



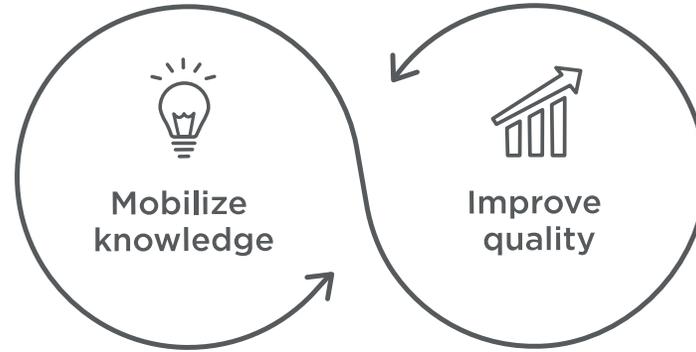
Back-to-school during COVID-19: Potential impacts on child and youth mental health

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Presentation to Physicians of Ontario Neurodevelopmental Advocacy
Virtual Conference, Nov 20, 2020



STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS 2019-21



AGE RANGES



Early years
Birth to ~6 years



Middle years
~7-11 years



Teen years
~12-18 years



Transition age
~19-25 years

FOCUS AREAS



Primary care/
care pathways



Youth and family
engagement



Digital/
e-mental health



System
initiatives



Ontario Centre of Excellence
for Child & Youth Mental Health

Centre d'excellence de l'Ontario en santé
mentale des enfants et des adolescents

Our mission: We drive high-quality mental health service delivery for Ontario's children, youth and families by mobilizing knowledge and setting the bar for excellence.

Our values: Accountable • Authentic • Collaborative
• Inclusive • Innovative • Passionate • Strategic



The Centre's work through the pandemic

- Evidence summaries and webinars targeted to community-based child and youth mental health service providers – cymh.ca/covid19
- Research on the experiences of children, youth and families through the pandemic (Radomski et al., 2020)
- Evaluation of the community-based child and youth mental health sector's transition to virtual care (Danseco et al., 2020)

Back to school during COVID-19: Evidence review

- **impacts of the pandemic** on CYMH (new research and existing evidence)
- **school transitions**; children/youth with additional complexities and vulnerabilities
- **resources and tools for community-based providers**

Considerations for Ontario's child and youth community mental health service providers

August 27, 2020



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CMHO Back to School Mental Health Kit

1. [Six tips to support your child's mental wellness and prepare for the start of the school year](#)
2. [Supporting children's mental wellness while encouraging pandemic prevention measures](#)
3. [Back-to-school tips for parents](#)

Other resources: tips for youth by youth, PDFs for providers to share directly with parents, “Ask an expert” webinars with clinicians





The impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of children and youth

Children and youth may be particularly vulnerable to mental health effects due to:

- Cognitive and developmental processes that occur in parallel with a pandemic
- Limited understanding of dangers, how to remain safe, when/how to access help and problem-solving skills
- Underdeveloped coping and emotion regulation skills
- Vicarious impact by their parents/caregivers' insufficient or distressing responses (lack of preparedness, unable to support their child)



The impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of children and youth

- The pandemic is having a negative impact on the mental health and well-being of many children and youth, particularly those with **pre-existing** mental health challenges (Hawke et al., 2020; CMHO, 2020; Radomski et al., 2020a; 2020b)
- Statistics Canada reported that youth (15 to 24 years) reported the greatest decreases in mental health out of **any age** group during the pandemic
- Altered sleep, changes in eating habits and increased irritability or outbursts are the most reported **behavioural changes** of children by parents (CMHO & Ipsos, 2020)
- Mental health **symptoms will outlast** the acute/crisis phase of the pandemic; early intervention and continuity of care are essential (Fegert et al., 2020)



COVID-19: Amplifier of existing challenges

Data from spring 2020 showed:

- 58% reported being at home for school had not impacted their mental health; 35% reported a deterioration; 7% reported an improvement (CMHO & Ipsos, 2020)
- For some, school transitions are difficult under normal circumstances; links depression and anxiety (e.g. Kulkarni et al., 2019; Wong & Power, 2019). COVID-19 may amplify concerns for those:
 - with pre-existing mental health challenges and substance use disorders.
 - who have been exposed to or contracted the virus.
 - who are members of marginalized or racialized communities.
 - with comorbidities and complex support needs.
 - with sub-clinical, low grade or undiagnosed mental health and behavioural concerns.



