Lived Experiences of Mental Health in Children, Youth, and Families in Saskatchewan during the First Year of the COVID-19 Pandemic

See Us, Hear Us 1.0 Qualitative Research Findings

Pisolkar, V., Dena, I., Habbick, M., Hinz, T., Adeyinka, D., Green, K., Kallio, N., Muhajarine, N.

1 INTRODUCTION

In our online SUHU 1.0 survey conducted in March-July 2021, 38% of children and youth aged 8 to 18 in Saskatchewan reported their overall mental health had worsened during the first year of the pandemic. One in four needed mental health services/support.[1]

This phase of qualitative research examined in greater depth the lived experiences of children and youth during the pandemic, in their own words. This evidence-based information can help policymakers to strengthen mental health services in Saskatchewan.

Research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of child/adolescent/youth in coping with mental health issues and seeking mental health services in Saskatchewan during the COVID-19 pandemic?
   - What meaning do parents/caregivers make of their children's experiences?

2 METHODS

Data collection and who participated?

N=31
Interviews

Out of the 510 participants from the SUHU1.0 survey, 31 child-parent dyads were recruited for the qualitative interviews.

Online (audio-video)	Semi-structured in-depth	30-90 minutes	Nov 2021-July 2022
Mode	**Type**	**Length**	**Period**

Residence
- **7** Rural
- **24** City

Schooling
- Online
- Homeschool
- In-person
- Hybrid

Household composition
- Single & two-parent
- Single, multiple children
- Mental illnesses
- Learning and developmental disabilities

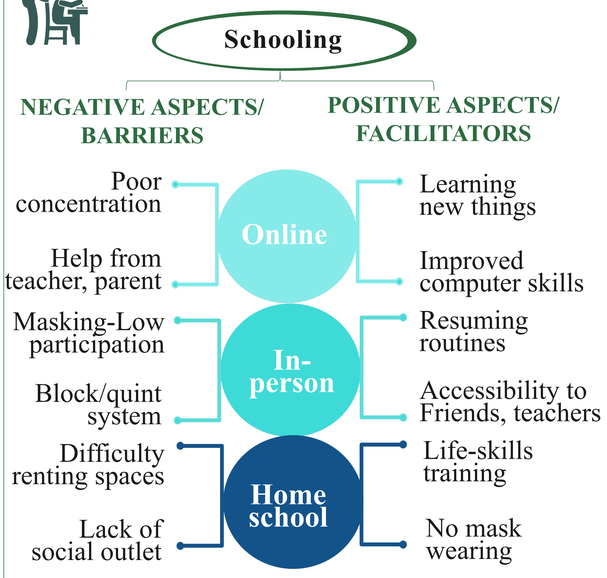
Parental work
- At-home
- Lost job
- Outside home Homemaker

