

Melanie Warken¹, Jadwiga Dolega¹, Martina Richmond², Cheska Daguio³, Yara Marei³, Cassidy Roberts³

¹ Population & Public Health, Saskatchewan Health Authority

² Nutrition and Food Services, Saskatchewan Health Authority

³ Dietetic Practicum Student, Saskatchewan Health Authority

BACKGROUND

Children aged zero to five experience significant transitions in growth, development, and nutritional requirements (Browser, 2017). Public Health Nutritionists with the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) aim to reach caregivers of young children with nutrition information and resources through other health professionals who have regular contact with them. Other health professionals commonly provide information to caregivers during in-person group sessions and classes, newsletters/ brochures, and child health clinics. According to Gazmararian et al. (2014) specific health information caregivers of young children wanted varied from breastfeeding to transitions in growth to sleep safety.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting public health measures and restrictions have had a significant impact on many aspects of living, including caregivers' access to health information. COVID-19 has changed how health information is provided to caregivers, as the percentage of in-person visits has decreased significantly throughout the course of the pandemic (MacLeod, 2020).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Public Health Nutritionists in Saskatchewan wanted to re-evaluate the ways information and resources are provided to caregivers of children between the ages 0-5 years so that it is most effective to caregivers' learning and understanding.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to identify what health information and resources caregivers want to access and how they want it provided to them.

METHODS

Saskatchewan families with children aged 0-5 years were invited to participate in a 12-item online survey. Public Health Nutritionists in Saskatchewan distributed the survey to their email lists in January 2021. The survey link was also distributed on SHA's social media including Facebook and Twitter (Figure 1). Convenience sampling was used. A draw for a \$50 gift card to a local grocery store in the community was provided as an incentive to participate in the survey. Survey and data collection occurred via the online REDCap program.

METHODS cont'd

Figure 1– Example of Social Media post promoting the survey



RESULTS

Respondent Demographics

A total of 1809 participants consented to participate in the survey. Demographic questions were asked including age, and the number of children they had (Table 1).

Table 1 – Respondent Demographics

Characteristic	n	%
Age	n = 1,566	
15 or under	8	0.5
16-20	3	0.2
21-30	397	25
31-40	1044	67
41+	114	7
Number of Children	n = 1,615	
1 child	518	32
2 children	700	43
3 children	307	19
4+ children	90	6

Respondent Demographics

The majority of participants, 75% (n=1192), lived in a city >5,000 people while 24% of participants (n=395) lived in a town or village. Twenty-one percent (n=337) of participants lived in the Regina, SK area and 19% (n=305) lived in the Saskatoon, SK area.

Health Topics Requested

Results indicated that parents want information on a variety of health topics. These topics fell within the categories of food and feeding, parenting, and health and safety. (Figure 2).

RESULTS cont'd

Health Topics Requested

One participant stated: *"Family health relies heavily on family nutrition. We are a middle income family and find it extremely hard to find affordable help in the nutrition field. We could use some help for family guidance not just for my children. I would like to model these good behaviors for my kids so it becomes automatic for them."*

