



# Systems of Hope Evaluation Brief



April 2009

## Focus on Caregivers: Caregiver Strain

The Evaluation Team presented information on caregiver strain, depression, and social support to the Systems of Hope Governing Board. To understand caregiver strain, we examined how much caregivers are affected by the special demands related to caring for a child with emotional and behavioral problems. Caregivers responded to a set of questions concerning the degree to which families have experienced problems in the past 6 months (1- "Not at All" to 3- "Somewhat" 5- "Very Much").



The items are related to three categories:

### Objective Strain:

Observable disruptions in family and community life (e.g., interruption of personal time, lost work time, financial strain).

### Subjective Internalizing Strain:

Negative feelings the caregiver experiences such as worry, guilt, and fatigue.

### Subjective Externalizing Strain:

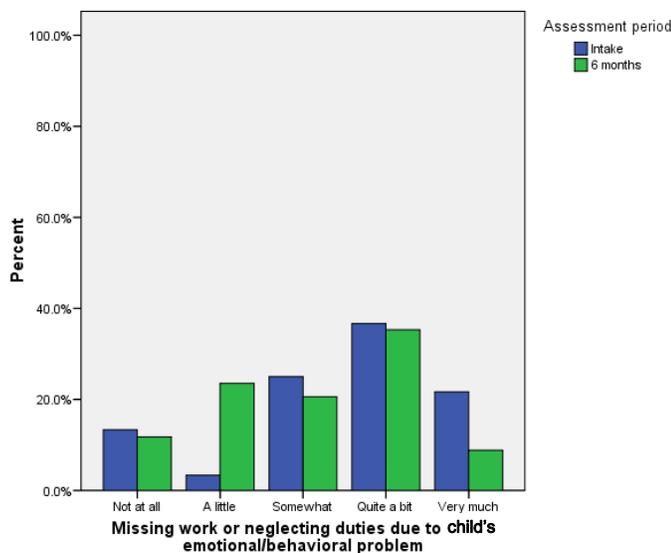
Negative feelings about the child such as anger, resentment, or embarrassment.



## Interviews completed

Baseline interviews between November 2006-December 2008	<b>61</b>
6 Month interviews between June 2007 and January 2009	<b>34</b>

## Objective Strain



The information presented includes responses from the 6 months prior to entering Systems of Hope (baseline) and 6 months after (follow-up).

Scale= 1-5

**Baseline mean** (average): 3.52 (Between "Somewhat" and "Quite a bit")

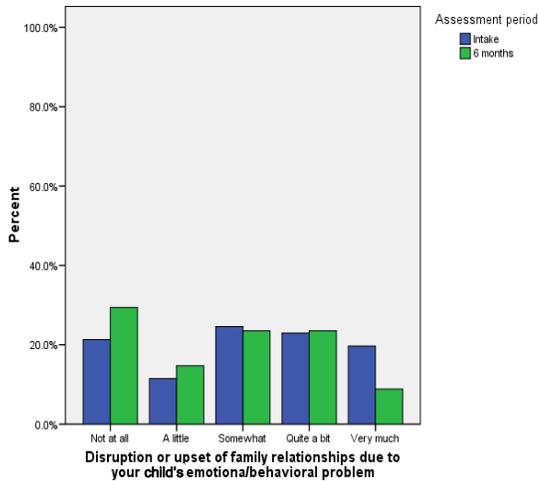
**Follow-up mean:** 3.03 ("Somewhat")

n (number of caregivers): 33

There is a significant difference in missing work or neglecting duties from baseline to six months.

**At baseline, 21.7% of caregivers said that missing work or neglecting duties was "very much" a problem, by follow-up it dropped to 8.8%.**

# Objective Strain



**Baseline mean** (average): 3.29 (Between “Somewhat” and “Quite a bit”)

**Follow-up mean:** 2.68 (Between “A little” and “Somewhat”)

**n** (number of caregivers): 34

There is a significant difference in disruption or upset of family relationships from baseline to six months. Overall, objective strain decreased after six months

# Subjective Externalizing Strain

This category looks at the negative emotions caregivers might have towards their child.

Questions include:

- “How angry did you feel towards your child?”
- “How resentful did you feel toward your child?”

Caregivers did not express strong feelings of anger, resentment, or embarrassment towards their child, indicating that parents may have difficulty in expressing these kinds of negative feelings about their child if they are experiencing them.

**Baseline mean** (average): 3.09 (“Somewhat”)

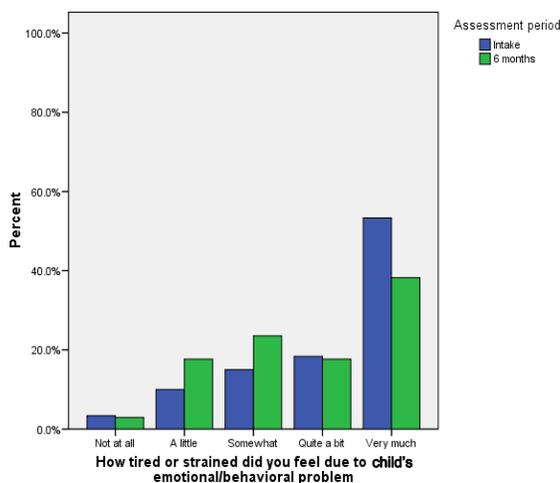
**Follow-up mean:** 3.02 (“Somewhat”)

**n** (number of caregivers): 32

From intake to six months, we found no significant difference in subjective externalizing strain.