Understanding educator and student mental health and addictions needs and strategies to address them (Bullock et al., 2020)

McMaster Health Forum – forthcoming report

- Rapid review and jurisdictional scan identified 10 highly relevant resources (reviews, single studies, guidelines)
- School-aged children and youth report worsening mental health during the pandemic
- Limited evidence specific to school reopening or the mental health of children and youth with pre-existing mental health concerns, special needs, other vulnerabilities
- No research evidence was found describing or evaluating COVID-specific mental health or addictions interventions targeting students, but guidelines offer broad recommendations
- Given current gaps in the literature, decision makers will have to rely on other sources of knowledge for service planning --- e.g. sector experts, evidence from other outbreaks, systematically-elicited values and preferences of stakeholders



Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of youth & young adults, and parents & caregivers

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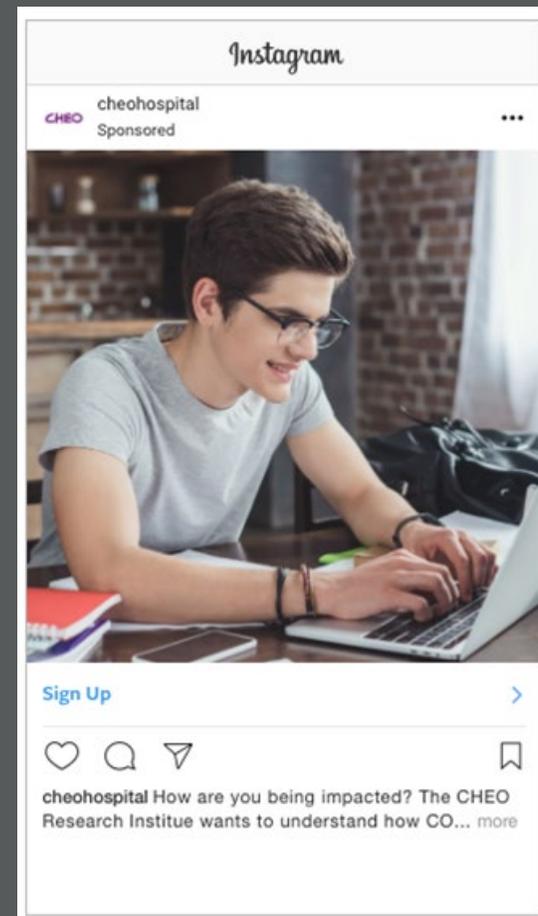
Paula Cloutier, Nicole Sheridan, William Gardner, Kathleen Pajer, Purnima Sundar



Overview of Study Methods

- Two studies were conducted between April – June 2020 to gather information about young people’s mental health experiences, service needs and preferences in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Study recruitment took place using social media advertisements and posts and email invitations across Ontario
- Participants were asked to complete a ~10 min. web-based survey (English/French)
- Over 1300 youth and young adults (12 to 25 years of age) and over 700 parents/caregivers (with a child from 4 to 25 years of age) participated

FINDINGS FROM YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS



Youth and young adult participants

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

- 1496 participants (93.7% study completion rate)
- Average age was 18.5 years
- 97.6% preferred English
- 72.1% identified as female
- 87.2% are from Central or Eastern Ontario
 - Includes larger populations such as Toronto & Ottawa

	N	%
Age	1496	100%
Mean (SD)	18.5	(3.5)
Preferred Language		
English	1460	97.6%
Français	36	2.4%
Gender		
Female	1079	72.1%
Male	340	22.7%
Other	65	4.3%
Region in Ontario		
Western	99	6.6%
Central	830	55.5%
Northern	73	4.9%
Eastern	474	31.7%

What we found

LEVEL OF DISTRESS RELATED TO COVID-19

- Nearly half reported a current concern about their mental health (43.5%) and rated it as either 'not so good' or 'poor' overall
- Nearly 1/3 (28.9%) reported having a *current* mental health diagnosis or problem that they were getting help for
- Nearly 2/3 (61.1%) reported a worsening of their mental health since COVID-19
- Over 1/3 reported anxiety at or above a 'clinical' level and was associated with significant impairment
- In the 'clinical' subsample, nearly 3/4 reported that their mental health has gotten worse since COVID-19 (74.4%)

Who is most likely to be affected

YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS WHO MOST LIKELY TO REPORT WORSE MENTAL HEALTH WERE:

- Older age (18 to 25 years)
- Female
- Lower economic status
- Currently employed
- Live in northern communities
- Have a current mental health concern that they are getting help for



