

ICH&HPSY 2020

5th International Conference on Health and Health Psychology

CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING AND DISTANCE LEARNING DURING PANDEMICS COVID-19

Ewa Lewandowska (a)*

*Corresponding author

(a) The Maria Grzegorzewska Univeristy, Warsaw, Poland, ewalew@aps.edu.pl

Abstract

The main objective of the systematic review will be to explore children's wellbeing and distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Particularly, understanding the effects of COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning on the wellbeing of children can help in the development of effective intervention strategies. The literature review included 20 articles selected after a rigorous electronic search. After the synthesis and analysis of the evidence in these articles, it is apparent that COVID-19 pandemic is likely to compromise the mental wellbeing of children. Although the effects of the pandemic are evident on various dimensions of wellbeing, the psychological effects are highly evident in children. The lack of adequate social interactions, home confinement, social distancing, and isolation all have the capacity to trigger the development of anxiety and depression among children. The review demonstrates that adapting to the online learning environment has its set of challenges for many children.

© 2020 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Children well-being, COVID-19, distance learning

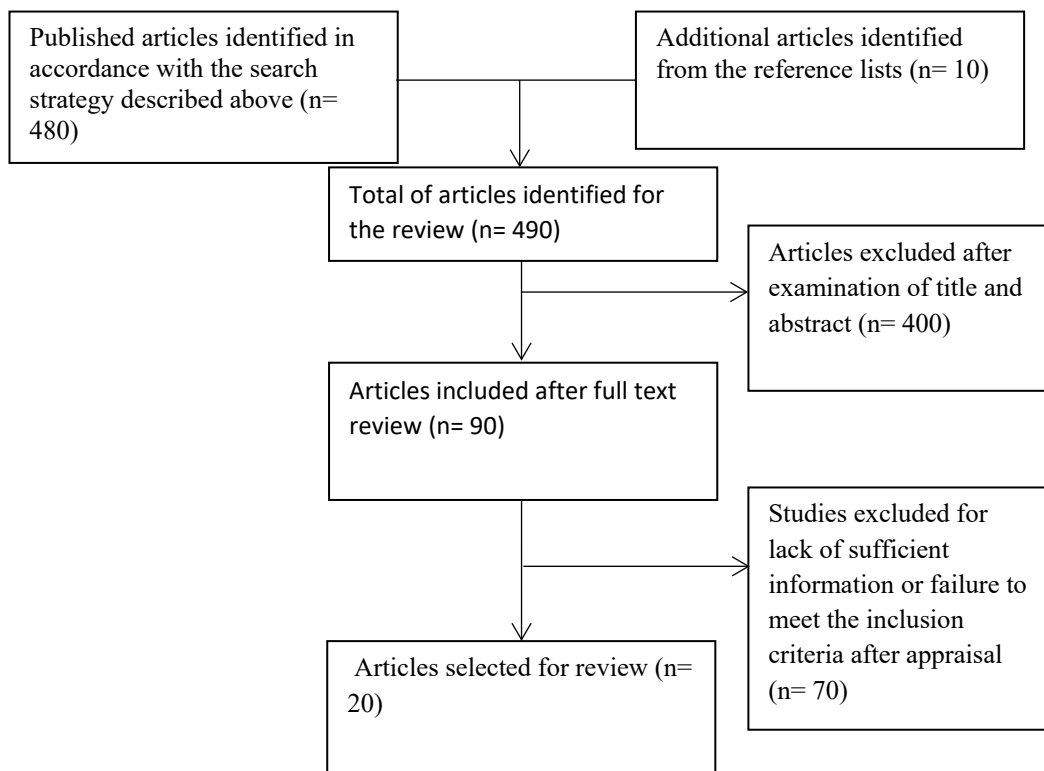


1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a major disruption on various systems and continued to register a diverse range of adverse outcomes. Particularly, COVID-19 has registered economic, social, and psychological effects. Children form one of the most vulnerable population groups that are currently experiencing the adverse outcomes of the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, children were able to lead normal lives and attend school on a regular basis. However, COVID-19 compelled many governments to disrupt the school year through the indefinite closure of learning institutions. According to Fore (2020), about 94% of global schools resorted to immediate closure as a way of combating the spread of the virus. The pandemic obligated families to embrace new lifestyle patterns with children spending more time at home. The changes caused by COVID-19 have disrupted the usual routines for children, placing them at risk of experiencing psychological trauma. Children have also been at the receiving end of the uncertainties as well as anxiety because of the pandemic. Children have witnessed a significant change of people's lives due to COVID-19. These experiences are likely to alter the wellbeing of children as the pandemic continues to register long-term effects. Understanding how COVID-19 has influenced the wellbeing of children establishes a platform for considering the various dimensions of wellbeing and the potential impact of the pandemic on each dimension.

