

May 2022 Youth Services Survey

Caregiver Supplemental Questions

Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health Services for Youth

County of San Diego Children, Youth and Families Behavioral Health Services

BACKGROUND

In May of 2022, clients ages 13 and older and the caregivers of all child and youth clients receiving outpatient mental health services from the County of San Diego Children, Youth & Families Behavioral Health Services (CYFBHS) system were asked to complete the online Youth Services Survey (YSS). In addition, a supplementary survey was added to the YSS to gather information about clients' experiences accessing and utilizing services during the COVID-19 pandemic. This information helps the San Diego County Behavioral Health Services system better understand the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of youth and their caregivers.

SAMPLE AND METHODS

During the weeklong May 2022 reporting period, the Youth Services Survey was conducted online and included a supplemental questionnaire that asked parents and caregivers five questions about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their mental health, and on the mental health of their children. In total, 845 caregivers returned the YSS supplemental questionnaire. Among these supplemental questionnaires, 93% were returned completed (N=787), with 78% completed in English (N=614) and 22% completed in Spanish (N=173).

YOUTH SERVICES SURVEY SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CAREGIVERS

Child's Mental Health

- Is the Covid-19 crisis currently causing your child to feel stressed? *Not at all • A little bit • Somewhat • A lot*
- How is your child's mental health currently? *Very Good • Good • Fair • Poor • Very Poor*

Coping with Parenting

- In the past three months, how well do you feel you are coping with the day-to-day demands of raising your children? *Very well • Somewhat well • Not very well • Not well at all • Don't know*
- Is the Covid-19 crisis currently causing you to feel stressed? *Not at all • A little bit • Somewhat • A lot*

Caregiver Needs

- What kind of support would help you cope with the COVID-19 crisis? *Short-answer responses*

I. CHILD’S MENTAL HEALTH

IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON CHILDREN’S STRESS

Caregivers were asked if they thought the COVID-19 pandemic was currently causing their child to feel stressed. Table 1 shows that over thirty percent of caregivers reported that they did not believe that the pandemic was currently making their child feel stressed. 29% reported that the pandemic was making their child a little bit stressed. 23% said that the pandemic was making their child somewhat stressed, and 11% reported that the pandemic was causing high levels of stress for their child.

Table 1: Is the COVID-19 crisis currently causing your child to feel stressed?	December 2021 (N=772)		May 2022 (N=781)	
	n	%	n	%
Not at all	198	26%	290	37%
A little bit	301	39%	227	29%
Somewhat	189	24%	177	23%
A lot	84	11%	87	11%

Note: N=781, six caregivers (0.8%) did not respond to this survey question in May 2022.

CHILDREN’S CURRENT MENTAL HEALTH

Caregivers were asked to rate their child’s current mental health. Table 2 displays caregivers’ responses. The responses show that most caregivers rated their child’s current mental health as either “good” (38%) or “fair” (35%). 11% rated their child’s mental health as “very good.” While 13% rated their child’s mental health as “poor” and 2% rated it as “very poor.”

Table 2: How is your child’s mental health currently?	December 2021 (N=773)		May 2022 (N=779)	
	n	%	n	%
Very good	77	10%	88	11%
Good	269	35%	295	38%
Fair	288	37%	276	35%
Poor	115	15%	104	13%
Very Poor	24	3%	16	2%

Note: N=779, eight caregivers (1.0%) did not respond to this survey question in May 2022.

II. COPING WITH PARENTING

IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON CAREGIVER’S STRESS

Caregivers were asked if they thought the COVID-19 pandemic was currently causing them to feel stressed. As displayed in Table 3, most caregivers reported the COVID-19 pandemic was not causing major stress in their lives. 37% said “not at all,” and 37% said that the pandemic was causing “a little bit” of stress. 17% reported that the pandemic was making them “somewhat” stressed, and 8% said that the pandemic was causing them “a lot” of stress.

Table 3: Is the COVID-19 crisis currently causing you to feel stressed?	December 2021 (N=768)		May 2022 (N=780)	
	n	%	n	%
Not at all	160	21%	292	37%
A little bit	320	42%	288	37%
Somewhat	188	24%	134	17%
A lot	100	13%	66	8%

Note: N=780, seven caregivers (0.9%) did not respond to this survey question in May 2022.

COPING WITH DAILY PARENTING DEMANDS

Caregivers were asked to rate how well they felt they were coping with the daily demands of raising their child over the last three months. Table 4 displays the responses caregivers shared. Most caregivers (56%) indicated that they felt they were coping with the day-to-day demands of parenting “somewhat well.” 29% said that they were coping “very well.” 11% reported that they were not coping very well, and 2% said they were coping “not well at all.” 2% said that they did not know how well they were coping.

