



NATIONAL CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH REPORT CARD 2011

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KEY FINDINGS

A new national survey of 1,000 parents with children aged 2-24 commissioned by the Child Mind Institute investigated parents' awareness of and concerns about psychiatric and learning issues in their children.

The key findings were as follows:

- 1** Nearly one in four parents (22%) reports being concerned about a child's mental health.
- 2** Children identified by their parents as having mental health issues show more than double the rate of problematic and dangerous behaviors—including alcohol and drug abuse, suspension from school, and suicide attempts—as compared to children in the whole sample.
- 3** While most parents with concerns sought treatment (87%), almost half (43%) waited more than a year and nearly a quarter (22%) waited more than two years to get help.
- 4** The most common treatments were medication (50%) and psychotherapy (46%). Of those who received medication, 80% found it effective while only 50% found psychotherapy and other treatments effective.
- 5** Of the parents who had concerns about a child's mental health, 81% said they had talked to their pediatrician about them.
- 6** Nearly half of concerned parents went to either their pediatrician (36%) or doctor/family doctor (11%) for help, while 38% went to a psychologist and 24% went to a psychiatrist.
- 7** While 97% of parents said mental health is as important as physical health, only 29% said their pediatricians asked them regularly about their child's mental health.
- 8** More than a third (40%) of parents said they do not understand their mental health insurance coverage, and 43% believe that there is not enough mental health coverage.

1

Nearly one in four parents are concerned about a child's mental health

The survey of 1,000 parents with children 2-24 years of age found that almost a quarter (22%) said they have had a child with mental health or behavioral issues.

By detailing the symptoms and behaviors that concerned them, the parents in the survey provide a snapshot of children who are displaying signs of psychiatric and learning difficulties, how their behavior differs from other children in the sample, and what parents are doing to get them help.

The reasons that parents most often "sought professional help" for their children included the following:

- 22% impulsive or hyperactive
- 20% moody or sad
- 18% trouble academically
- 16% trouble paying attention
- 12% problems with friends or interacting socially
- 12% more disobedient than other children
- 11% breaking rules or getting in trouble
- 10% repetitive, rigid or strange behaviors

Of those parents who expressed concern about a child, 70% said the symptoms and behaviors affected the child's "quality of life."

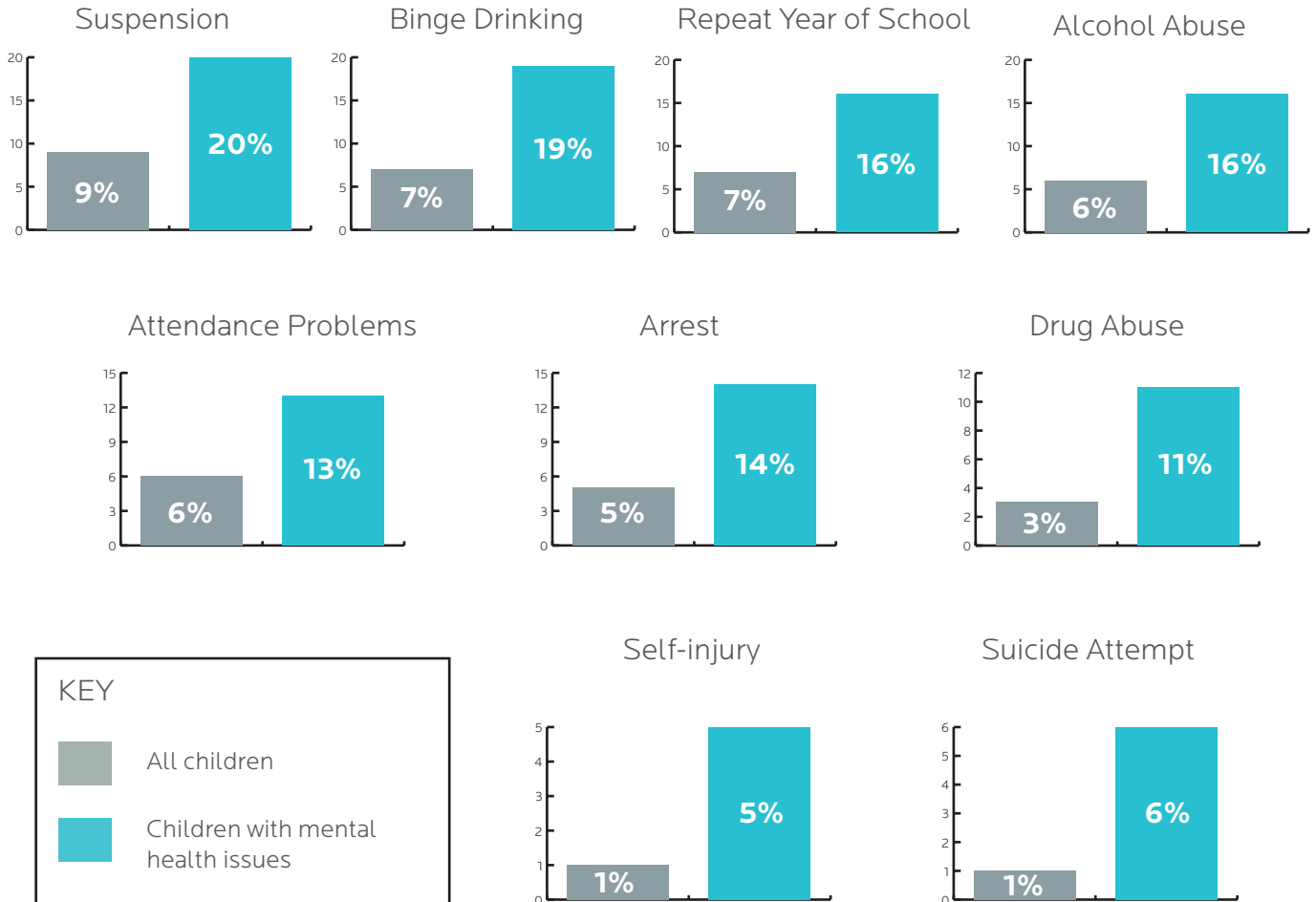
The most common ways in which the child's quality of life was impaired (multiple answers were accepted):

