



Commissioned by UCL PACT Network

COVID-19: What does it mean for my family and I?

A journey through the eyes of a child



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Abstract

This study is commissioned by the [UCL PACT network](#), a network made to support parents and carers at UCL. It explores the experiences of young people and their families through the global pandemic of COVID-19. Researchers designed and used surveys and focus groups to collect data. The main findings were that young people need a routine in order for them to get work done and keep a sense of normality. They also stated their screen usage had increased a lot, and they needed their parents to help them monitor that. They were worried about the false news their parents kept reading and believing, and they thought bonding time with parents through fun activities was more important than ever now. They enjoyed doing exercise in the house as compared to going out for walks, and they thought it was necessary for parents to check in on them every once in a while in order to keep them focused.

Key search terms: COVID-19, young people, parents, pandemic

Acknowledgements

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Researchers' information

Miss Eshal Sajid is a 15 year old student at Upton Court Grammar School and the lead researcher on this study. She aspires to be a clinical psychologist and in her spare time enjoys playing the guitar, watching Netflix and cooking/baking.

Dr Sajid Saleem is the co-researcher on this study. He enjoys running, shooting and studying. He also took on the role of a moderator during the focus groups discussion for safeguarding purposes.

Introduction

COVID-19 has completely changed the way the world lives. Our lives are at a halt - schools and offices are closed, and everyone is stuck at home apart from key workers. Young people are also severely affected - they cannot go to school, see their friends and their exams have been cancelled. As you can imagine, they are under tremendous stress, which can be hard for adults to recognise sometimes. Adults might not know how to help their children during these times.

The purpose of this study is exactly that - to figure out what children and young people want from their parents during these tough times.

Research design

This is a qualitative study with surveys and focus groups as the main method of data collection. Surveys were designed after several hours of brainstorming. We used Google Forms as the main platform to collect data. They were sent out in order to collect information from a large group of people. The surveys were designed with the following research questions in mind:

Research questions:

- What are the experiences of children about the Covid-19?
- What they are feeling during the global epidemic?
- How are they dealing with the sudden change from school to home?
- What are they looking forward to?
- How can they help their families and what do they have to offer?
- What can families do to facilitate their lives at home?

Focus groups were also designed, using the information gathered from the surveys to come up with some more questions. An information sheet was also prepared with details about the study and what participants would be required to do, and a confidentiality clause was included.

Data collection

During the first stage, the surveys were distributed using various channels. They were emailed to teachers at Upton Court Grammar School to distribute amongst the students. Myself and my co-researcher sent it out to numerous Whatsapp groups and email groups we are a part of. The information sheet was also sent out with the survey with an option to sign up for the focus groups. One of the researchers was the moderator in the focus groups and I led it.

We received 20 responses from children and 11 responses from adult surveys. Key points from surveys were chosen to design questions for the focus group for guided discussions. Focus groups resulted in much elaborate and richer data. A platform provided by UCL Moodle, Blackboard Collaborate was used for the focus group and with the permission of all participants, both sessions were recorded. They were then transcribed using voice recognition and all points were formatted. All recordings were saved on a secure UCL server with permission and all quotes were anonymised.

