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Addressing the Needs of Sara Holbrook Community Center Caregivers

Stephen J. Foley
University of Vermont

Shubhankar Joshi
University of Vermont

Ankrish Milne

Izabella Ostrowski
University of Vermont

William Robinson
University of Vermont

See next page for additional authors

Authors

Stephen J. Foley, Shubhankar Joshi, Ankrish Milne, Izabella Ostrowski, William Robinson, John A. Steinharter MS, Rachel A. Wayne, and Alayna M. Westcom

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THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT — LARNER COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

Sara Holbrook COMMUNITY CENTER

Sara Holbrook Community Center (SHCC)

Organizational Mission: *"To develop responsible and productive children, youth, and families through social development, education, and recreational opportunities."*

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

- Previous research: parental stress can negatively impact behavioral and cognitive development of children (Lee & Ward, 2020)

- Each year, over 4,000 people use SHCC resources: preschool, after school care, teen programs, food shelf, ESL services, etc.

- SHCC supports families at the center itself, but many families still experience difficulties at home that contribute to caregiver stress

- The purpose of this study: understand the needs of the caregivers of students who attend SHCC and propose actionable solutions to address the top identified needs

METHODS

- Conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with seven SHCC staff to identify needs of caregivers from a staff perspective (Collins & Swartz, 2011)

- Based on these interviews, created surveys for caregivers at a fifth-grade reading level that aimed to identify common stressors (e.g., food insecurity)

- Anonymous surveys were distributed to caregivers in secure electronic or paper format

- After identifying the most common stressors for caregivers, proposed three solutions that SHCC could implement to address these stressors
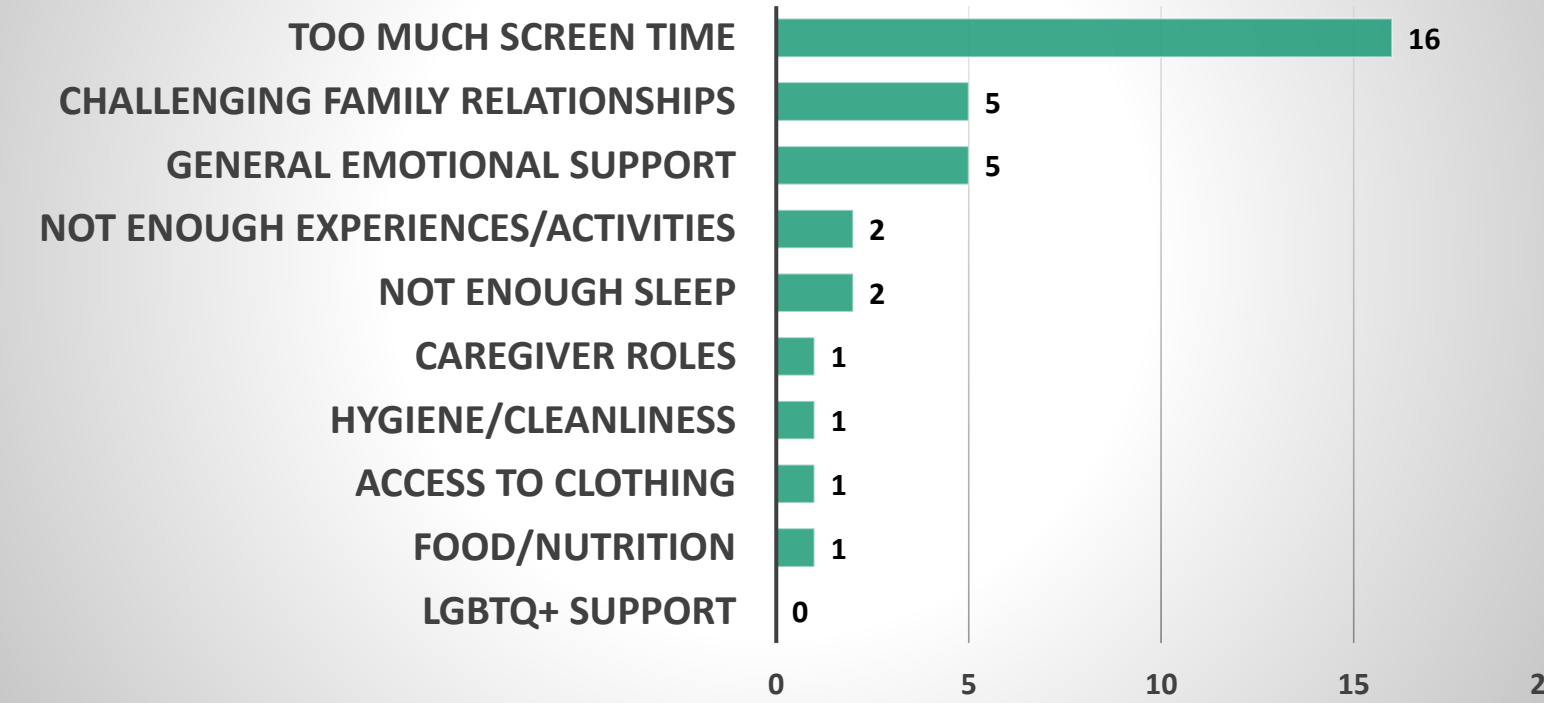
SHCC Survey Response Demographics