Financial stability
Most families - stable

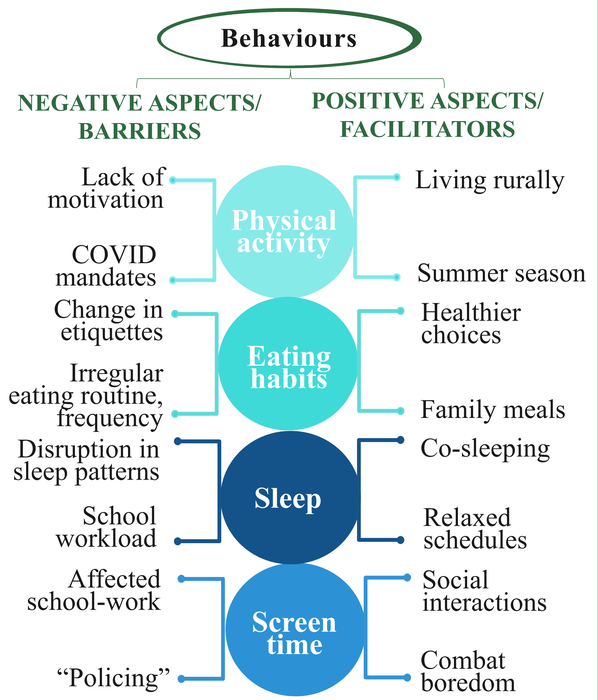
Immigration status
2 self-identified

3 FINDINGS

COVID-19 pandemic impacts: Child and parent perspectives

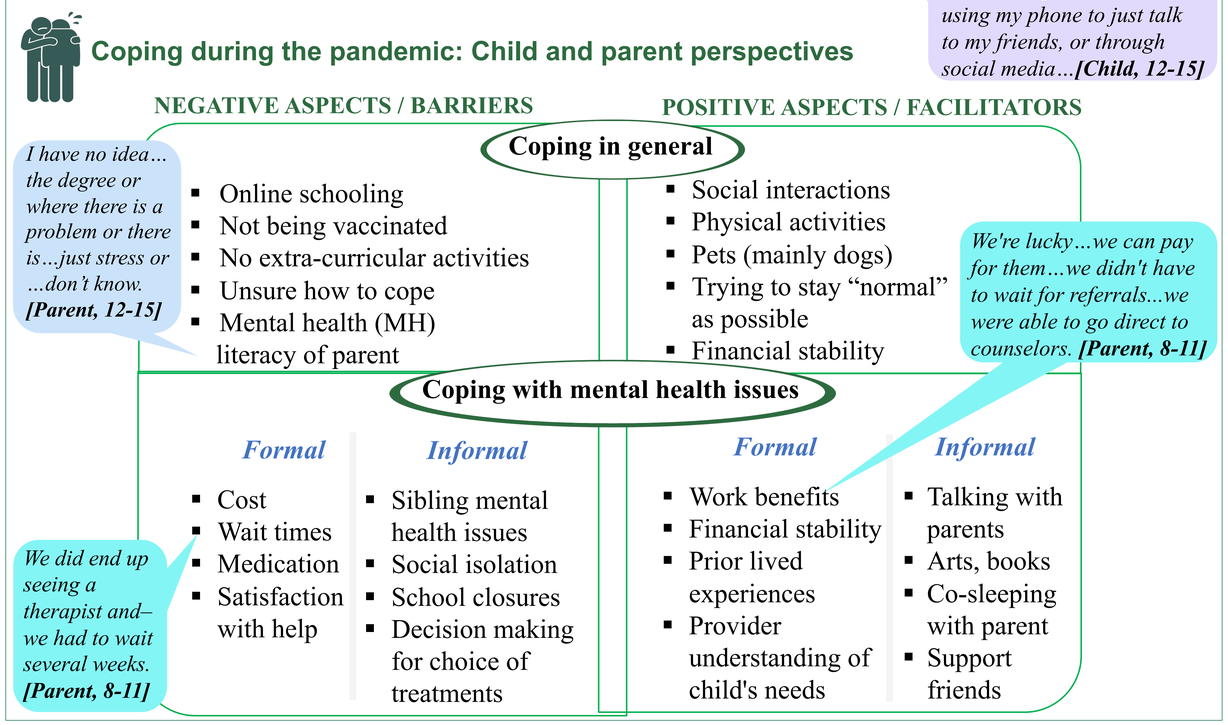


*The first couple days of **online** school, and we were all there like, Yay! Freedom! This is so cool! But then a week passed…then a month…the end of the year… it became, very sad, there wasn't as much fun as there was in **in-person** school. **[Child, 12-15]***



*…big increase there [in screen time]…I was still using my phone to just talk to my friends, or through social media…**[Child, 12-15]***

Coping during the pandemic: Child and parent perspectives



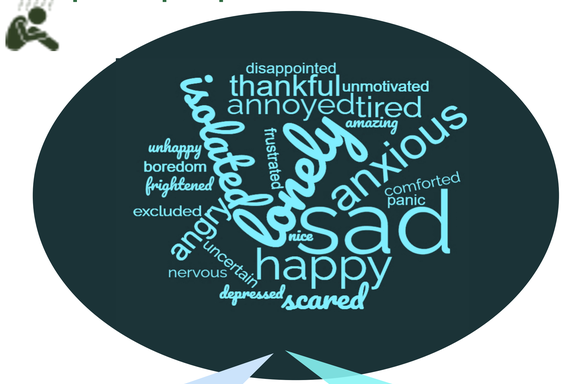
*I have no idea… the degree or where there is a problem or there is…just stress or …don't know. **[Parent, 12-15]***

*We're lucky…we can pay for them…we didn't have to wait for referrals…we were able to go direct to counselors. **[Parent, 8-11]***

*We did end up seeing a therapist and– we had to wait several weeks. **[Parent, 8-11]***

3 FINDINGS, contd.

Psychosocial responses: Child and parent perspectives



*We didn't see any family for over a year. So [youth] was worried about…when are we going to be able to see family again. **[Youth, 16-18]***

*Right at the beginning…was a bit, frightening…Since then, it's been fine. It's just that, new disease and no vaccinations. Some people are getting very sick. **[Child, 8-11]***

Improving MH services in Saskatchewan: Recommendations from children and their parent/caregiver

- Increase mental health crisis units and providers in rural areas.
- Reduce student-to-counsellor ratio by adding one full-time counsellor in each school.
- Incorporate more mental health training in school curriculum.
- Educate parents on signs and symptoms of mental illnesses.
- Urge government to put children and teachers first.

4 CONCLUSION

Children and youth in Saskatchewan have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in many areas of their lives. The recommendations they have spoken provide urgency to prioritize children's mental health needs in the province. It will be a missed opportunity to truly *"see and hear"* Saskatchewan children if we fail to act now.

Acknowledgements: SUHU1.0 team, funders, partners
Reference: 1. Muhajarine, N., Adeyinka, D., Pisolkar, V., Ramamoorthy, S., Hinz, T., Damodharan, S., Balbuena, L., McCutcheon, J., Dena, I., Green, K.L., Kallio, N, April 7, 2022. Research Brief: See Us, Hear Us 1.0. Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Saskatchewan Population Health and Evaluation Research Unit (SPHERU).

For more information on the research study and findings, scan the QR code

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Partners: