



Voices of Child Health in Chicago REPORT

Volume 3 Number 2
February 2021

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Chicago parents were most likely to say they felt supported as a parent by their child’s health care provider.

Fifty-five percent of Chicago parents said that balancing work and family was difficult and 58% said they sometimes or often worry about child and family issues when they are at work.

Moms and dads did not differ in how difficult they found balancing work and family.

Parenting Support During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Parenting — even under normal circumstances — comes with challenges, but during the COVID-19 pandemic, parents have faced unprecedented challenges raising their families. Heightened concerns about their family’s health, navigating remote learning and remaining socially distant from loved ones and friends are just a few of the challenges parents have faced over the last 11 months. Recent research has shown that the pandemic has been particularly stressful for American parents, who reported feeling significantly higher levels of stress than adults without children.¹ However, parental support may have a protective effect on parental stress during the pandemic.²

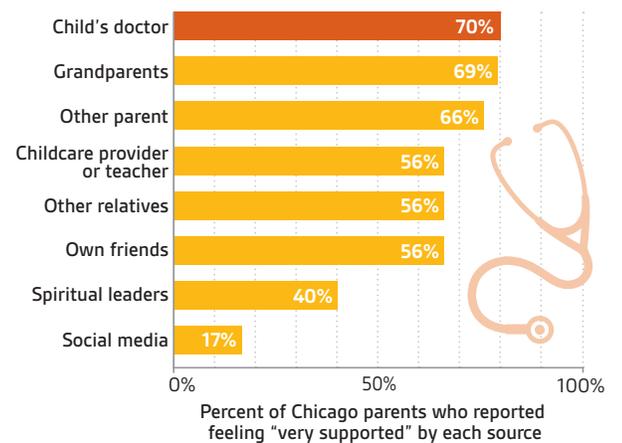
In this month’s *Voices of Child Health in Chicago* report, we focus on parents’ sources of support and parenting challenges, such as balancing work and family life, during the course of the pandemic. To explore these issues, we surveyed 1,642 Chicago parents from all 77 community areas in the city through our Parent Panel Survey from May–July 2020.

Who are the sources of parenting support for Chicago parents?

To better understand sources of parenting support, we asked Chicago parents “How supported as a parent do you feel by the following people?” Parents were most likely to say they felt “very supported” by their child’s health care provider (70%); followed by their child’s grandparents (69%); their child’s other parent (66%); their child’s babysitter, daycare provider or teacher (56%); other relatives (56%); their own friends (56%); spiritual leaders (40%) and people on social media platforms (17%) (Figure 1).

When we explored sources of parenting support individually for moms and dads, the same sources emerged as the top sources of support, but in a different order. Among moms, the top three sources of parenting support were: their child’s health care provider (71%), their child’s grandparents (67%) and their child’s other parent (62%). Whereas for dads, their child’s other parent was the top source of parenting support (74%), followed by their child’s grandparents (73%) and their child’s health care provider (69%).

Figure 1. Top sources of parenting support for Chicago parents



We also asked parents “How comfortable do you feel asking for parenting support from the following people?” Parents’ comfort asking for support largely aligned with who they felt most supported by. For instance, parents were most likely to say they felt “very comfortable” asking for support from their child’s other parent (70%), their child’s grandparents (68%) and their child’s healthcare provider (67%). Parents felt somewhat less comfortable asking for support from other relatives (52%); their friends (49%); their child’s babysitter, daycare provider or teacher

 Ann & Robert H. Lurie
Children's Hospital of Chicago

Stanley Manne
Children's Research Institute™

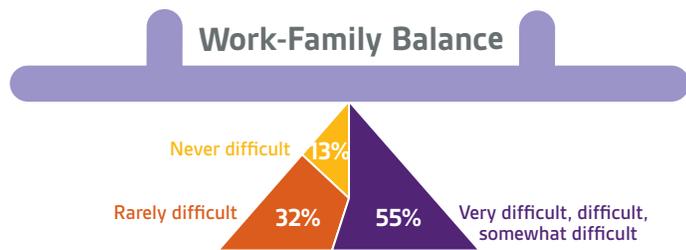
Smith Child Health Outcomes,
Research and Evaluation Center

 FCHIP
Family & Child
Health Innovations Program

(46%); spiritual leaders (36%) and people on social media platforms (17%). When we looked at how this differed by parent gender, we found that moms and dads felt most comfortable asking for parenting support from the same people, but in a different order. Moms felt most comfortable asking for support from their child's healthcare provider (67%), their child's other parent (66%) and their child's grandparents (65%). Dads felt most comfortable asking for support from their child's other parent (75%), their child's grandparents (72%) and their child's healthcare provider (66%).