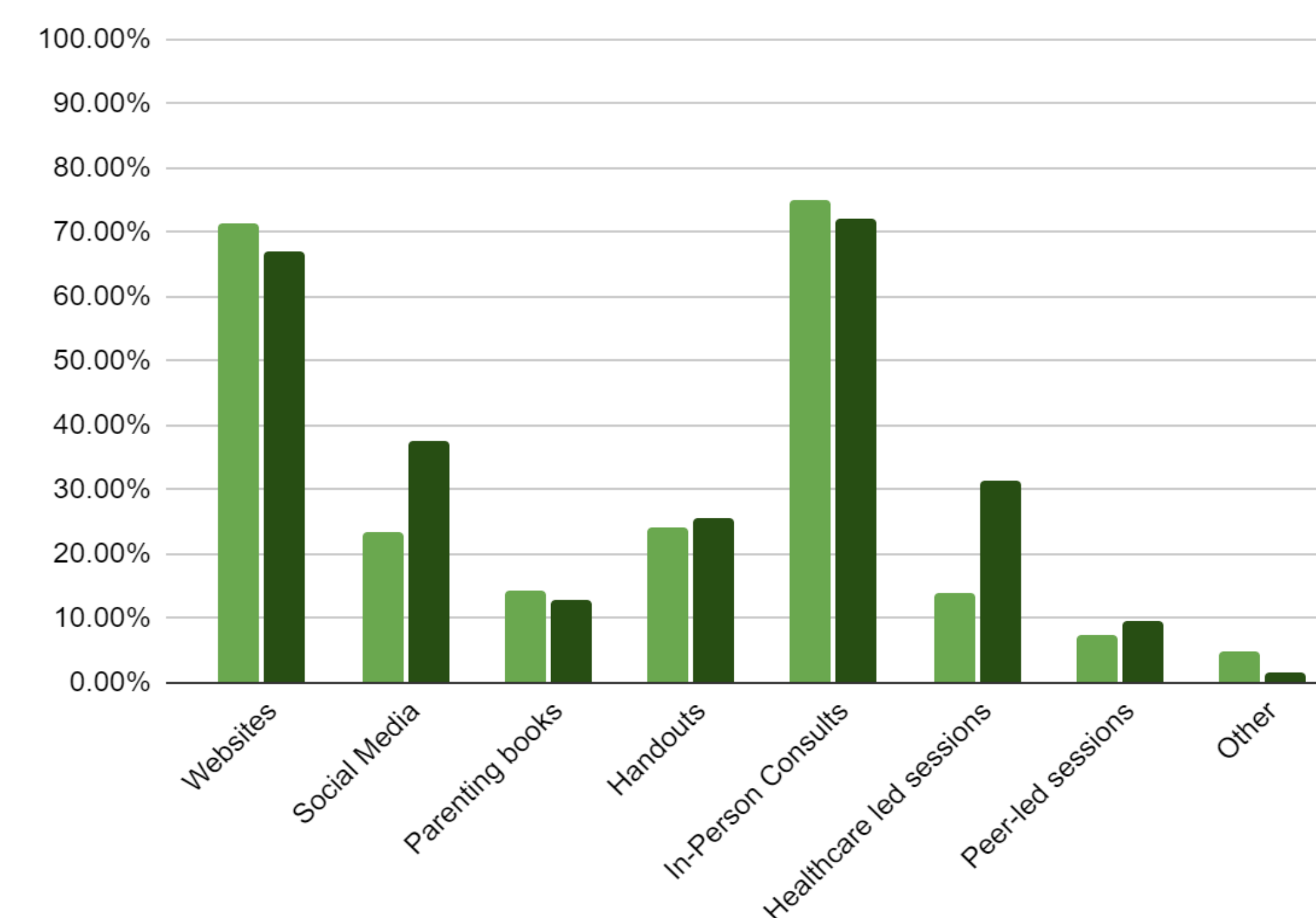
Figure 2– Most popular topics caregivers wanted to know more about



COVID-19 & Health Information Access

Despite the many challenges associated with the pandemic, participants wanted health information disseminated to them in a similar manner to before the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 2). Participants preferred receiving health information either online through websites (before COVID 71%, n=1153/1614; during COVID 67%, n=1084/1613) or during in-person appointments with health care providers (before COVID 75%, n=1213/1614; during COVID 72%, n=1166/1613). One participant stated: *"as a first-time parent you don't know what's "normal" and not being able to see medical professionals in person for milestone checkups has made it difficult to know if [their] child is meeting those milestones"*.

Figure 3– Comparison of Preferred Methods for Accessing Health Information: Before (light)/During (dark) COVID-19



RESULTS cont'd

Health Information & Social Media

Participants reported increased reliance on social media platforms to find health information during the pandemic (pre-COVID 23% n=376/1614; during COVID 37% n=604/1613). Our study found that Facebook (90%, n=542/602) and Instagram (60%, n=361/602) were the two most popular social media platforms used to access health information

CONCLUSION

Our study found there were a number of key topics participants wanted to know more about. The most popular topics were communicating with my child(ren), menu planning, and toilet training.

Caregivers prefer to obtain health information through online platforms including websites and social media, as well as during in-person appointments with their healthcare providers. The results of the survey demonstrate the need for increased focus in developing online resources for this population group, and access to a variety of reliable resources is imperative.

RELEVANCE TO PRACTICE

The survey results will help guide Public Health Nutritionists and other health professionals in the decision-making process of what resources to create and how to provide them to caregivers.

REFERENCES

- Browser, E. (2017). Toddler and Preschool Nutrition. *Nutrition through the life cycle* (pp. 261-270). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.
- Cucinotta, D., & Vanelli, M. (2020). WHO Declared COVID-19 a Pandemic. *Acta Biomed*, 157-160.
- Gazmararian, J., Dalmida, S., Merino, Y., Blake, S., Thompson, W., Gaydos, L. (2014). What New Mothers Need to Know: Perspectives from Women and Providers in Georgia. *Matern Child Health J*, 18, 839-851. Doi: 10.1007/s10995-013-1308-8
- MacLeod, M. (2020). *New Normal: Are virtual doctor's appointments here to stay?* Retrieved from <https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/new-normal-are-virtual-doctor-s-appointments-here-to-stay-1.4939255>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to extend their thanks and appreciation to the following:

- Public Health Nutritionists in Saskatchewan
- Saskatchewan Health Authority Communications