

The Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health, Quality of Life, and Service and Support Needs in Families of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Preliminary Findings

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BACKGROUND

- In response to the current pandemic, government action has been widely judged to have failed to address the major concerns and needs of families of children with a range of special needs in British Columbia.
- Prior to COVID-19, most caregivers of autistic children had to meet high demands requiring their time and energy.
- It is probable that already existing barriers faced by these families were exacerbated by COVID-19 restrictions, with families isolated and cut-off from most of their support systems.
- Research is urgently needed to examine the impact of COVID-19 on mental health, quality of life and service accessibility to determine the most effective services and supports for families and what essential services must be in place in times of emergency.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS & COLLABORATORS

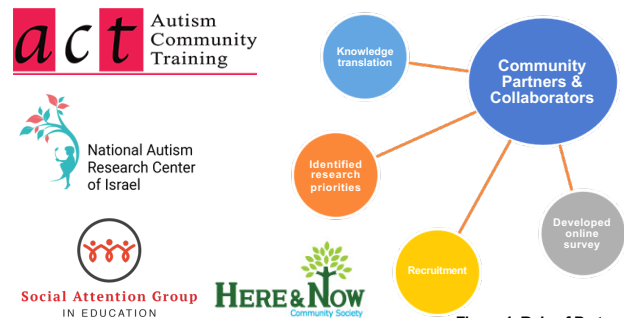


Figure 1. Role of Partner

OBJECTIVES

- How are families of autistic children living in British Columbia coping during COVID-19?
- What are families' perceptions of the services and supports provided by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and the Ministry of Education?

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

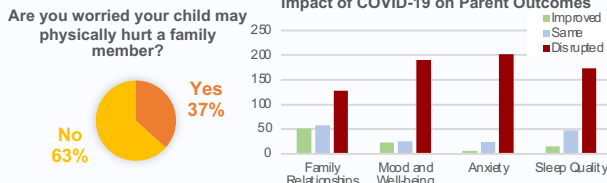
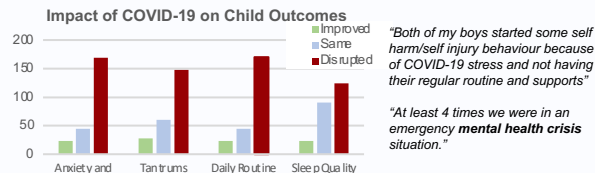
- 238 caregivers living in BC between the ages of 25-64 years (M=42.82; SD=6.65) were included in the present study. Their autistic children were between the ages of 2-21 years (M=10.47; SD=6.65).

METHODS

- Online survey hosted by Qualtrics from July 30 – September 26, 2020.
- Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 24.

RESULTS

HOW ARE FAMILIES COPING?



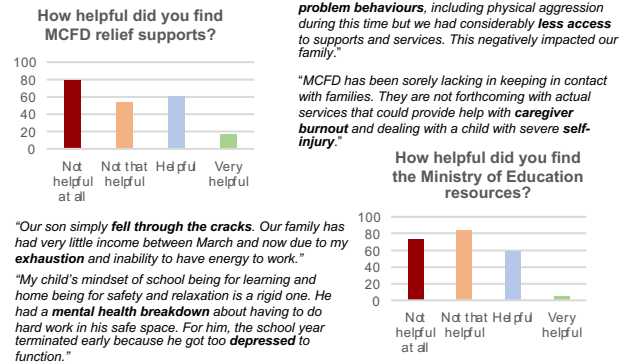
Did you ever consider putting your child into care of MCFD due to lack of services/supports?



"I have been close to relinquishing guardianship to just keep what's left of my family together."

RESULTS CONTINUED

SERVICES AND SUPPORTS



CONCLUSIONS

- The majority of parents reported that their child's anxiety, tantrums, daily routine, and sleep quality have worsened during the pandemic.
- The majority of parents reported their family relationships, well-being, anxiety, and sleep quality have worsened during the pandemic.
- Over a third of parents report safety concerns for their family.
- Almost 10% of parents considered putting their child into care.
- The majority of parents report that both MCFD and Ministry of Education supports in response to COVID-19 have been insufficient in meeting their needs.
- Three families reported positive impacts of the pandemic on their child, for example one parent expressed that her son "has sort of thrived with COVID-19...as the day to day social demands have lessened due to quarantine."
- Open-ended responses indicate the need for mental health supports, respite, and greater flexibility with funding.

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