- Parent of a child at SHCC — 78%
- Caregiver/guardian of a child at SHCC — 7%
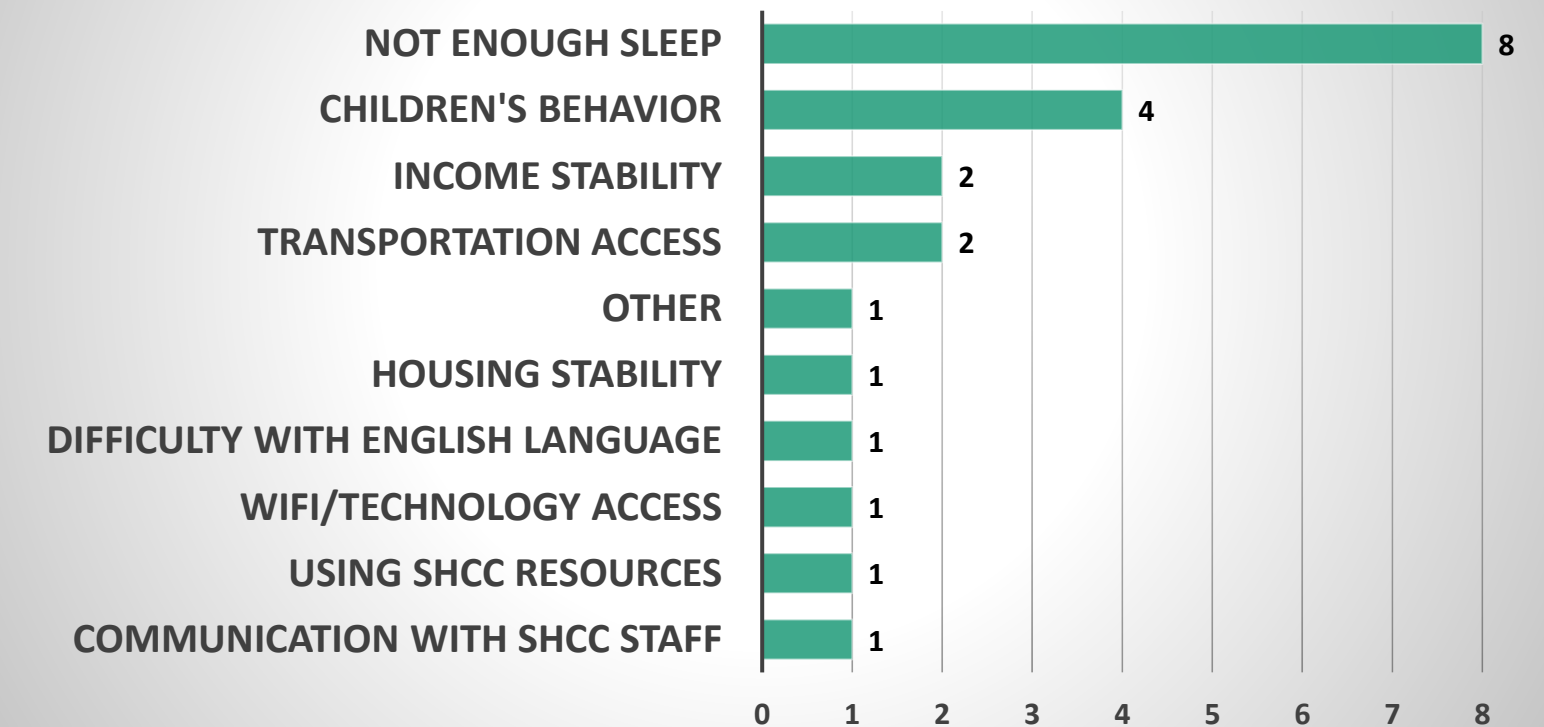- Other — 15%
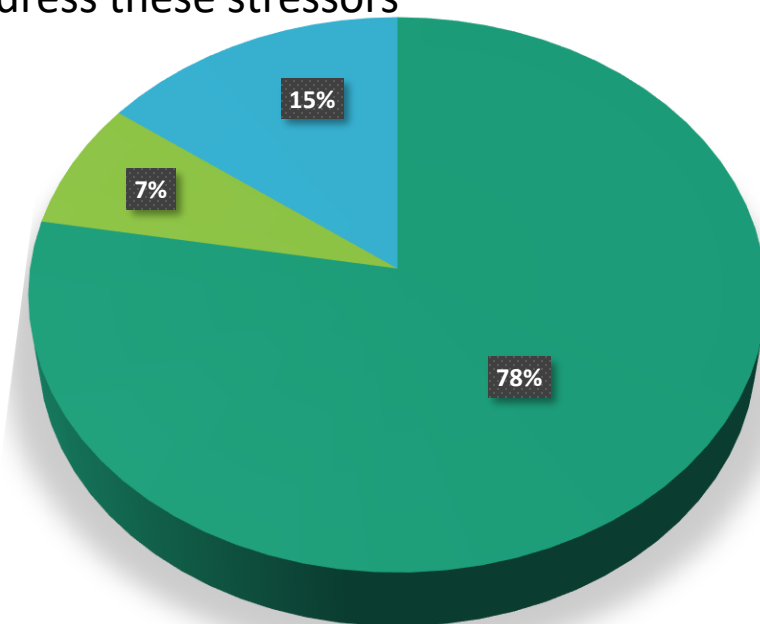
RESULTS

- 26 survey responses were collected from ~100 SHCC families

- 78% (n=21) of participants identified as parents

- 15% (n=4) of participants reported interest in joining a caregiver advisory committee

Caregiver-identified Stressors (Relevant to Children)

- TOO MUCH SCREEN TIME — 16
- CHALLENGING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS — 5
- GENERAL EMOTIONAL SUPPORT — 5
- NOT ENOUGH EXPERIENCES/ACTIVITIES — 2
- NOT ENOUGH SLEEP — 2
- CAREGIVER ROLES — 1
- HYGIENE/CLEANLINESS — 1
- ACCESS TO CLOTHING — 1
- FOOD/NUTRITION — 1
- LGBTQ+ SUPPORT — 0

Caregiver-identified Stressors (Relevant to Caregiver)

- NOT ENOUGH SLEEP — 8
- CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR — 4
- INCOME STABILITY — 2
- TRANSPORTATION ACCESS — 2
- OTHER — 1
- HOUSING STABILITY — 1
- DIFFICULTY WITH ENGLISH LANGUAGE — 1
- WIFI/TECHNOLOGY ACCESS — 1
- USING SHCC RESOURCES — 1
- COMMUNICATION WITH SHCC STAFF — 1

Notes on category titles: Challenging family relationships (ex. divorce); Experiences/activities (ex. Afterschool programs), Caregiver roles (ex. Children caring for other family members); Using SHCC resources (ex. Negative attitudes towards using the food pantry)

POTENTIAL ACTIONABLE SOLUTIONS

Parent/Caregiver Advisory Committee	Provides a sustainable avenue for direct communication, constructive feedback, and collaboration between SHCC staff and parents/caregivers.
"SHCC Unplugged" – Screen Time Management Group	Establishes a supportive program that develops offline/outdoor activities that encourage students to stay engaged, creative, and active outside of school.
Babysitter & Child Care Training Programs	Provides educational resources for youth community members to become certified babysitters for families that are actively seeking help with childcare.

DISCUSSION

- Most common stressor: screen time for children. Other top stressors related to a need for childcare. Actionable solutions were designed to address both these concerns

- Expectations of caregiver stressors from SHCC staff interviews differed from results of caregiver surveys. Qualitative data from staff interviews suggested the most common struggles were related to food insecurity, unstable home environments, income instability, etc.

- To address the main stressor of children screen time: the American Academy of Pediatrics does not set screen time recommendations and endorses individualized family screen time limits; therefore, families can be supported in learning how to set these limits and to find alternative activities, or use screens to promote healthy activities (Nagata, 2020)

- To address challenging family relationships and inadequate emotional support, we also propose implementing a social and emotional learning curriculum which has been shown to equip children with the skills to effectively address interpersonal situations (Durlak, 2011)

- Limitations: Survey was self-report and only 26% of SHCC families completed the survey, making it difficult to draw accurate conclusions on the most common SHCC caregiver struggles. This many not have been a representative sample

- Future steps: implementing the proposed solutions and studying the effectiveness in improving caregiver stress