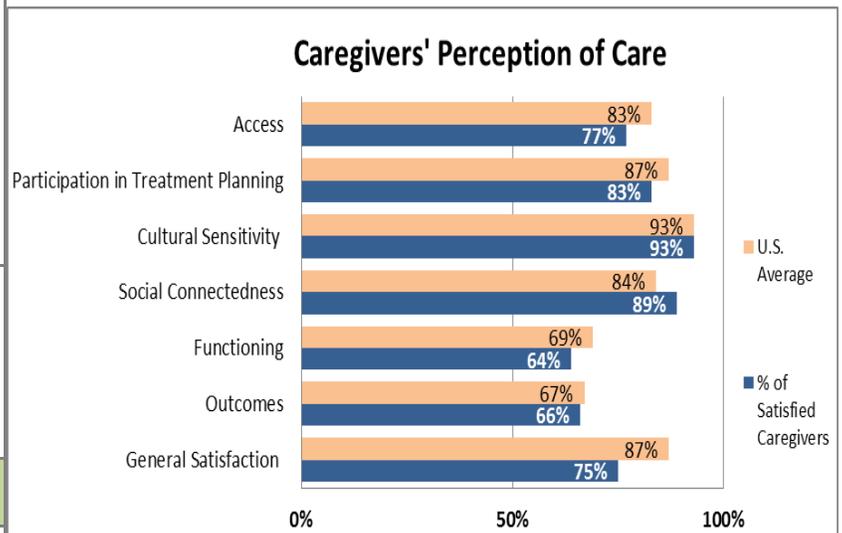




Caregivers' Perceptions of Public Mental Health Services in the District of Columbia

Each year, the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH), along with other states, is required by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to conduct a satisfaction survey to assess caregivers' perception of the services their child receives from the public mental health system. The Youth Services for Families Survey (YSS-F) was designed for caregivers of children (≤ 17), who receive mental health services. Survey results identify areas for system and practice improvement and reported annually to the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS). For this study, a random sample of caregivers of youth (N=1517), whose child received at least two mental health services in FY 2014 (October 1, 2013 through September 30, 2014), were included in the study. Out of the sample, 416 caregivers completed the survey and answered questions that were on a Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The outcome data reported are based on the percentage of caregivers (respondents), who completed two-thirds of the questions in each domain. Content analyses were conducted for qualitative analysis to identify major themes for recommended improvements to services.

Suggestions to Improve Services	
Staff Professionalism	Timely communication with family, consistency of staff, availability of staff
Tailored Services	Therapy or services (e.g., group therapy for girls), supportive services for caregivers, accessibility to services (e.g., transportation)
Timing of Services	Evening and weekend hours, shorter wait time, more time with staff
Most Helpful about Services	
Individualized Services	School and home visits, therapy, mentoring, resources
Relationships with Staff	Staff becoming like a family member
Improvements in Child's Mood and Behavior	Decreased anger, learning coping skills
Availability of Staff and Services	Ability to contact staff with ease
Someone to Talk to	Child able to vent to staff



Implications for Practice: Greater attention is needed on improving children's functioning and outcomes, as reflected by the scores. Caregivers' offered several ways to improve services that may improve functioning and outcomes. Based on their recommendations, providers should review agency standards with all staff to ensure that quality services are being provided (timely communication, consistency of staff).¹ Retention strategies can also be employed to reduce turnover and disruption in staff-family working relationships. Exploring caregivers' need for tailored services is also essential. This includes matching the child's needs with the appropriate level of intervention (goodness-of-fit).² Lastly, providers should consult with caregivers and their children to address any barriers to care (location, transportation, scheduling) at the initial stage of treatment and throughout the course of care.

¹Jain, R., Jain, S., & Dhar, U. (2002). Measuring customer relationship management. *Journal of Services Research* 2(2), 97-109.

²Stroul, B. A. (1989). Community support systems for persons with long-term mental illness: A conceptual framework. *Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal*, 12(3), 9-26.