Mental health service use

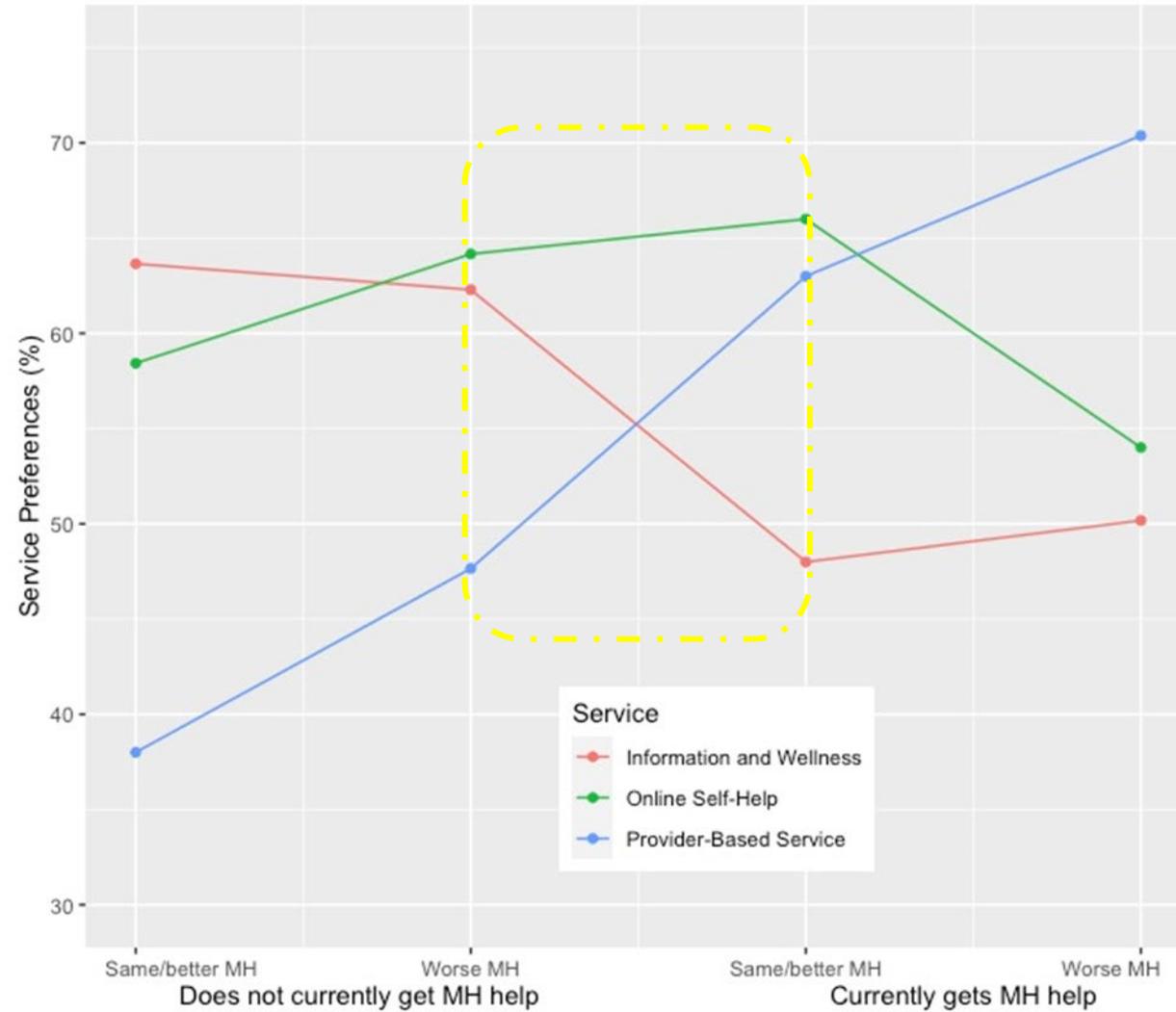
- Nearly 30% reported that they do not *currently* need mental health services
- Within the ‘clinical population’, nearly 30% are in a waiting pattern (unsure) about services; we can expect them to return to services
- But nearly all (92.4%) gave us information about what services they might consider helpful in the future*
 - Online information and wellness support: 59.1%
 - Online self-help support: 60.3%
 - Provider-based services: 50.6%