- 49% had difficulty making friends and socializing
- 25% became withdrawn or depressed
- 21% suffered academically
- 18% had trouble going about daily life
- 14% became very anxious

2

Children with mental health issues show more than double the rate of problematic and dangerous behaviors

Even more concerning, children identified by their parents as having mental health issues show more than double the rate of problematic and dangerous behaviors as compared to all children in the sample.



3 Most parents with concerns sought treatment, but almost half waited more than a year

Of those parents who expressed concern about a child, 87% said they sought professional help at least once for that child. But 43% of parents say they waited more than one year from the onset of symptoms before seeking help. And, nearly one quarter (22%) waited more than 2 years.

The central reason why parents waited to get help was that they “didn’t think it was a problem” (40%).

The other reasons why parents waited to get help included:

- 9% I couldn’t get my child to go to services
- 7% I didn’t know where to go
- 5% it was too expensive
- 5% services were not available in my community
- 5% I was afraid they would recommend medication

Of those who sought help, 72% said they got a diagnosis.

- 58% were diagnosed with attention and behavior issues
- 16% with autism
- 10% bipolar
- 9% depression
- 8 % anxiety
- 6% learning disorder

4 The most common treatments were medication and psychotherapy, with medication reported as most effective

Of those who sought professional help, 67% said they received “effective” treatment.

Half (50%) of those whose children received treatment said the treatment was medication, while 46% said they received psychotherapy, and 19% said they were prompted to make changes in the child’s lifestyle.

Most—85%—of the parents who sought help accepted the treatment recommendations that they received. Fifteen percent rejected the treatment recommendations; more than half of those (55%) rejected medication, 10% rejected psychotherapy, and 3% rejected changes in lifestyle.

The most common reasons for rejecting the treatment recommendation for medication were:

- 17% side effects of the drugs
- 17% school feels should wait to see if the child improves before medication
- 13% I don’t believe in medication
- 10% I didn’t like what I read or heard about medication
- 10% I felt my child would be stigmatized as having a mental health problem

Eighty percent of the parents reported that medication was effective, and only half of those who received other forms of treatment found those treatments to be effective.

5 Pediatricians play key role

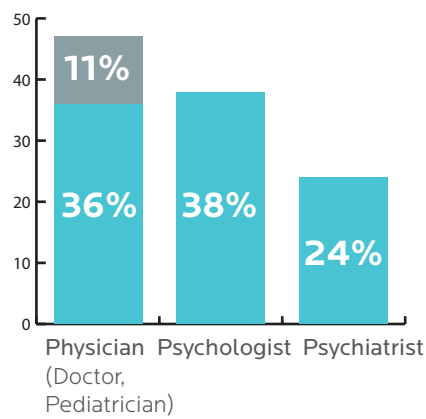
The survey highlighted the important role pediatricians play in identifying children with symptoms of psychiatric and learning disorders. Pediatricians were the top referral source; 39% of parents stated that they were referred to another clinician by their pediatrician. Of parents who had concerns about a child’s mental health, 81% reached out to their pediatrician.

6 Pediatricians as mental health providers

Nearly half of parents (47%) took their child for help to either the pediatrician (36%) or doctor/ family doctor (11%). Others went to a psychologist (38%) or a psychiatrist (24%).

What type of clinician did you go to for help?

Multiple responses were accepted.



7 Few pediatricians ask regularly about a child’s mental health

While almost all parents (97%) said mental health is just as important as physical health, mental health screening does not seem to be a routine part of a pediatrician’s exam. Only 29% said that their pediatrician asked them regularly whether they had concerns about their child’s mental health.

8 Many parents are confused by their mental health insurance coverage; nearly half believe there is not enough mental health coverage.

Parents revealed substantial confusion about insurance coverage for mental health diagnosis and treatment. Forty percent of the parents reported that they do not understand the mental health coverage that their health insurance offers. Parents with a child with mental health issues are more knowledgeable about their level of coverage, but even in this group, 1 in 5 (21%) said they do not understand the coverage that their health insurance plan provides.

Overall, only 1 in 3 (32%) parents said they believe that health insurance “provides enough mental health care coverage”—43% said they believe there is not enough coverage, and 25% said they were not sure.

SAMPLING STRATEGY AND IMPLICATIONS

The survey, prepared and commissioned by the Child Mind Institute, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,000 adults with children (primary or co-caregivers of the children, including mothers, fathers, stepmothers, stepfathers, and grandmothers), was conducted with random digit dialing, and has a margin of sampling error of +/-3%. There were 14,697 refusals.

Overall, the sample was better educated and from a higher socioeconomic status when compared to the US population. The rates of mental illness and problematic and risky behavior would likely be much higher if this sample were more representative and included more participants of a lower socioeconomic status. A full demographic comparison can be provided upon request.

This survey captured parents' assessment of the mental health and behaviors of one of their children. Therefore, the study should not be used to estimate the prevalence of mental health disorders in children, but rather should illustrate that nearly one quarter of parents are wrestling with these issues, and what they are doing to get help for their children.

Responses include parents' concerns about children and adolescents. Hence, the statistics about risky behaviors (e.g. drug and alcohol abuse) were skewed by the younger children in the sample. If these numbers reported only adolescents, one would expect the percentages of these behaviors to be even higher.

This survey was conducted by Douglas E. Schoen, LLC. The survey was developed by faculty at the Child Mind Institute with input from Mary McKay, PhD, Professor of Psychiatry and Professor of Preventive Medicine at Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

CONCLUSIONS

- 1 With 22% of parents expressing concerns about a child's mental health, the issue calls for urgency, funding, and public policy initiatives comparable to childhood illnesses like leukemia and diabetes.
- 2 Not addressing mental health issues puts children at significant risk for alcohol and drug abuse, problems in school, arrest, and harmful behaviors. Furthermore, we are placing additional and unnecessary burden on other systems, i.e. the juvenile justice system. Parents, teachers, and pediatricians need better tools to identify these disorders in their early stages and help link these children to effective treatment.
- 3 Since we know that early intervention leads to better outcomes, we should strive to close the gap between the onset of symptoms and the start of diagnosis and treatment, as well as encourage all concerned parents to seek treatment for mental health issues. Better education of parents, teachers, and pediatricians would enable them to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health issues earlier, in addition to destigmatizing treatment and improving outcomes.
- 4 Despite the widespread concern in our society about the use of psychotropic medication in children, 80% of parents in our sample whose children received medication for their mental health issue found it to be effective.

Only 50% of parents found other forms of treatment (e.g. psychotherapy) to be effective. Given that this response rate does not match the levels of efficacy shown in studies of behavioral treatments used to treat children in combination with or in lieu of medication, more effort should be made to make effective evidence-based behavioral treatments and care available nationwide.

- 5 While nearly 70% of parents found their child's treatment to be effective, more research has to be conducted to develop more effective treatment of psychiatric disorders in children and adolescents.
- 6 Given the key role pediatricians play in identifying children with mental illness, treating children with mental illness, and referring parents to other professionals for treatment, it is critical that pediatricians receive residency training, as well as ongoing Continuing Medical Education (CME) about the diagnosis and treatment of psychiatric and learning disorders in children.
- 7 With parents reporting that most pediatricians don't inquire about the mental health of children, we need to educate and encourage pediatricians to include this screening as a part of a child's annual checkup.
- 8 The confusion surrounding the provision of mental health care coverage in insurance plans suggests the need to better educate the public about their coverage. Furthermore, the lack of parity between physical and mental health insurance coverage needs to be rectified to ensure children get the diagnoses they need to lead full, productive lives.