2. Methodology

The researcher conducted an electronic search for published articles from the Web of Science database. The search focused on identifying articles published between 2019 and 2020. The key search terms were specific to COVID-19 and wellbeing of children. The search gave attention to different dimensions of wellbeing. Other key terms were mental health of children during pandemics and effects of distance learning in children. The initial search yielded 480 articles. From the references in these articles, the researcher identified 10 more articles. The researcher reviewed the titles and abstracts of the 490 articles to determine the ones that did not meet the inclusion criteria. After reviewing the abstracts and titles, the researcher eliminated 400 articles. A more stringent screening followed that included a review of the entire text. Out of the remaining 90 article, the researcher excluded 70 based on study design, interventions, participants, and the level of information in the specific studies. Moreover, the researcher conducted a rigorous assessment of the study quality with the primary objective of selecting the most relevant studies for the review. After the rigorous screening and review, the researcher settled for 20 studies that met the inclusion criteria.



3. Research Questions

The main research question for this study will be:

- 3.1. How has COVID-19 and distance learning affected the wellbeing of children?

4. Literature Review

4.1. Impact of COVID-19 on the Mental Health of Children

According to Liu et al. (2020), COVID-19 has compelled families to live in quarantine and isolation, a reality that is likely to affect the wellbeing of children. Particularly, many children do not have prior experience of dealing with social distancing and isolation. The health directives regarding quarantine, isolation, and social distancing have disrupted the normal lives of children. Many of the children lack proper coping mechanisms to deal with the new realities. Wang et al. (2020) are of the view that it is time to take measures to address the adverse effects of home confinement on children. Specifically, the closure of schools has obligated children to remain within the home settings, an aspect that is likely to affect the mental health. Specifically, confinement at home reduces their social interactions as well as the amount of time spent on physical activities. Such changes are likely to affect their mental health. Silva Junior et al. (2020) explored the specific mental effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people and adults. The study revealed that COVID-19 has the potential to compromise the mental wellbeing of young people. Courtney et al. (2020) revealed that COVID-19 has the potential to predispose children to anxiety and depression. The evidence from this study relied on the available psychiatric studies on how disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic can make children and young people highly vulnerable to the development of anxiety and depression. In the view of this study, depression and anxiety represent the leading mental

disorders that are highly prevalent among children and youth. These disorders compromise the mental functioning of children and result in adverse health effects.

Xie et al. (2020) provided evidence from a study that analyzed the mental health status of children in home confinement in China. Based on this study, it was apparent that the children were likely to exhibit anxiety-related disorders, depressive symptoms, constant worry, as well as pessimism due to the limited outdoor activities and reduced social interaction due to home confinement. Idoiaga et al. (2020) focused on identifying the social and emotional representations of children during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings from the study demonstrated that children have a constant worry of contracting the Coronavirus and infecting their family members. As a result, many children are exhibiting conflicting emotions that range from being scared to sadness, boredom, anger, and loneliness. The study concluded that it is imperative to establish measures of addressing the psychological, social, educational, as well as the social wellbeing of children during COVID-19. Dalton et al. (2020) place emphasis on the need to protect the psychological wellbeing of children during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is possible to initiate informative conversations as a way of reassuring children of their safety and the measures in place to reduce the cases of infection.

Jiao et al. (2020) paid attention to the behavioral and emotional disorders that have become prevalent among children due to their reactions to the pandemic. Children are experiencing multiple uncertainties and fears that are likely to result in extreme psychological distress that may translate to post-traumatic stress disorder after the pandemic. Varshney et al. (2020) agree that COVID-19 has registered a psychological impact on communities, an aspect that demonstrates adverse effects on children. Based on this study in the Indian community, the younger age was more vulnerable to experiencing a higher psychological impact. Yoshikawa et al. (2020) paid attention to the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on early childhood development. The study revealed that children are likely to register both short-term and long-term adverse effects due to the pandemic. Some of the effects will include cognitive and socioemotional consequences that will have an impact on the overall wellbeing of children. Such effects will compromise the mental health of children in different phases of their development.