**Most caregivers felt very sad about their child’s emotional/behavioral issues at baseline, this decreased at follow-up.**

# Subjective Internalizing Strain



**Baseline mean** (average): 4.18 (“Quite a bit”)

**Follow-up mean:** 3.67 (Between “Somewhat” and “Quite a bit”)

**n** (number of caregivers): 33

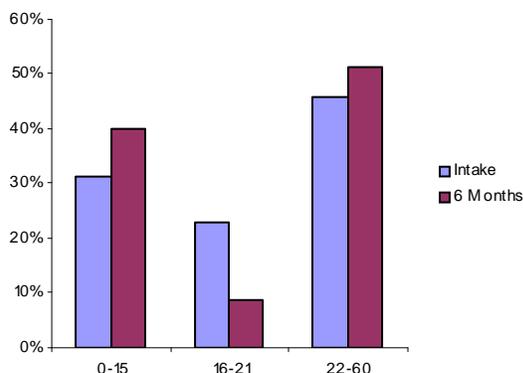
Six months after entering Systems of Hope, caregivers report less strain due to their child’s emotional and/or behavioral problems. Subjective internalizing strain (worry, guilt, and fatigue) also decreases.

# Depression Screening

Caregivers were asked a set of questions related to how they felt or behaved during the past week. The responses ranged from “Rarely or none of the time (0)” to “Most or all of the time (3)”. The answers were totaled for a score. Scores can range from 0 to 60.

This questionnaire is a screening tool, and results should not be interpreted as an assessment of caregivers.

- 15 or less is not indicative of depression.
- 16-21 indicates the need for a more in depth evaluation and treatment for mild to Moderate Depression.
- 22 or higher indicates probable Major Depression.



**“46% of caregivers at baseline and 51.4% at 6 months had scores of 22 and higher, indicating sustained depressive symptoms.”**

# Social Support

Caregivers were asked how often companionship, assistance, and other types of support were available. The survey examines the amount of support an individual receives at a given point in time.

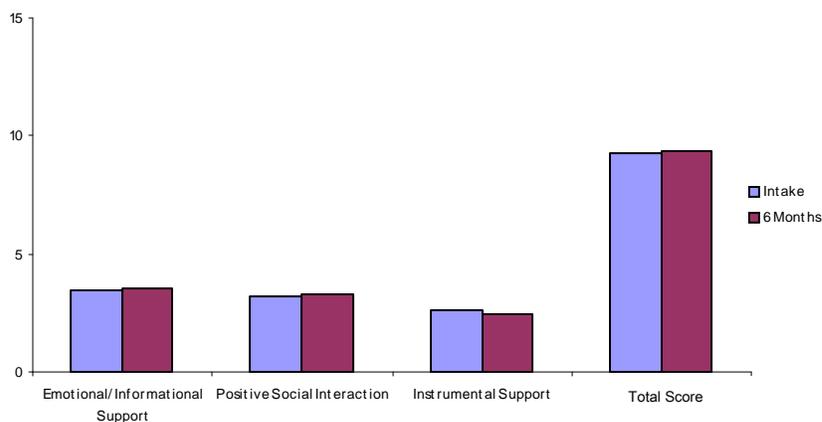
The survey responses are categorized into 3 areas:

- **Emotional/Informational Support** involves the expression of empathy
- **Positive Social Interaction**, engaging in social and leisure activities
- **Instrumental Support** refers to the provision of money, goods, and services that can be used in coping and problem solving efforts.

The answer responses are on a scale of 1, “None of the time” to 5, “All of the time”. The maximum score for each category is 5 and when all three categories are combined the maximum total score is 15.



Our findings point out that it can be a challenge to obtain forms of social support from friends and other family members, especially when it is instrumental. Friends and family are key for the reason that they remain when professional services end. Solutions as to how increase the involvement of friends and family, in useful ways, can improve social support.



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## Summary

**The results have implications for how Systems of Hope should address caregiver strain, depression, and social support:**

- **At intake, caregivers reported a great deal of strain. Six months after intake, caregiver strain significantly decreased overall, and subjective internalized strain and objective strain sub-scales decreased significantly.**
- **Over 70% of caregivers had mild to major depressive symptoms at intake and 60% at six months. If not already done, SOH may want to consider the inclusion of a depression screening tool for caregivers at intake and appropriate follow-up when doing service planning.**
- **The instrumental support category in the Social Support Survey had the lowest scores, 2.64 (intake) and 2.45 (6 months), between “A little of the time” and “Some of the time”. A review of informal and/or peer-to-peer support activities may be needed to determine whether or not these services are accessible to all.**

### **Questionnaires:**

#### **Caregiver Strain Questionnaire (CGSQ)-**

- **Examines how much caregivers are affected by the special demands associated with caring for a child with emotional and behavioral problems.**

#### **Center for Epidemiological Studies– Depression Scale (CES-D)-**

- **Screens for depressive symptoms in individuals. This survey is not a diagnostic tool, further evaluation is necessary.**

#### **Social Support Survey (SSS)-**

- **Evaluates the amount of support an individual receives at a given point in time.**