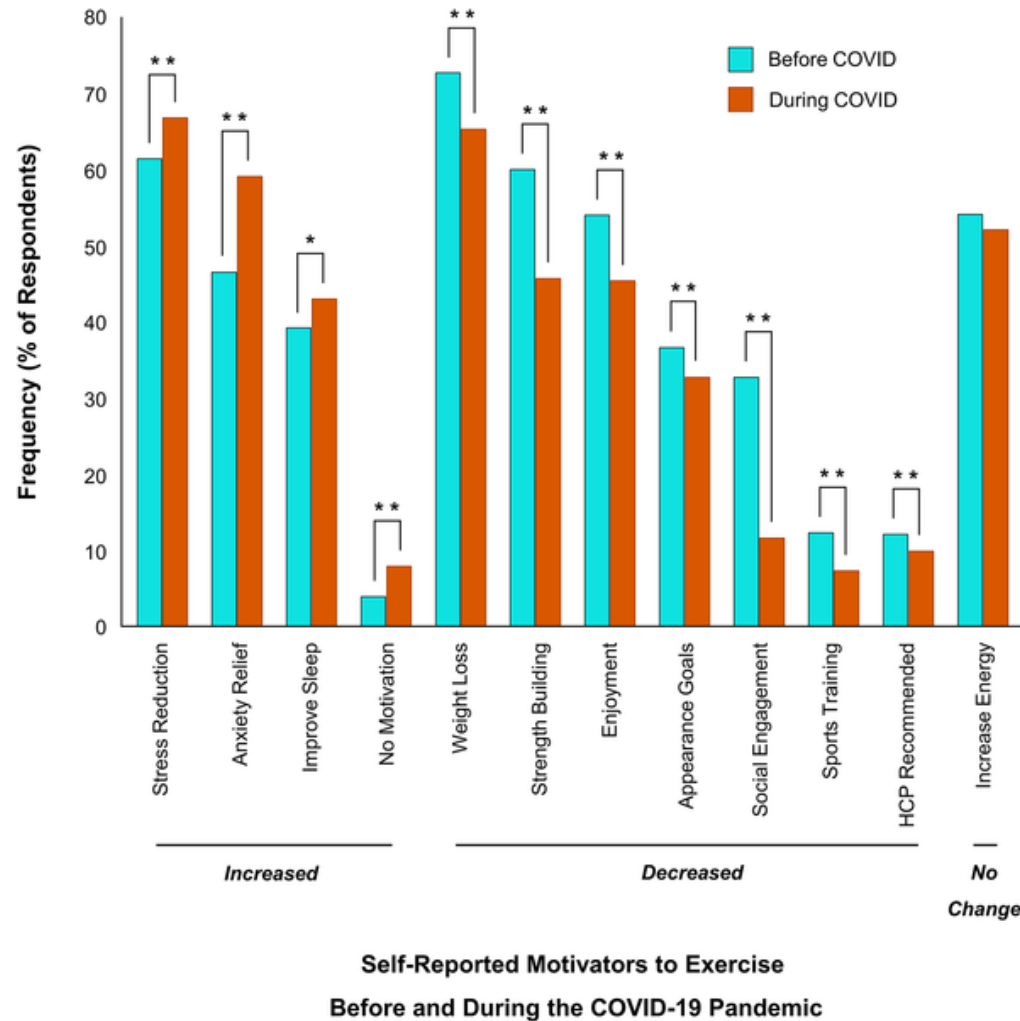


Since the onset of COVID-19, respondents' aerobic activity decreased by 22 minutes ($p < 0.05$), their strength-based activity decreased by 32 minutes ($p < 0.01$), and their sedentary times increased by 33 minutes ($p < 0.01$).

Average sedentary activity before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Marashi MY, Nicholson E, Ogrodnik M, Fenesi B, Heisz JJ (2021) A mental health paradox: Mental health was both a motivator and barrier to physical activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. PLOS ONE 16(4): e0239244. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0239244>



Motivation to Exercise

All motivators shown indicate a significant change (* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$).

Motivators that increased significantly include 'stress reduction', 'anxiety relief', 'improve sleep' and 'no motivators'.

Motivators that decreased significantly include 'weight loss', 'strength building', 'enjoyment', 'appearance goals', 'social engagement', 'sports training' and 'healthcare provider (HCP) recommended'.

There was no change in how 'increase energy' was viewed as a motivator to exercise during the pandemic ($p > 0.05$).