Table 4: In the past three months, how well do you feel you are coping with the day-to-day demands of raising your children?	December 2021 (N=768)		May 2022 (N=773)	
	n	%	n	%
Very well	172	22%	222	29%
Somewhat well	462	60%	431	56%
Not very well	91	12%	89	11%
Not well at all	27	4%	17	2%
I don’t know	16	2%	14	2%

Note: N=773, fourteen caregivers (1.8%) did not respond to this survey question in May 2022.

III. CAREGIVER NEEDS

What kind of support would help you cope with the COVID-19 crisis?

Caregivers were asked to share the types of support that would help them cope with the COVID-19 crisis. Responses included additional childcare, increased financial security, and mental and social support for caregivers and children.

CHILD CARE SUPPORT

Caregivers said that they needed more childcare to better maintain their employment during times when their children are not able to attend school.

“Resources like babysitting when she’s not accepted at school due to cold symptoms or a positive case in her classroom.”

“Respite or alternative daycare assistance when school or primary daycare is closed. I work and it is difficult to take time off, even with supplemental paid leave for COVID-19.”

“More respite opportunities.”

“Daycare assistance and consistency.”

“More availability regarding daycare for children under 3 years old.”

“Most of my stress comes from school protocol . . . the children have missed a significant amount of school because of the COVID guidelines the school has to follow.”

“I get stressed when I have to do extra steps to allow my child to go back to school when sick and not with Covid-19.”

FAMILY FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Caregivers noted the need for ongoing financial support to help with many of the costs incurred throughout the COVID-19 pandemic including loss of employment, added childcare costs, and increasing rents.

“Not having to miss work so much because kids have to miss school because of COVID stuff. I can’t afford it.”

“Finding sustainable employment and programs to help with bills/rent, child care, and extracurricular activities.”

“Catching up on bills and help with housing.”

“Getting back on track financially and my kid’s mental health stabilized.”

“Low-cost therapy for myself. Continued therapy for my son.”

“Financial services, and a mental health therapist to have someone to talk to.”

CAREGIVER MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Caregivers reported the need for more social and mental health and social support and parenting classes to help them provide care for their children.

“Parenting classes to support my family and help them with their mental health.”

“Support for families due to spending so much time isolated.”

“Mental health services for parents.”

“New parenting skills to support my daughter.”

YOUTH SOCIAL SUPPORTS

Caregivers noted the need for more structured social support for their children, many of whom experienced social isolation and educational gaps during the pandemic.

“Age-appropriate socializing activities for preteens with special needs.”

“Activities for children so my kids can socialize more with other children.”

“Opportunities to get kids involved and not so isolated.”

“Supported social activities for my child with transportation.”

“More activities for the kids.”

“Access to social skills group. COVID impacted the delivery of these services, and as a result, we haven’t been able to be ready for in-person instruction. Keeping my child homeschooled is creating a great deal of stress.”

IV. KEY FINDINGS

- In May 2022, 37% of caregivers said their child was not currently experiencing stress due to the pandemic, up from 26% in December 2021. However, 34% reported that their child was currently experiencing substantial stress (“somewhat” or “a lot”) related to the pandemic. These numbers remained consistent with the December 2021 YSS responses.
- 49% of caregivers reported that their child’s mental health was “very good” or “good,” a slight increase from the December 2021 YSS (45%). 15% reported that their child’s mental health was “poor” or “very poor,” a slight decrease from the December 2021 YSS.
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on caregivers’ current stress showed a significant decrease. In May 2022, 37% of caregivers indicated that the pandemic’s impact on their current stress was “not at all,” compared to only 21% in December 2011 reporting that the pandemic was not impacting their current stress.
- While many caregivers reported that they felt that they currently had sufficient support to help them deal with the challenges surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, many reported gaps in services such as childcare access, affordability, and consistency. Many caregivers

noted unmet financial needs, and difficulties balancing employment and childcare during uncertain school hours.

- The findings also highlighted the need to increase mental health support for caregivers, and develop more age-appropriate, safe, and accessible social outlets for children and youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Although fewer families are struggling with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, service providers should continue to assess for pandemic-related stress and other mental health challenges.
- Service providers should ask parents and caregivers about the support they need related to the impacts of the pandemic on their employment and family financial needs. Providing resources to help caregivers navigate childcare amid the return to in-person schooling is vital for helping families maintain stability.
- More opportunities for structured, age-appropriate social interaction for youth and children are needed as they transition back to in-person education and activities. Parents and caregivers noted the negative impact that social isolation had on their children during the pandemic and the necessity for developing accessible, developmentally-appropriate social engagement activities that reacclimate youth through healthy peer activities.