

Impact of the Pandemic on Families



Covid-19 Pandemic Changed our World



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The social isolation, physical health threats, the financial impact, the shut down of child servicing programs including schools, present significant risks to the population, over and above the health threat associated with COVID-19, including compromised family mental health and relationships ([Holmes et al., 2020](#)). Worldwide, the rate of mental health symptoms in adults at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic has been elevated compared to historical norms ([Nelson et al., 2020](#)).

Parents and children living through COVID-19 are faced with numerous challenges, which together present a constellation of risk. Recent research has identified that the top **stressors** faced by parents and caregivers during COVID-19 include **work, their children's well-being, and the well-being of family and friends** outside their household ([Waite and Creswell, 2020](#)). Of concern, two thirds of parents report that they are not meeting the dueling needs of work and their child's well-being ([Waite and Creswell, 2020](#)). Other likely concerns include high rates of unemployment and economic uncertainty, a reduction in social support and onsite schooling, and a reduction in access to critical clinical, community and sporting activities, including greenspace and playgrounds. Each of these challenges is known to negatively impact family well-being outside the context of a pandemic ([Marin et al., 2011](#); [Olesen et al., 2013](#); [Bakusic et al., 2017](#); [Leigh-Hunt et al., 2017](#); [Wang et al., 2017](#); [Lupien et al., 2018](#)). **Now co-occurring together during an unprecedented health crisis, these conditions may be pushing families to the edge of their resources.**

Studies with Families post-pandemic

An Austrian study of 2,130 parents which included and represented a diverse range of family backgrounds was conducted in the late fall of 2020. Some of the results of this study indicated these problem areas:

- **Many families reported a concern over deteriorating mental health in themselves, their children, and their families.** Sometimes this appeared to be related to an exacerbation of existing mental health difficulties, including symptoms of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress. Parents were particularly concerned about the mental health and welfare of their children, who seemed to struggle to understand this “frightening” new world. Such responses are concerning given knowledge that early childhood mental health issues are associated with later episodes of depression ([Luby et al., 2014](#)).
- Parents overwhelmingly reported how being “*stuck*” or “*trapped*” at home resulted in their family “losing” or “missing out” on their usual activities, events, and strategies, which had helped to maintain the family’s “structure,” “well-being,” and “happiness.” **Families felt that these missing activities had resulted in a significant negative affect on the whole family well-being.**
- Many families indicated that the pandemic restrictions and health threats had **stressed their relationships**. Strained relationships were commonly reported in the study, including increased conflict and arguments between parents, parents and children, and between siblings. Children in particular seemed to be a source of family relationship discord, either demanding more from already exhausted parents, or creating tension in the family by bickering and fighting.

Studies, cont.

- Families frequently reported being **less attentive to their children due to increased family demands and other responsibilities.** Parents reported being busier than usual, sharing examples of increased household chores and family management tasks, ranging from more frequent trips to the supermarket due to restrictions and not being able to find common household products, to increased cleaning needs with the entire family at home. Families particularly missed the support of friends and family in helping with child care issues. *The challenge to balance work, home-schooling, and household chores was too much for some families to manage.*

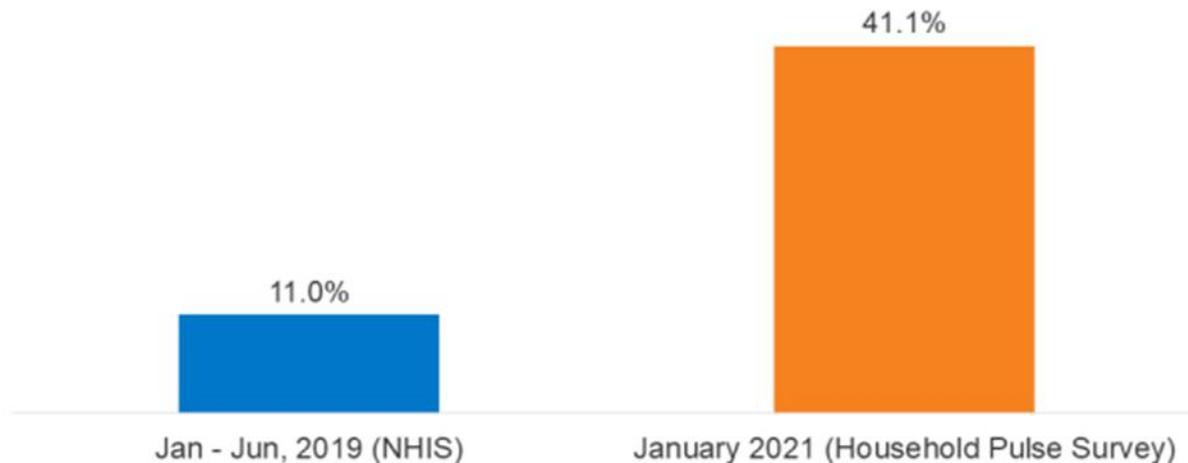
The conclusion of this study was that these negative impacts of the pandemic on the family unit as a whole **could have long-lasting and enduring consequences for mental health and family continuity post-pandemic.**

A study in Canada (fall 2020) reported that **44.3%** of parents with children <18 years living at home reported worse mental health as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Parent Anxiety and/or Depression

Figure 1

Average Share of Adults Reporting Symptoms of Anxiety Disorder and/or Depressive Disorder, January-June 2019 vs. January 2021



NOTES: Percentages are based on responses to the GAD-2 and PHQ-2 scales. Pulse findings (shown here for January 6 – 18, 2021) have been stable overall since data collection began in April 2020.

SOURCE: NHIS Early Release Program and U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey. For more detail on methods, see: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhis/earlyrelease/ERmentalhealth-508.pdf>

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Studies, cont.

Last November, 3,000 parents and caregivers were surveyed on the financial impacts, disruptions to the family routines, and positive & negative stress in their lives since March 2020.

Forty percent of families reported a negative impact on finances as a result of the pandemic.

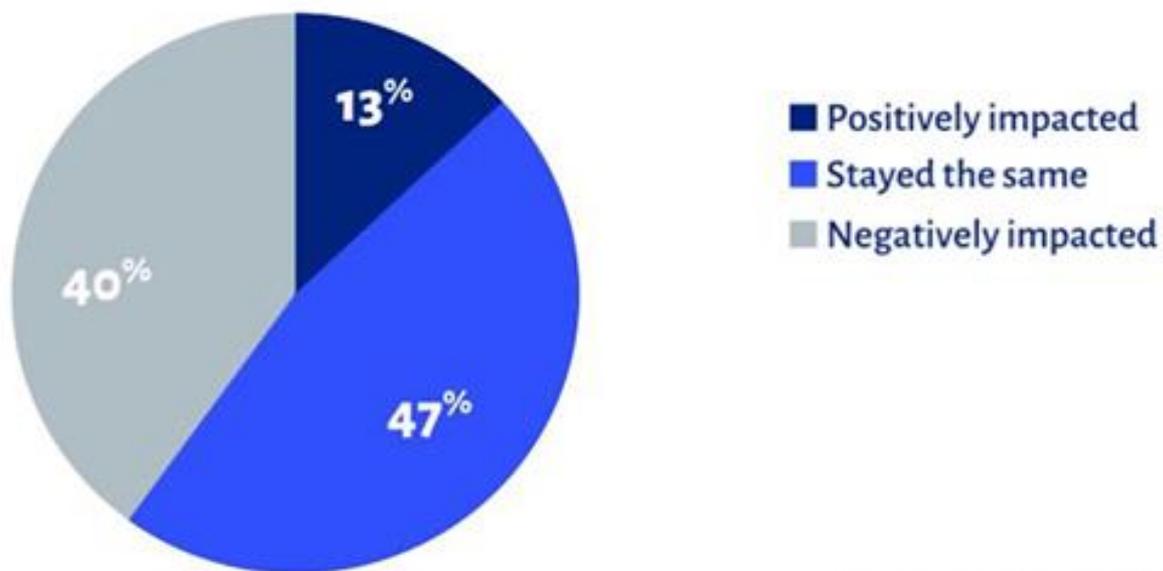
Impacted the most are women and families with school-age children. Twice as many women as men reported that they reduced their working hours to provide care. The highest proportion of reduced work hours was among families with 5- to 9-year-olds.

This financial stress is often cascaded into family relationship stress that directly impacts the child's well-being in those homes.

Children often gage the level of tension and distress in the home based on the stress they observe from their parents or caregivers behaviors and actions.

Studies, cont.

Change in Household Finances, March to November 2020



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Studies, cont.

Nearly all parents reported that the pandemic had significantly effected normal daily routines.

Parents sited trying to balance work from home, home schooling, and family management to be most challenging.

There was significant negative effects felt by low income families and low income working parents who either lost their income or could not work from home.

There was also a significant report of worsening mental health issues among minority families too.

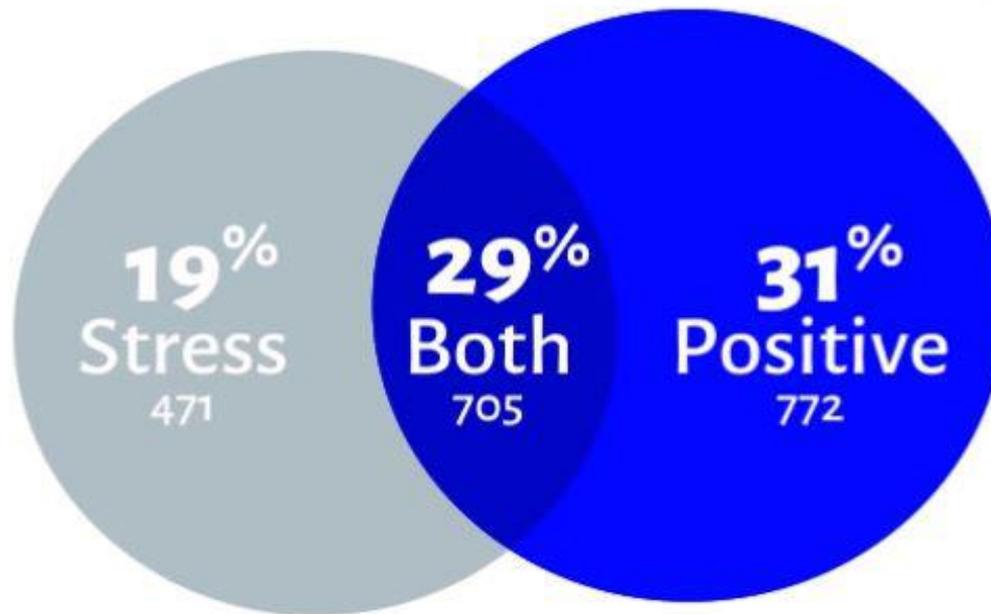
Studies, cont.

Although it is important to note that the pandemic has had a major impact on the family financially, and a major impact on daily routines and structure, many families found there to be positive implications from these changes in the family.

Included in the study was the impact of home schooling on the family and many reported a mix of negative and positive impacts including a closer bonding between parents and children during this time.

Studies, cont.

Parents Who Reported That Educating Their Children at Home Has Been Stressful Only, Positive Only, or Both



Neither positive nor stressful: 527 (21%)

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Studies, cont.

Although the study revealed many parents were reporting either a positive impact or mixed positive and negative impact of home schooling, the researchers advise..

“In practice, these responses from parents suggest that pediatricians and pediatric health care providers should inquire further when families share feelings of stress or closeness. ... **Similarly, many of those who share heartwarming stories about family closeness also might feel stressed or experience household tension,**” according to the report. “These responses show that many families have these same mixed feelings.”

“It is important to foster the positive relational growth in families along with monitoring levels of elevated stress,” according to the report.

How has the pandemic impacted Families?

In the past, economic crises have led to increased parent stress, mental health problems, and interparental conflict, leading to increased harsh and abusive parenting (Conger & Elder, [1994](#); Schneider, Waldfogel, & Brooks-Gunn, [2017](#)). In addition to work and financial disruptions, during the COVID-19 pandemic, families have experienced enormous stress due to seclusion within households, social isolation, concern about the health of family and friends, disruptions to school and child care, food & housing insecurity, and the need to make new health-related decisions in a world of uncertainty and speculation.

This stress can have a major impact on the family unit functioning and structure.

Family impact most recent study...

A study published in April of this year reported in an article titled “**Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Parent, Child, and Family Functioning**” by Mark E. Feinberg in the Wiley Library suggested the following:

Based on our findings of large negative impacts of the pandemic on parent and child well-being, we believe it is important to consider the possibility of these negative impacts persisting after the pandemic.

Family impact most recent study...

This study suggested that these negative impacts may result in cognitive “scaring” individually and in the family....

“This is analogous to the possibility raised by economists that severe disruption in businesses and financial markets might “scar” the economy that make it hard for recovery. We suggest that similar scarring may take place within families; after a decline in inter-related factors such as parent mental health, child adjustment, co-parenting, and parenting quality,”

Family impact most recent study...

This “scaring” may be the result of severe parental depression, co-parenting conflict, and individual child stress that has not been addressed or treated according to this study...

“For example, research suggests that parent depression and co-parenting quality are in particular reciprocally linked (Feinberg, [2003](#); Tissot, Favez, Frascarolo, & Despland, [2016](#)), and indeed these two factors were substantially linked (r 's = .39–.58) in our data..”

“As ongoing, intertwined family conflict and mental health problems are difficult to interrupt (Harold & Sellers, [2018](#); Parry, Davies, Sturge-Apple, & Coe, [2020](#)), a **“scarring” phenomenon could lead to entrenched, long-term psychological and relationship difficulties.**”

Review of Studies about COVID-19 and Mental Health

The National Institute of Health did a review of 65 papers/studies of the possible mental health effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic and this was their conclusions:

The COVID-19 pandemic is exceptional. Its effect will likely be imprinted on each individual involved. Extensive stressors will emerge or become worsened. Many **medical staff workers** will be harmfully psychologically affected.

Children are likely to be experiencing worry, anxiety and fear and **older people** and also **those with underlying health or mental health conditions**, having been identified as more vulnerable to COVID-19, the pandemic can be extremely frightening and very fear-inducing. Medical staff and affiliated healthcare workers (staff) are under both physical and psychological pressure. (June, 2020) Also **those who contracted the virus** with significant adverse symptoms and lasting complications may be at significant psychological risk.

We can expect to all have experienced some level of **TRAUMA**

The most common factor for families

Trauma :

Trauma can be understood as a rupture in "meaning-making", says David Trickey, a psychologist and representative of the UK Trauma Council. When "the way you see yourself, the way you see the world, and the way you see other people" are shocked and overturned by an event – and a gap arises between your "*orienting systems*" and that event – simple stress cascades into trauma, often-mediated through sustained and severe feelings of helplessness

A sense of loss of control from the family unit as a whole.

We have experienced **COLLECTIVE TRAUMA**

Collective Trauma Experience

- Collective Trauma refers to an event or series of events that affects a large number of individuals and/or has the potential consequences of negatively affecting the emotions and behavioral health of a large number of people and families.
- It is usually universal in that the event is the same, and there will be an emotional affect regardless of other individual diversities such as age, region, race, gender, or national origin. The response to the affect may however differ.
- Collective trauma is the psychological upheaval that is shared by a group of people who all experience an event. This type of trauma can affect groups of people of any size, including entire nations or societies.
- Collective trauma leaves its mark on each person as well as society as a whole. It disrupts our understanding of how the world works and our place within it—and it can change how we view ourselves and others.

Protective factors that affect the impact of a disaster like a pandemic

- The resiliency of the family before the disaster.
- The functionality of the family as a whole during the disaster. (their individual ability to cope)
- The support the family had with others.
- The access to external as well as internal resources.

Risk factors that affect the impact of a disaster..

➤ Dysfunctional issues that were present before the disaster

(A 2018 study of the effects of dysfunctional family issues on children revealed that these children frequently grow up to “experience feelings of anxiety, conflict, and hostility. These children also often suffer from a variety of fears that don’t correspond with their age, causing infantilization and a natural ageing process slowdown.”

➤ Preexistent mental health or substance abuse disorders

➤ Poor support system before the disaster.

(One of the pillars for over-coming adversity is interactions with others. **Connectedness is essential to Resilience**)

➤ Poor access to mental and physical health services.

➤ Financial stress that was already happening before the disaster.

➤ Level of severity of the impact of the disaster

Unique Experience

Although this was a collective trauma experience... every family may have had a unique responses to the experience that defined what they had been through..

The personal stages of a disaster often mimic those of grief: **Shock, Denial, Barging, Anger, Depression , Acceptance.**

Although everyone experienced a traumatic event, that produces an emotional response, for children the absence of independent decision making , limited understanding of the event, family stress, and the complete disassembly of their normal routines makes this traumatic event even more distressing.

The length of this event is a significant part of the lasting impact... a year is a long time in child development.

What Parents are observing.

- **Parents are reporting that their children are more withdrawn than usual, with accompanying decreases in sleep and appetite as we started 2021.**
- **Parents described decreased face to face social opportunities for their children and concern about them being constantly online.**
- **Substance Misuse is of significant concern for many parents.**
- **Parents are worried about children being behind in school and how this is frustrating their children.**

Parents observing cont.

Studies are showing .. “**Nearly 9 in 10 parents** are worried about their children falling behind academically due to coronavirus-related school closures, ranking higher than any other financial or socioemotional concern. 8 in 10 parents say their child(ren) are experiencing heightened stress levels.” (Their Children Are Falling Behind During School Closures- article)

Parents observing cont.

- **Parents were most concerned over Life Style Changes in the children going forward.**

Increases in unhealthy eating habits and a lack of physical activity among children, along with worries over racism, depression and the risk of suicide were also top concerns for parents of children ages 0 to 18, according to the poll of over 2,000 parents released in Dec. 2020 by [C.S. Mott Children's Hospital](#) at Michigan Medicine.

(CNN Health Report 12/22/20)

The Issues we experienced from this global disaster.

1. Social Isolation
2. Structural Support Changes
3. Physical Health Threat
4. Losses (deaths, jobs, dreams, etc.)
5. Housing and Food Insecurity
6. Political and Civil Unrest
7. Moral Dilemmas

Allocation / ratio of survival supplies (i.e. ventilators and critical care units)

Liberties - mandatory restrictions on personal freedoms.

The post-pandemic emerging family

Some of what the family is now coping with in the aftermath of the pandemic:

1. Family unit role changes.
2. New financial struggles with added food/housing/child care insecurities.
3. Relationship changes. (including marital stress)
4. Loss of loved ones and support systems (grief)
5. Substance misuse issues.
6. Children are going to have an adjustment period to life post-pandemic
7. New or worsened mental health problems of individual family members.
8. Pace of life speeds up from the slow down during the pandemic
9. Some parents may go through empty-nest syndrome all over again.
10. Some people have a changed view of health care, government, and even racism in the post pandemic world.

Family impact most recent study suggestions for helping families...

One study suggested that.... (a collaborative and integrated approach is needed)

“ Assisting families in recovering from the pandemic period may require multi-component, inter-disciplinary approaches by schools, counselors, mental health clinicians, pediatricians, family service agencies, faith-based congregations, and youth-serving recreational and athletic organizations. Thus, it will be important to follow families’ as the pandemic (decreases) and screen for persistence of disruptions in parent and child well-being.”

Recommendations for Post-Pandemic Behavioral Health Interventions

- I. Early Screening and Detection.
- II. Trauma focused evidence based treatment early.
- III. Treatment that encompasses the whole family.
- IV. Wrap Around support for the family as a unit.
- V. Integrated Services for the family.
- VI. Follow up screening and assessment after the pandemic and after treatment.
- VII. More research and data collection around the on-going effects of the Pandemic on Mental Health.

Resources

APA News & Journal- **Survey gives snapshot of pandemic's impact on family finances, education, relationships**

April 20, 2021; Trisha Koriath, Staff Writer

Frontiers in Psychology- **"It Has Stopped Our Lives" to "Spending More Time Together Has Strengthened Bonds": The Varied Experiences of Australian Families During COVID-19** Subhadra Evans, Antonina Mikocka-Walus, Anna Klas, Lisa Olive, Emma Seiberras, Gery Karantzias, & Elizabeth M. Westrupp.

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Anne C. Gadermann; Kimberly C. Thomson; Chris G. Richardson; Monique Gagne; Corey McAuliffe; Saima Hirani; & Emily Jenkins (2021) *BMJ Journal : Examining the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on family mental health in Canada: findings from a national cross-sectional study*

A.F. Mullins "Psychological Trauma of Children of Dysfunctional Families" (2018) *The European Proceedings of Social & Behavioral Sciences.* ISSN 2357-1330

On-Line Articles "Their Children are Falling Behind During School Closures" *The Education Trust; June 1, 2020.*

Sandee LaMotte, "Here are Parents Top 10 Concerns During the Pandemic" *CNN Health Report Dec. 22, 2020.*