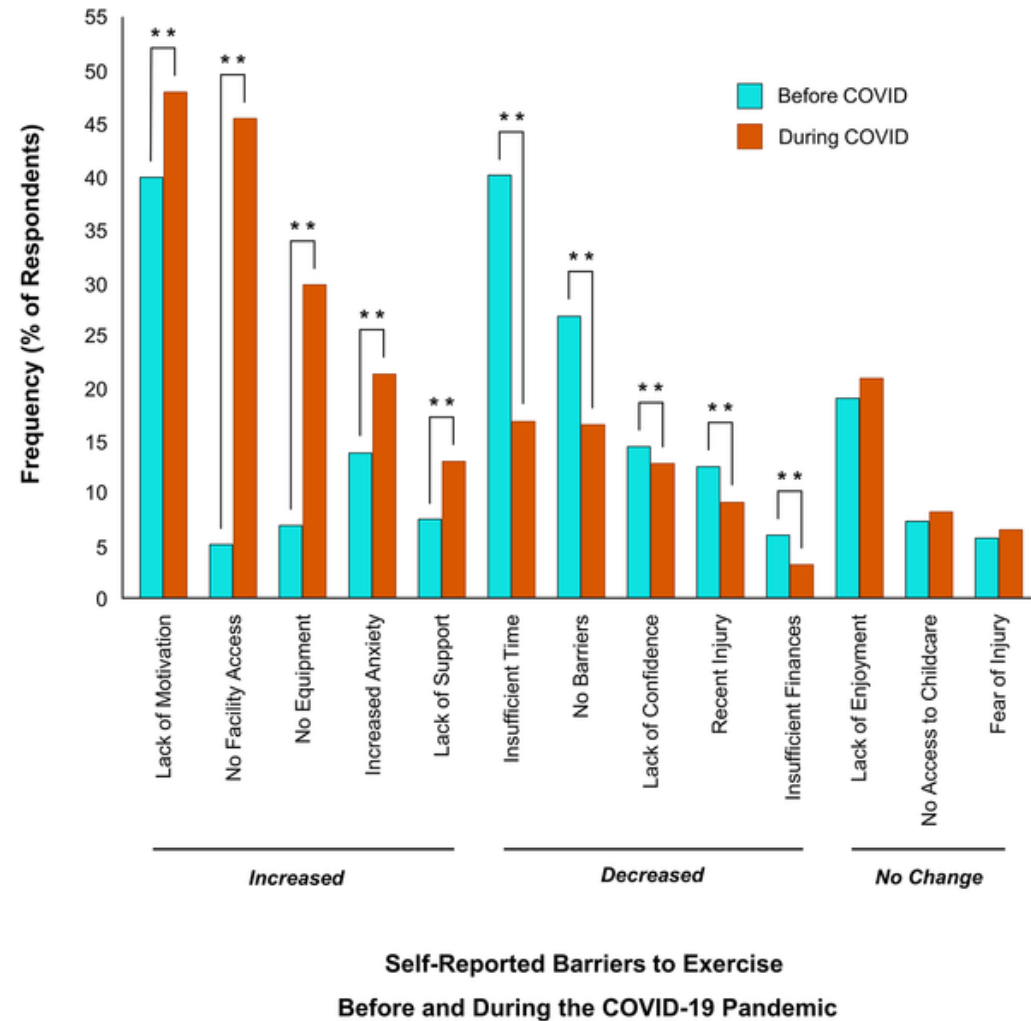
Barriers To exercise

All barriers listed showed a significant change (** $p < 0.01$).

Barriers which increased significantly since COVID-19 include 'lack of motivation', 'no facility access', 'no equipment', 'increased anxiety' and 'lack of support'.

Barriers which decreased significantly during COVID-19 include 'insufficient time', 'no barriers', 'lack of confidence', 'recent injury' and 'insufficient finances'.

No change in barriers related to 'lack of enjoyment', 'no access to childcare' and 'fear of injury' ($p > 0.05$).



MENTAL HEALTH AS A MOTIVATOR AND BARRIER TO EXERCISE

Results highlighted a paradox with mental health being both a motivator and barrier to physical activity.

People wanted to be active to improve their mental health but found it difficult to be active due to their poor mental health.

Likewise, respondents who were more depressed were also less motivated to engage in physical activity, and amotivation is a symptom of depression itself.

The stressfulness of the pandemic has made this a global issue that now must be considered when devising physical activity programs to support the mental wellbeing of citizens.

The benefits of a two-pronged approach in promoting physical activity during stressful times includes:

- 1) adopting a mode of physical activity that supports mental health, and
- 2) providing support to help minimize perceived psychological barriers to exercise (Marcus and Forsyth, 2009).

For example, symptoms of anxiety may increase with high-intensity exercise and therefore moderate-intensity exercise might be preferable (Pauolucci et al., 2018).

At the same time, to help overcome “feeling too anxious to exercise”, people should be encouraged to schedule their physical activity ahead of time in a calendar (Arbour and Ginis, 2007) to reduce feelings of uncertainty and decision fatigue that can aggravate their anxiety symptoms (Azjen, 1991).

BARRIERS EXPLAINED...

Not surprisingly, government-mandated closure to gyms and other recreational training facilities made it more difficult for people to be physically active.

The pandemic forced a shift in doing everything at home but not everyone's home is large enough or well-equipped to support their physical activity needs.

Income level was predictive of activity level during the pandemic.

People who reported “just enough” or “less than enough” income experienced greater decreases in physical activity and worsening mental health, especially younger adults aged 18 to 29 years old.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS...

The sample consisted mainly of young (18–29), highly educated (Bachelor's degree or higher), female-identifying Canadian inhabitants which may limit the generalisation of the results.

On average, our respondents were meeting the physical activity recommendations, which is not representative of the population at large.

During stressful times, like the COVID-19 pandemic, people are especially motivated to be physically active for their mental health but may be too anxious or depressed to partake.

The results point to the need for additional psychological support to help people maintain their physical activity levels during stressful times.