4.2. Distance Learning and the Wellbeing of Children during COVID-19 Pandemic

Dong et al. (2020) paid attention to the perspectives of parents towards the online learning of young children during COVID-19 pandemic. Parents may develop significant concerns regarding the effectiveness of online learning as a replacement for face-to-face learning. The adoption of online learning presents unique challenges for young children because it alters the learning environment and other factors that influence effective learning. Chiodini (2020) explored the realities of online learning during COVID-19. The compulsion of children to embrace online learning has presented multiple challenges due to the resulting variations in the learning environment. Mukhtar et al. (2020) revealed the challenges associated with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the study focused on university students, the challenges of adopting online learning modalities are evident across different students. Children are likely to be more vulnerable to experiencing the challenges of online learning during the pandemic.

4.3. Other Effects of COVID-19 on the Wellbeing of Children

Klein et al. (2020) reveals that children are likely to experience adverse health outcomes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The increased risk of children with underlying comorbidities is evident based on the evidence in this article. As a result, providing support to the wellbeing of children is imperative. Rabinowicz et al. (2020) highlighted the health effects of COVID-19 and the presentation of the virus in young children. The evidence provided by these authors reveals the potential burden of the disease in young children that may affect other dimensions of their wellbeing. Sinha et al. (2020) reveal that children have been sidelined during the development of effective interventions that will help different patient populations in dealing with COVID-19 effects. The sidelining of children predisposes them to more complexities that are likely to compromise their overall wellbeing due to the lack of early interventions.

Goldschmidt (2020) is cognizant of the need to provide further support to children as a way of reducing the potential adverse outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic. Duan's et al. (2020) study conducted in China revealed that children were likely to exhibit more depressive symptoms if they live in urban areas, are female, and embark on the emotion-focused coping style. Similarly, the study demonstrated that children were more prone to developing smartphone and internet addiction as a sign of depression. Király et al. (2020) further revealed that children are prone to problematic internet use due to the multiple factors associated with the COVID-19 reality. As a result, it is imperative to work with children and protect them from the various forms of addiction. Racine et al. (2020) revealed that COVID-19 has introduced new realities regarding the risk of mental health illnesses among children and adolescents. Particularly, children who lack adequate information regarding the pandemic are more prone to depressive symptoms as well as those living in the highly infected areas. Children in cities have experienced greater depressive symptoms due to the fear of infection.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The available evidence reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to register a diverse range of direct and indirect impacts on the wellbeing of children. While the pediatric population is only likely to experience milder forms of the illness, children with underlying comorbidities face an increased risk of infection and severity of the coronavirus disease. The effects of the pandemic on the mental wellbeing of children emerge as a critical aspect that requires attention. Children have been demonstrating depressive symptoms due to their perception of the threat that the pandemic poses. Home confinement, the lack of social interactions, and limited social activities all contribute positively to the development of negative mental health outcomes in children. Children are also prone to the development of various forms of addiction due to extreme isolation and quarantine conditions. The evidence gathered from the review also demonstrates the challenges that children are experiencing as they seek to embrace distance learning due to the mandatory closure of schools. The sidelining of children translates to limited interventions that seek to empower children to deal with the pandemic without experiencing depressive and anxiety symptoms.

References

- Chiadini, J. (2020, March 1). Online learning in the time of COVID-19. *Travel Medicine and Infectious Disease*, 34, 101669. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmaid.2020.101669>
- Courtney, D., Watson, P., Battaglia, M., Mulsant, B. H., & Szatmari, P. (2020). COVID-19 Impacts on Child and Youth Anxiety and Depression: Challenges and Opportunities. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry. Revue Canadienne de Psychiatrie*, 65(10), 688–691. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0706743720935646>
- Dalton, L., Rapa, E., & Stein, A. (2020, May 1). Protecting the psychological health of children through effective communication about COVID-19. *The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health*, 4, 346–347. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642\(20\)30097-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(20)30097-3)
- Dong, C., Cao, S., & Li, H. (2020). Young Children's Online Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic: Chinese Parents'. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 118, 105440. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2020.105440>
- Duan, L., Shao, X., Wang, Y., Huang, Y., Miao, J., Yang, X., & Zhu, G. (2020). An investigation of mental health status of children and adolescents in china during the outbreak of COVID-19. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 275, 112–118. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2020.06.029>
- Fore, H. H. (2020, July 1). A wake-up call: COVID-19 and its impact on children's health and wellbeing. *The Lancet Global Health*, 8, e861–e862. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(20\)30238-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(20)30238-2)
- Goldschmidt, K. (2020). The COVID-19 Pandemic: Technology use to Support the Wellbeing of Children. *Journal of Pediatric Nursing*, 53, 88–90. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedn.2020.04.013>
- Idoiaga, N., Berasategi, N., Eiguren, A., & Picaza, M. (2020). Exploring Children's Social and Emotional Representations of the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1952. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01952>
- Jiao, W. Y., Wang, L. N., Liu, J., Fang, S. F., Jiao, F. Y., Pettoello-Mantovani, M., & Somekh, E. (2020, June 1). Behavioral and Emotional Disorders in Children during the COVID-19 Epidemic. *Journal of Pediatrics*, 221, 264-266.e1. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpeds.2020.03.013>
- Király, O., Potenza, M. N., Stein, D. J., King, D. L., Hodgins, D. C., Saunders, J. B., Griffiths, M.D., Gjoneska, B., Billieux, J., Brand, M., Abbott, M. W., Samuel, W. A., Chamberlain, S. R., Corazza, O., Burkauskas, J., Sales, C. M.D., Montag, C., Christine Lochner C., Grünblatt, E., ... Demetrovics, Z. (2020). Preventing problematic internet use during the COVID-19 pandemic: Consensus guidance. *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, 100, 152180. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.comppsy.2020.152180>
- Klein, J. D., Koletzko, B., El-Shabrawi, M. H., Hadjipanayis, A., Thacker, N., & Bhutta, Z. (2020). Promoting and supporting children's health and healthcare during COVID-19-International Paediatric Association Position Statement. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 105(7), 620–624. <https://doi.org/10.1136/archdischild-2020-319370>
- Liu, J. J., Bao, Y., Huang, X., Shi, J., & Lu, L. (2020, May 1). Mental health considerations for children quarantined because of COVID-19. *The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health*, 4, 347–349. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642\(20\)30096-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(20)30096-1)
- Mukhtar, K., Javed, K., Arooj, M., & Sethi, A. (2020). Advantages, limitations and recommendations for online learning during covid-19 pandemic era. *Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences*, 36(COVID19-S4), S27–S31. <https://doi.org/10.12669/pjms.36.COVID19-S4.2785>
- Rabinowicz, S., Leshem, E., & Pessach, I. M. (2020). COVID-19 in the Pediatric Population—Review and Current Evidence. *Current Infectious Disease Reports*, 22(11), 29. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11908-020-00739-6>
- Racine, N., Cooke, J. E., Eirich, R., Korczak, D. J., McArthur, B. A., & Madigan, S. (2020, October 1). Child and adolescent mental illness during COVID-19: A rapid review. *Psychiatry Research*, 292, 113307. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113307>
- Silva Junior, F. J. G. Da, Sales, J. C. E. S., Monteiro, C. F. D. S., Costa, A. P. C., Campos, L. R. B., Miranda, P. I. G., de Souza Monteiro, T. A., Lima, R. A. G., & Lopes-Junior, L. C. (2020, July 1). Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on mental health of young people and adults: A systematic review protocol of observational studies. *BMJ Open*, 10, e039426. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-039426>

- Sinha, I., Bennett, D., & Taylor-Robinson, D. C. (2020, May 27). Children are being sidelined by covid-19. *The BMJ*, 369. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m2061>
- Varshney, M., Parel, J. T., Raizada, N., & Sarin, S. K. (2020). Initial psychological impact of COVID-19 and its correlates in Indian Community: An online (FEEL-COVID) survey. *PLOS ONE*, 15(5), e0233874. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0233874>
- Wang, G., Zhang, Y., Zhao, J., Zhang, J., & Jiang, F. (2020, March 21). Mitigate the effects of home confinement on children during the COVID-19 outbreak. *The Lancet*, 395, 945–947. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30547-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30547-X)
- Xie, X., Xue, Q., Zhou, Y., Zhu, K., Liu, Q., Zhang, J., & Song, R. (2020, September 1). Mental Health Status among Children in Home Confinement during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak in Hubei Province, China. *JAMA Pediatrics*. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.1619>
- Yoshikawa, H., Wuermli, A. J., Britto, P. R., Dreyer, B., Leckman, J. F., Lye, S. J., Ponguta, L. A., Richter, L. M., ... Stein, A. (2020, August 1). Effects of the Global Coronavirus Disease-2019 Pandemic on Early Childhood Development: Short- and Long-Term Risks and Mitigating Program and Policy Actions. *Journal of Pediatrics*, 223, 188–193. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpeds.2020.05.020>