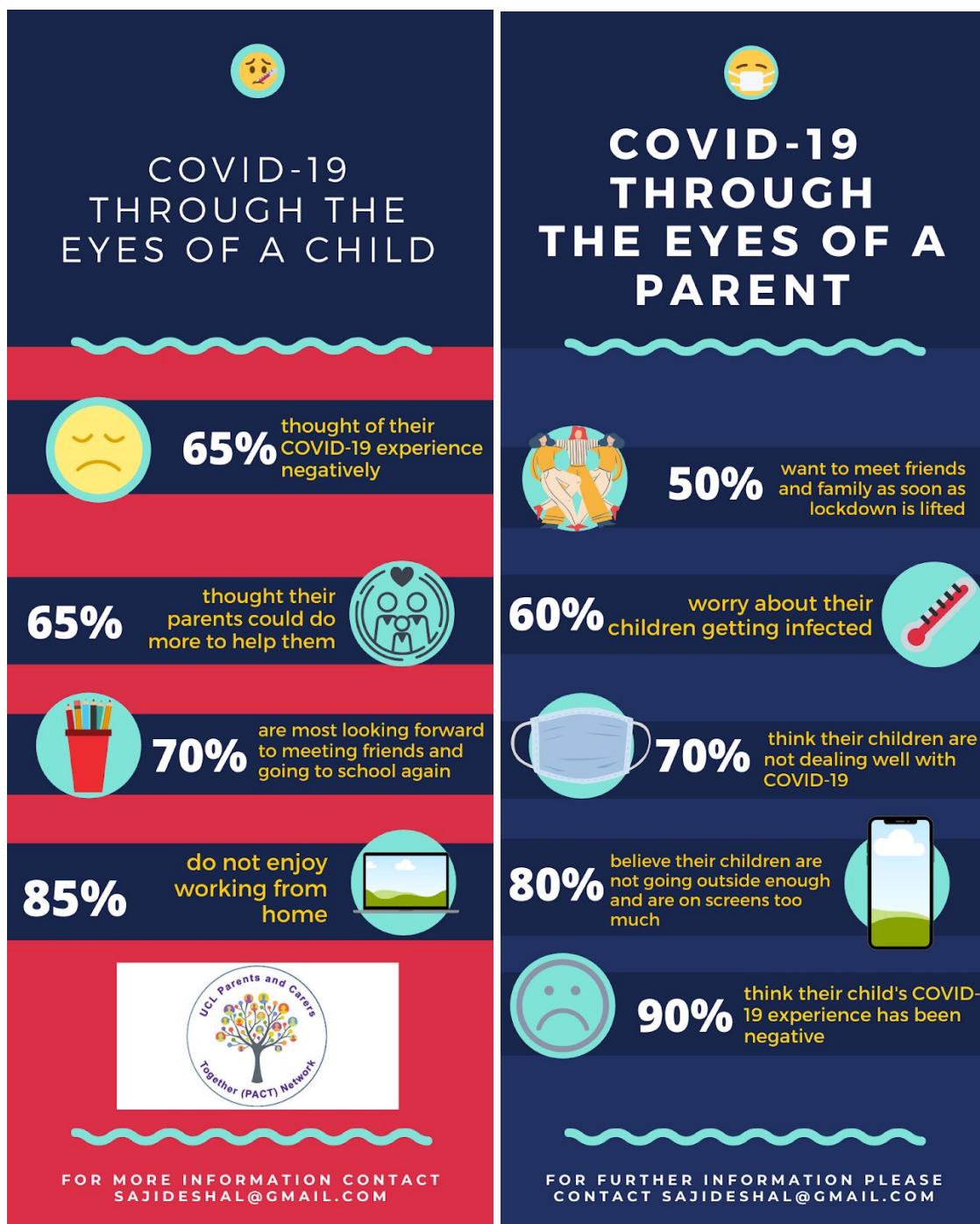


Illustration 1: Infographics from parent and child surveys

Data Analysis

Focus group participants

Parents focus group:

- 3 Pakistani males aged 30 to 50 (2 living in the UK)
- Pakistani female aged between 30 and 35 (living in the UK)

Childrens focus group:

- 2 British-Indian females aged 14 to 15
- 1 British-Brazilian male aged 15
- 1 British-Indian male aged 15
- All living in UK

Survey questions (Parents)

1. What is your gender?
2. What country do you currently reside in?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. What do you think your child's experience of COVID-19 has been so far?
5. What are you worrying about the most for your child due to COVID-19?
6. How do you think your child feels now that their daily lifestyle has been changed? (such as not being able to go out to eat, with friends, etc)
7. How is your child dealing with the sudden change from school learning to home learning?
8. As a family what are you most looking forward to after the pandemic calms down?
9. How is your child helping the family cope right now?
10. What could your child(ren) do differently to better cope with the current situation?

Survey questions (Children)

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender?
3. What country do you reside in?
4. What is your ethnicity?
5. How has your experience of COVID-19 been so far?
6. What are you most worried about due to COVID-19?
7. How do you feel now that your daily lifestyle has changed? (such as not being able to go out to eat, with friends, etc)
8. How are you dealing with the sudden change from school learning to home learning?
9. What are you most looking forward to after the pandemic calms down?
10. What are you doing to help your family cope right now?
11. What could your parents/carers do differently to help you cope better?

Themes arising:

Data from focus groups was analysed using Thematic Analysis and themes arising were:

Routine

100% of the young people said a routine was something they absolutely needed, and they wanted to keep it flexible to suit their moods and feelings. For example, if they weren't feeling especially productive one day, they could go for a walk rather than carry on working. In their own words.

"I need a routine. I'll spiral out of control if I don't have one"

They stated that sitting down with parents and creating a routine that suits both should be one of the first things you do, as who knows how long self-isolation is going to last? Parents also agreed, but leaned more towards a stricter routine as they believed that without one, children would become out of control and their mental health would worsen.

Screens

95% of young people said their screen usage has increased a lot during quarantine.

"Screens have overtaken our lives and are probably the thing many young people would say they couldn't live without".

Young people are right - you can't avoid the importance of screens in today's day and age. It is inevitable that during lockdown, they will be spending a lot more of their time on screens. They said that parents need to accept that and maybe somehow incorporate it into their daily routine, like a movie night. However, they also said it is hard for them to know where to stop sometimes and that is where parents need to step in.

