



INTRODUCTION

- Current research suggests maternal mental health concerns have grown tenfold during the pandemic¹, and that parenting stress has increased significantly as well².
- Increased parenting stress is directly linked to maternal depression³ which can lead to lower quality parenting including harsh disciplinary action⁴ and puts children at a greater risk of internalizing and externalizing behaviours and developmental delays⁵.
- Research has yet to qualitatively examine whether impacts of stress and resources to assist family coping differ based on maternal depression status.
- Understanding how COVID-19 affects families differently depending on maternal depression status is critical for informing unique supports required for different families.
- The aim of the current study is to identify the stressors families are facing, resources they need, and to examine thematic differences in mothers' responses based on maternal depression symptomology.

METHODS

Participants

- N = 140 mothers of children aged 2-5 were recruited via social media platforms.
- Average age of mothers was 34.39 years (SD = 7.24).

Measures

COVID-19 Questionnaire:

- Open-ended questionnaire about family experiences during the pandemic.
 1. Please describe how the pandemic has impacted the stress you and your family are feeling or dealing with.
 2. What has been the biggest struggle for you and your family since the start of the COVID-19 restrictions?
 3. Have there been any areas of family life that have improved since the start of the COVID-19 restrictions?
 4. What resources would help your family deal with changes your family is experiencing due to COVID-19?

Patient Health Questionnaire Depression Scale (PHQ-9):

- To measure maternal depression severity, mothers rated how often they express a depressive symptom within a given week.
- Depression categories were associated with the following scores: minimal (1-4), mild (5-9), moderate (10-14), moderately severe (15-19), and severe (20-27).

Procedure

- During Zoom assessments, mothers completed the COVID-19 Questionnaire from which answers were qualitatively analyzed.
- Responses were coded and grouped into themes which were compared between three depression groups: 1) minimal to no depression (n = 63), 2) mild depression (n = 34), and 3) moderate to severe depression (n = 43) to determine differential experiences and supports needed between depression groups.

RESULTS

Shared Themes Across Depression Groups

Figure 1. Themes for Q1.

1. Please describe how the pandemic has impacted the stress you and your family are feeling or dealing with.

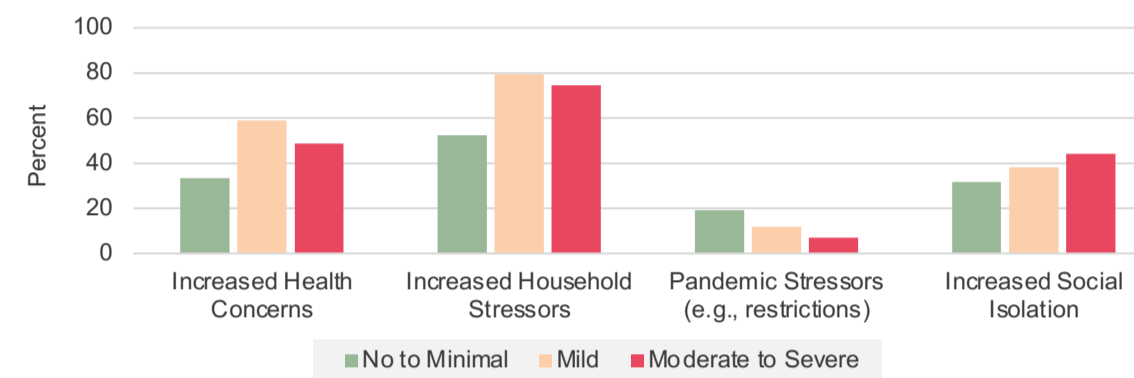


Figure 2. Themes for Q2.

2. What has been the biggest struggle for you and your family since the start of the COVID-19 restrictions?

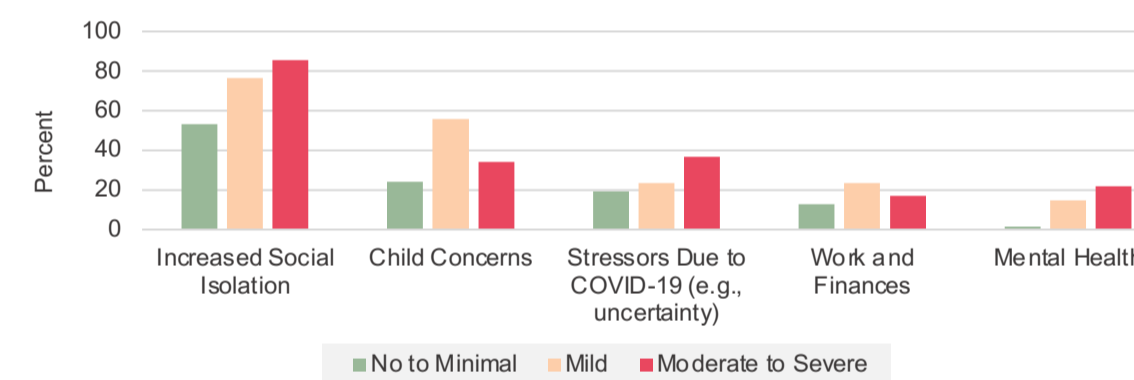


Figure 3. Themes for Q3.

3. Have there been any areas of family life that have improved since the start of the COVID-19 restrictions?

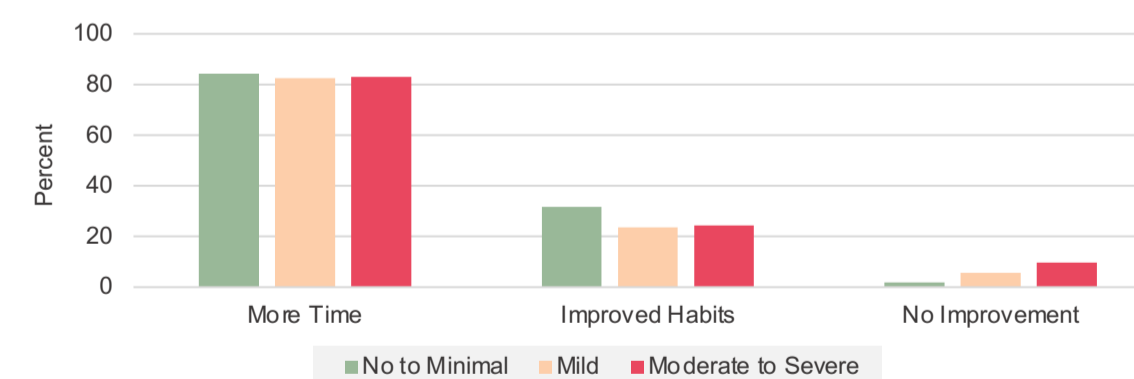
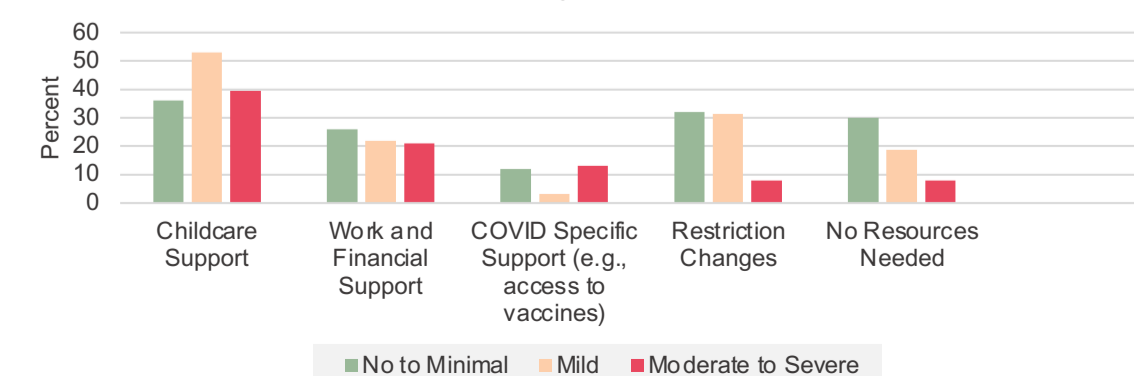


Figure 4. Themes for Q4.

4. What resources would help your family deal with changes your family is experiencing due to COVID-19?



Contrasting Themes Between Depression Groups

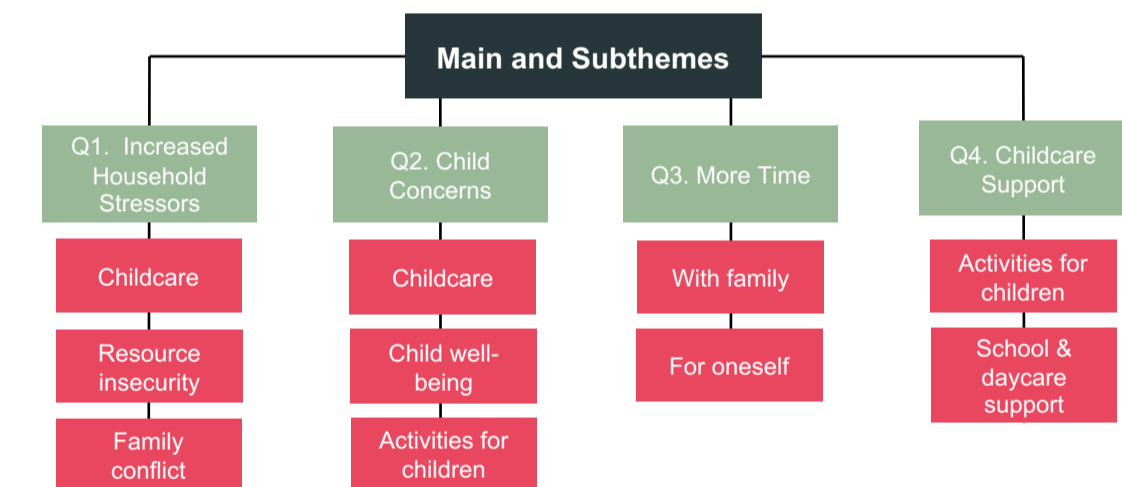
Table 1. Themes exclusive to certain groups.

Question	Theme	Only Found In	Percent
1.	No change or decrease in stress levels	No to Minimal	13.8
4.	Mental Health Resources	Moderate to Severe	23.7
4.	Parenting Resources	Moderate to Severe	18.4

Sample responses to Q1. (1: minimal depression, 2: severe depression)

1. "I don't think the COVID has impacted the stress in our life, just that it has made us look forward to time spent outside the house."
2. "I find myself more irritable and sometimes not as patient with my son...my mental health was declining. I found it hard to take my classes online and juggle motherhood at the same time."

Example Main Themes and Subthemes Across Questions



DISCUSSION

- Mothers with higher levels of depression experienced higher stress in 8 of 9 themes identified in Q1 and Q2 (Figures 1 and 2).
- Lack of change or decreased stress levels was only reported by those with no to minimal depression.
- Fewer mothers with higher levels of depression reported improved habits (e.g., healthy eating, exercise) compared to those with lower levels.
- Only mothers with moderate to severe depression reported mental health and parenting resources as supports that would assist coping.
- Varied proportions across themes highlight differential family experiences between maternal depression levels and that mothers with depression may be impacted further than those without.
- Results reveal the urgent need for accessible parenting and mental health services to assist mothers with depression in coping during the pandemic and inform unique supports and services to support different families.

REFERENCES

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