

Study: U.S. families' mental, behavioral health worse in pandemic

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Editor's note: For the latest news on COVID-19, visit

<https://www.aapublications.org/news/2020/01/28/coronavirus>.

New data highlight the COVID-19 pandemic's substantial impact on families' mental and behavioral health, particularly single-parent families and those with young children.

More than one in four parents reported worsening mental health, and one in seven reported worsening behavioral health for their children since coronavirus began to spread in March. About 10% reported that both parent and child were affected, according to "Well-being of Parents and Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A National Survey," (Patrick SW, et al. *Pediatrics*. July 24, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-016824>).

Mental health decline was reported most by females and unmarried parents. Families with younger children had highest rates of declining mental and behavioral health.

The survey was conducted in June and had a 50% completion rate with 1,101 responses. Questions assessed changes in health status, insurance status, food security, utilization of public food assistance resources, child care and use of health care services since the beginning of the pandemic.

Among areas of difficulty were food insecurity, which increased from 32.6% in March to 36% in June, and disruptions in child care, which affected 24.1% of respondents. The increase in food insecurity did not translate to significant changes in enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. In addition, use of food banks and pantries increased only slightly.

The pandemic also caused disruptions to child health care visits. Parents reported canceling or delaying well-child visits (49.4%) and visits for vaccinations (9.3%).

"Loss of childcare, delays in health care visits, and worsened food security were common among families experiencing worse mental and behavioral health," the authors said.

With changes resulting from the pandemic continuing to disrupt families' lives, authors called for more data examining how social isolation, psychological distress among adults and substantial economic distress impact these populations.

“As policymakers consider additional measures to mitigate the health and economic effects of the pandemic, they should consider the unique needs of families with children, including support for mental and behavioral health and efforts to improve food security,” the authors concluded.

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