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Report Highlights

Adults across the US rate childhood obesity at the top of the list of big health problems for children in their communities.

Hispanic adults rate bullying as the #2 health concern for children in their communities.

Black adults rate school violence as the #3 health concern for children in their communities; Hispanic adults also rate school violence in their top 10.

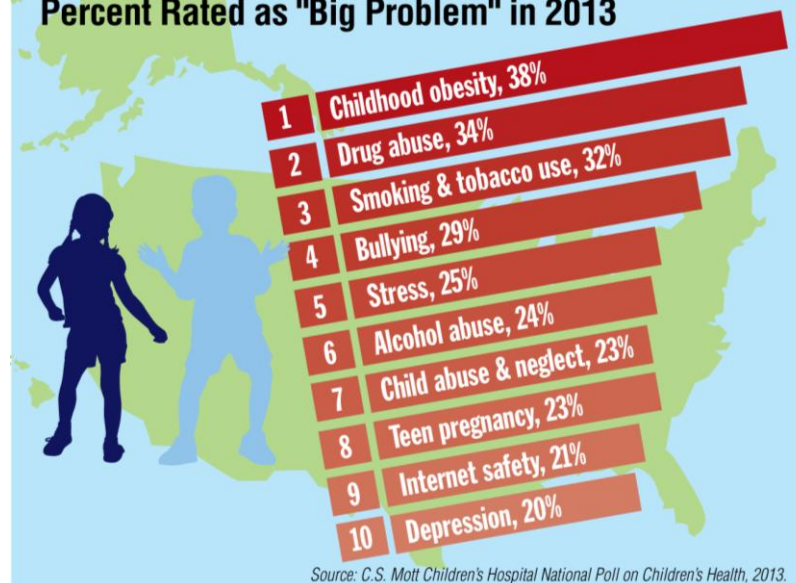
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A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Unit.

Top Child Health Concerns: Obesity, Drug Abuse & Smoking

In this year's seventh annual survey of top health concerns conducted by the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, adults rate childhood obesity as the leading health concern for children in their communities. Drug abuse and smoking & tobacco use are the second and third most commonly identified child health problems by adults across the United States.

Figure 1. Top 10 U.S. Children's Health Concerns, Percent Rated as "Big Problem" in 2013



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2013.

As in [past years](#), many of the top 10 health concerns relate to health behaviors for children and teens: childhood obesity, smoking & tobacco use, drug & alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy and bullying. Top child health concerns this year also include stress, internet safety, child abuse & neglect, and depression.

Childhood obesity tops the list of biggest child health problems, as measured in the Poll. From 2007 to 2012, drug abuse and smoking have also consistently been rated at or near the top of the list of health problems for kids from the perspective of adults (not just parents) across the United States.

This year, other child health concerns rated as a "big problem" include: sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS (21%), school violence (19%), not enough opportunity for physical activity (18%), unsafe neighborhoods (17%), motor vehicle accidents (17%), ADD/ADHD (16%), gun-related injuries (16%), hunger (12%), suicide (12%), racial inequality (12%), autism (9%), safety of medications (7%), food allergies (7%), safety of vaccines (6%) and lead poisoning (3%).

Similar to past editions of the top 10 list in the National Poll on Children's Health, adults from different race/ethnicity backgrounds express different views about the top child health concerns in their communities (Figure 2).

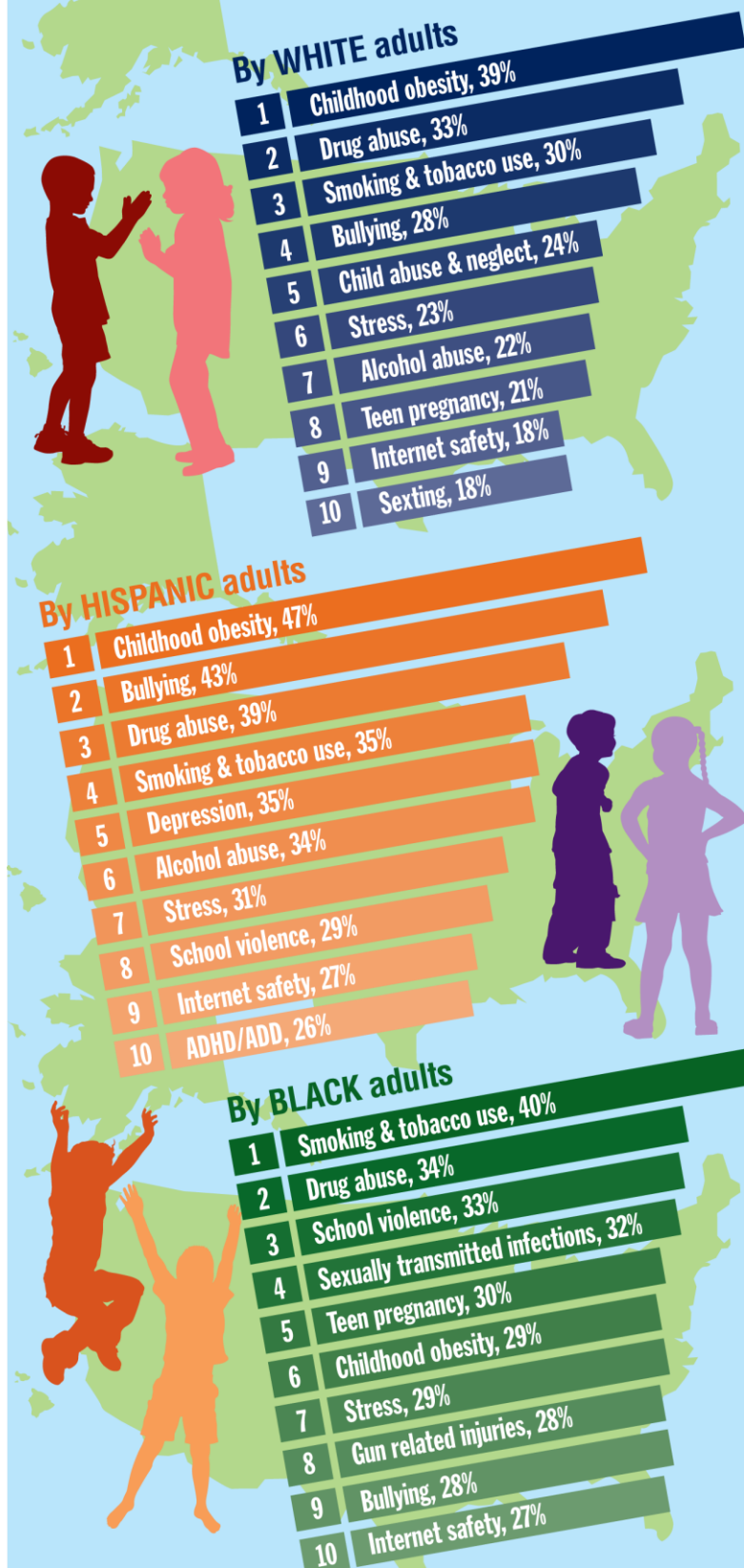
Hispanic adults differ from blacks and whites in their comparatively high levels of concern about childhood obesity, bullying, drug abuse, alcohol abuse and depression.

Black adults differ from Hispanics and whites in their comparatively high levels of concern about smoking & tobacco use, teen pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections/HIV.

Compared with white adults, black adults and Hispanic adults rate school violence, stress and internet safety as substantially greater health problems for children in their communities.

Despite these differences, Hispanic, black and white adults agree that drug abuse is one of the top three health concerns for kids in their communities. Other concerns that made the top 10 in all three groups included smoking & tobacco use, bullying, childhood obesity, stress and internet safety.

Figure 2. Top U.S. Child Health Concerns, Rated as a "Big Problem" by Race/Ethnicity in 2013



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2013.

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by GfK Custom Research, LLC (GfK), for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered in June 2013 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults age 18 and older (n=1,996) from GfK's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 58% among the panel members contacted to participate. The margin of error is ± 1 to 4 percentage points.

Implications

Every summer, the National Poll on Children's Health takes the pulse of the views of adults in the U.S. about child health issues, as a way to help inform program priorities in medicine and public health and measure whether information about specific health challenges for children and adolescents are reaching the public.

Results of this latest Poll indicate that adults view childhood obesity as the biggest health problem for U.S. children. There is little doubt that messaging from medical professionals, through public health programs and in the popular media about the risks of childhood obesity is widespread. Recent data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicate that rates of obesity in early childhood may be decreasing for the first time in some states, which may be attributable to the high level of concern and responses from parents, families and communities. Yet, rates of childhood obesity remain substantially higher than a generation ago, and the connection to obesity and obesity-related health problems later in life remains strong. The high level of public concern about childhood obesity may be key to sustaining national and local efforts to address the obesity epidemic.

The strong link of many of the top 10 child health concerns to health behaviors of children and their families indicates that the public understands the powerful role of behavior in health – in terms of short-term impact and long-term consequences. Many of the top 10 child health concerns are as much or more about public health than about medical care.

Moreover, not all groups see problem behaviors through the same lens. Findings from this Poll also reflect markedly varied perspectives about child health concerns by race/ethnicity. For example, while Hispanic adults are more likely than black or white adults to express concerns about bullying and alcohol abuse, black adults express greater concerns about teen pregnancy, and both blacks and Hispanics express greater concern than whites about school violence. Such differences of perspective likely reflect street-level realities that child health varies across communities, and that perceptions of problems and need are essential to measure when planning, developing and implementing programs. To be successful, programs will likely need to respect and address community-specific health priorities for improving and safeguarding child health.

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