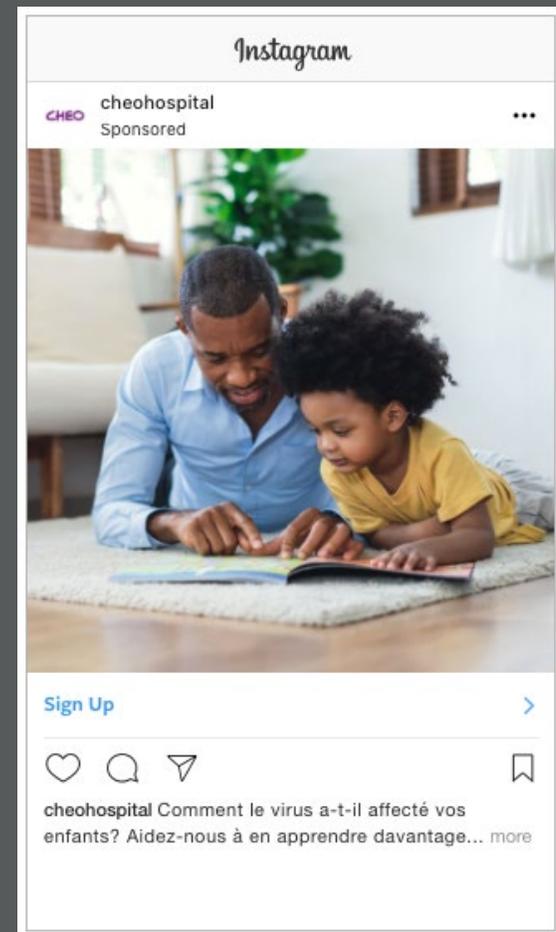
Preferences for future mental health services

- Preferences for mental health support were related to mental health status
 - Youth and young adults not currently receiving support preferred online sources of information and self-help supports (less intensive)
 - Youth and young adults currently receiving support preferred provider-based services, as did those who reported that their mental health had gotten worse since the pandemic (more intensive)

Preferences for future mental health services by mental health status



FINDINGS FROM PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS





Parent & caregiver participants

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

- 725 participants
- Average age was 43.3 years
- 92.6% preferred English
- 92.4% identified as mothers
- 72.6% lived with their child
- 60.8% were from Eastern Ontario
- Median number of children was 2
- Average age of child was 10.1 years
- Over 3/4 of children were between K to Grade 8



Parent & caregiver mental health

LEVEL OF DISTRESS RELATED TO COVID-19

- Over one quarter (26.7%) reported that their current mental health was ‘not so good’ or ‘poor’ overall
- Over 1/4 (28.9%) reported moderate to severe levels of caregiver strain
- Nearly one-third (32.5%) had already sought – or were planning to seek - mental health support because of the impact of COVID-19 on their daily life
- Caregiver strain was significantly higher related to the overall self-reported mental health of parents (greater strain related to worse mental health)



The impact of school changes on their child

PARENT & CAREGIVER PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL CHANGES ON THEIR CHILD

- Caregivers found their child's inability to (1) see their friends and peers, (2) participate in their regular fun activities, sports or hobbies, and (3) complete the school year in a usual way to be most impactful on their child
- The impact seemed to be greater for high school or post-secondary students than for elementary school students
- Caregiver-reported impact of the school year changes for their child was significantly related to the overall mental health of both caregivers and children since COVID-19



Key takeaways from the survey studies

YOUTH & YOUNG ADULTS

- Most reported a decline in their mental health and an interest in future services
- Findings suggest a surge in the demand for future services; meeting demands has important implications for young people's well-being
- Preferences for service types were associated with mental health need

PARENT & CAREGIVERS

- Over one-third (34.5%) were 'quite a bit' or 'very much' bothered by the added schoolwork responsibilities
- School impact was related to the overall mental health of both parents and children
- Nearly one-third (32.5%) have, or are planning/considering to, seek their own mental health support

Contact us

THE ONTARIO CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE FOR CHILD AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH



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What can we do to support our children, youth and families?

PARENT/CAREGIVER STRATEGIES FOR HOME

- Shine a spotlight on what is still within the child's control as opposed to focusing on what's not
- Help manage their child's cognitive distortions around retuning to school, peer interactions, physical safety (move from polarized to adaptive thinking)
- Reduce their child's anxiety by helping them identify their worries and fears, providing child-friendly, fact-based information in response, reassuring their child that teachers and parents will be there to help; teaching coping and relaxation strategies
- Promote the use of routine (provides comfort and certainty)



What can we do to support our children, youth and families?

PARENT/CAREGIVER STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOL

- Help their child learn about and understand the new rules of heading back to school; practice the rules and behaviours in advance
- For all children and youth, but particularly those with IEPs, engage and maintain communication with appropriate school staff
- For vulnerable children and youth, identify a 'safe' person at school they can seek when distressed
- Reinforce the importance of their child returning to classroom-based learning, if possible/applicable

Resources to support back to school transitions

- **For educators:** SMH-ON developed a [Mentally Health Return to School Toolkit](#) to support system and school leaders, educators, school support professionals, and parents and families in promoting and protecting mental health at school
- **For providers:** CMHO and their youth and family partners have created a [Back-to-School Mental Health Kit](#) with resources tailored to the needs and interests of youth and parents/caregivers preparing for the transition back to school

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