Other research suggests that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of parents in the United States report that they have lost emotional support during the pandemic. This research also showed that parents were significantly less likely to receive emotional support from friends and slightly more likely to receive emotional support from their child's grandparents compared with before the pandemic.³

Figure 2. Proportion of Chicago parents who report that balancing work and family is difficult, rarely difficult or never difficult



Parents' Work-Family Balance During the Pandemic

In this survey, we also explored parents' perceptions of their work-life balance approximately three to six months into the pandemic. We asked working parents "How difficult is balancing work and family responsibilities for you?" Overall, 55% of parents said this was either somewhat difficult, difficult or very difficult; 32% said this was rarely difficult and 13% said this was never difficult (Figure 2). These rates, although collected during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, are similar to rates in a national 2015 Pew Research Poll that found that 56% of all parents said that it was difficult for them to balance job and family, with moms slightly more likely (60%) to say balancing job and family was difficult than dads (52%).⁴ In our survey, moms and dads did not differ significantly in how difficult they found balancing family and work.

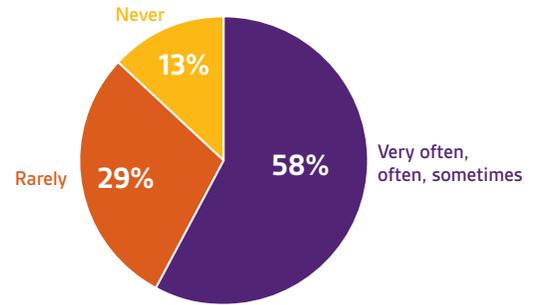
Parents who reported lower levels of parenting support (i.e., they felt "very supported" as a parent by two or fewer people) were more likely to find it difficult to balance work and family (64%) than parents who reported higher levels of parenting support (i.e., they felt "very supported" as a parent by six or more people; 46%).

Additionally, we asked working parents, "How often when you are at work are you worried or concerned about your child or family issues?" The majority of parents (58%) said that they very often, often or

sometimes worry about their child or family issues while at work, 29% said rarely and 13% said never (Figure 3). Because these data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, many parents may have been working from home with their children at home as well, which might have influenced parents' feelings of concern about children and family during work.

There are strategies parents can use to help cope with challenges of parenting during the pandemic. Suggestions from mental health experts include acknowledging one's own emotions, following a routine, sharing responsibilities and practicing self-care if possible.⁵

Figure 3. Proportion of Chicago parents who report that they often, rarely or never worry about child or family issues while they are at work



REFERENCES

1. Stress in the Time of COVID-19: Volume 1. Stress in America 2020, American Psychological Association. May 2020. <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2020/stress-in-america-covid.pdf>
2. Brown SM, Doom JR, Lechuga-Peña S, Watamura SE, Koppels T. Stress and parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Child Abuse & Neglect*. 2020;110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104699>
3. Center for Translational Neuroscience (2020, August 12). How Long Can the Levee Hold? *Medium*. <https://medium.com/rapid-ec-project/how-long-can-the-levee-hold-2a2cd0779914>
4. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/11/04/raising-kids-and-running-a-household-how-working-parents-share-the-load/#striking-a-work-family-balance-is-hard-most-parents-say>
5. Parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic. American Psychological Association. April 2020. <https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/parenting-during-pandemic>

HOW THE SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED

This report is based on data from the Voices of Child Health in Chicago Parent Panel Survey. The survey is administered to a sample of Chicago parents by Lurie Children's and NORC at the University of Chicago via internet and telephone. The survey is administered to the same panel of parents three times each year. The data in this report was collected from May through July 2020. The sample consisted of 1,642 Chicago parents, step-parents or guardians who had at least one child under 18 years of age in the household (referred to as "parents" in this report). Parents were from all 77 community areas in Chicago. The cumulative survey response rate was 2.24%. All analyses were conducted with statistical weighting so that the results are representative of the parent population in the City of Chicago during the time period of data collection. For more information about the VOCHIC Parent Panel Survey, visit luriechildrens.org/ParentPanel and our page on Open Science Framework at <https://osf.io/cjz82/>.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Davis MM, Heffernan ME, Smith TL, Bendelow A, Bhatti PK, Casale M, Garfield CF. Parenting Support During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Voices of Child Health in Chicago Report*. Vol 3, Number 2. February 2021. Available at luriechildrens.org/voices.

Stanley Manne Children's Research Institute™

Smith Child Health Outcomes,
Research and Evaluation Center

Matthew M. Davis, MD, MAPP, Director
Marie E. Heffernan, PhD, Associate Director
Tracie L. Smith, MPH, Senior Epidemiologist
Anne Bendelow, MPH, Data Analyst

Punreet K. Bhatti, MD, Project Manager
Mia Casale, MPH, Data Analyst
Craig F. Garfield, MD, MAPP, Expert Contributor

CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information on Voices of Child Health in Chicago, contact:

Mary Ann & J. Milburn Smith Child Health Outcomes, Research and Evaluation Center
Stanley Manne Children's Research Institute

Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago
225 East Chicago Avenue, Box 157, Chicago, IL 60611-2991

voicesofchildhealth@luriechildrens.org
luriechildrens.org/voices

This project is supported in part by an anonymous foundation and the Founders' Board of Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago.