

**Mental Health and Parenting During COVID-19**

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## **Mental Health and Parenting During COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted people's mental health on a large scale. More specifically, with the closing of in-person schools and workplaces, parents during the pandemic were faced with additional stressors, substantially worsening the impacts of COVID-19 on mental health. This resulted in a number of stressors that were not present or as high as before the global shutdown started.

### **Introduction**

Parenting during COVID-19 has affected parents' mental health to the extreme. These issues have gone vastly unrecognized with little to no solution. Parenting in general is often regarded as being stressful but when you add a global pandemic as another obstacle things may and did turn for the worse in many households. Multiple factors including money, time, energy, and other resources make parenting in general difficult, and at times, stressful. However, the pandemic created other unforeseen factors to make parenting that much harder because of the mental strain it put on so many.

During the time of the pandemic, many parents were left without work or unable to find jobs, others were unable to find caregivers so that they were able to work, and others were left with the stress of being a full-time caregiver due to school and workplace closures. The pandemic also negatively impacted families and children as a whole. For example, not being able to work or find work could lead to one not being able to effectively support a family through paying bills, providing groceries, and not being able to meet a child's needs. All of these factors, among many more, led to the decline of mental health within parents. In fact, a study found that one in four parents reported worsening mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic (Patrick et

al., 2020). Overall, this issue is a serious problem that needs to be widely discussed in order to educate people that do not have children or who did not know about this problem. Moreover, the findings of parental stress during COVID-19 opens the discussion to mental health and parenting in a broader sense. These combined imply that further research along with resources and assistance for parents is a dire need within society.

### **Effects of Parenting on Mental Health**

During the Covid-19 pandemic there was a major decline in many individuals' mental health. However, parents were one of the highest populations it negatively affected. For instance, in a study conducted by Gadermann et al., (2021) it was found that during the first five months of the pandemic, rates of depression and anxiety within parents exceeded up to around 48-51%. Furthermore, the study found that alcohol consumption along with thoughts of suicide and self-harming drastically increased as well as a global increase in the demand for antidepressants. Another issue that was brought to the attention of the reader is that there were also implications that male caregivers were more likely to physically abuse their partner and child whereas women tend to become angry quickly and become more emotional.

A second study reported that a high population of children experienced child abuse in the household (Brown et al., 2020). Oftentimes, parents were left with no other coping mechanisms and they were likely to resort to physical abuse. This finding was also supported in other research that found that children during the pandemic were likely to have more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) such as physical, emotional, and sexual abuse than the amounts they would have experienced pre-Covid (Calvano et al., 2021). Lastly, research shows that children also greatly experience mental health decline due to their parents' own psychological

distress. In a study conducted by Spinelli et al., (2020) it was found that children whose parents struggle with mental health issues are themselves more susceptible to developing mental health issues along with behavioral and conduct issues.

### **The Proposed Solutions**

Vast amount of research shows implications for some form of intervention. Brown et al., (2020) found that providing support to parents, especially to families in lower socioeconomic and other minority populations is crucial to assisting parents with mental health issues. One interesting intervention that this study proposed was to have easier access to medical assistance and to have parents be provided with information such as how to communicate feelings including fears and stresses in a healthy way with one's child. This study also specifically mentions easier access to benefits such as Medicaid and Food Stamps. This proposed solution was again mentioned in a study conducted by Patrick et al., (2020) in which it stated that there should be additional funding and support for programs such as SNAP which would help eliminate the stressors that come from food insecurities.

In an article by Li et al., (2020), it was proposed that parents need more access to affordable childcare through funding and government relief programs. Furthermore, this study also mentioned that parents, children, and families as a whole need to be provided with access to psychological services. Lastly, Byford et al., (2014) explored how children and families under stressful environments, in this case the COVID-19 pandemic, should be given access to mental health services that would assist families in emotional development and management. In short, it is proposed that families need to be provided with access to services including, healthcare,

mental health resources, and social benefit programs. More specifically, local and federal governments should increase funding for these services and resources.

## **Conclusion**

The COVID-19 pandemic increased the rates of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Furthermore, it is supported that these mental health issues are likely to be negatively impactful, especially for children, even after the pandemic has subsided. Multiple literatures state that intervention methods are crucial to assisting the parents and children impacted by COVID-19. Many of these methods include an increase of funding for social benefits programs, easier and more inexpensive means of childcare, and an increase in access to healthcare and mental health services. Moreover, these services and interventions are specifically needed for families who faced social injustices such as food insecurities and unequal access to healthcare before the COVID-19 pandemic. The topic of mental health decline during COVID clearly showed the disparities in services for families of at risk populations. However, it also allows room for further discussion on the issues pertaining to the severity and seriousness of mental health in parents and its subsequent effects on children. Mental health in general must be addressed and changes need to be made in order for families.

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