False news

20% of young people said their parents believe things about the virus that are not true. Kids are worried about their health anyway, and they said a lot of their parents inadvertently worsen it by forwarding them false information on online texting sites like Whatsapp that they themselves have been sent by someone else. Fact Checking and using reliable sources of information is extremely important so your kids know true from false.

"It scares me when my parents tell me things they've just heard off Whatsapp about the virus".

Bonding time

70% of young people said they want to spend more time with their parents this lockdown. Both kids and parents are saying that this is the best possible time to get closer to each other, parents more than kids.

"No time like the present!"

This can be hard as they are stuck in the house all day with each other, but that's why it's so important to have your own space and a sense of privacy, so the time you spend together will be all the more important. There are many fun activities to do together, like cooking, workouts, art, movie nights, anything that you can do as a family! Getting close to each other will also improve both your moods during quarantine.

Exercise

60% of young people try to incorporate some form of physical exercise into their days. Right now, young people are only allowed to go outside every day once for physical exercise, as dictated by the government. This is tough for some people who are used to being outside a lot, and not that hard for others who are natural hibernators. Going outside can often be a point of contention between parents and children, but the best way to work through this is by talking to each other about the type of physical exercise to do.

"My parents keep forcing me into the garden but I know it's good for me"

For example, many young people said they preferred to do at-home workouts, but adults preferred going on walks and runs outside.

Productivity vs procrastination

100% of the young people said they wanted their parents to set a routine for them. They stated it was very hard for them to stay focused, and they need parents to check in on them every once in a while.

"I need parental checks - I wouldn't be able to get any work done otherwise".

Parents preferred a stricter routine whereas children were asking for a more relaxed and flexible routine. Some young people said it would be helpful for them for their parents to have some ideas for activities they could do, in order to increase productivity. However, many parents thought being on screens and phones was a sign of procrastination, which differed to the views of young people, who thought it was a sign of taking time out for yourself.

Mental health

100% of young people thought mental health was the most important thing to focus on during self-isolation. They placed a larger emphasis on mental health than parents - in fact, the discussion was dominated by the topic of mental health as all of the things listed above circled back to it. Parents thought the way to combat bad mental health was having a strict routine and going out for fresh air every day, whereas all young people said taking care of your mental health could also just mean having a day where you did nothing, and just relaxing your mind from everyday stresses.

"Quarantine has given me a chance to work on my mental health and improve it, as school was too stressful".

Key Findings about young people

This study explored the experiences of young people and parents in separate conversations. We found that:

- Young people are extremely worried about their future education and job prospects. COVID-19 means GCSE students are missing out on a lot of content that can't be learnt at home, like science practicals.
- The change from school learning to home learning hasn't been an easy one for them - a classroom environment is a much better place to learn than the comfort of your own home, which made them lazy and unproductive due to all the distractions around them.
- A lot of them are actually looking forward to going back to school and meeting friends again, as they are finding it really hard not seeing their friends every day and not having a sense of routine.
- They're trying their hardest to ease the burden on their parents, as they recognise what a tough time this is, by helping out with chores, trying to bother them less or whatever it may be!
- They think a routine is extremely important for them during this pandemic, and that should include some physical exercise, restrictions on screen time and parents checking in on them once in a while to make sure they stay on track. They also stated they wanted to spend more time with their parents doing fun activities.

Key findings about parents

The study also provided an opportunity for parents to voice their concerns for their children and we found that:

- Parents are worried about their children getting sick, as it is in their nature to be protective.
- They are worried their kids are spending too much time on screens, but don't see an alternative solution because the world is in lockdown.
- They are worried about their childrens' mental health, and how all the negative news could affect them.
- They are worried about their childrens' education, as they want their children to go far and succeed in life but they are missing out on a big chunk of their school life.
- They think their children should have a strict routine to follow in order to keep some sense of normalcy in their day

Recommendations

Following the data analysis, this study makes the following recommendations to parents:

1. Try to spend some time with your children! Set aside a time once a week for you to have a movie night together, and go for walks together. Use this time to get closer with your child and learn more about them.
2. Go easy on them. These are tough times for everyone, and children are often forgotten about in the rush of the adult world. Relax some rules, allow them to stay up later, whatever works for you and your child!
3. Set a routine that you both have talked about. It's very important to keep a sense of normality these days, and by having a routine both you and your child are happy with, they stay healthy. You could also come up with some fun activities for them to do during this time.
4. Check up on your kids regularly. Pop into their room and make sure they're staying on track - it's hard for kids to stay focused on their work at home with so many distractions all around them.
5. Let them know you're there for them! Your kids might not always want to spend time with you - but let them know that when they do want to, you're there!

This study also makes the following recommendations to children:

1. Try to make things as easy as possible for your parents. Remember they're trying to take care of the entire family! You can do this by not moaning about what's been cooked for dinner, helping them with chores, etc.
2. Stick to a routine! It has awesome health benefits and it means you're showing your parents how independent you are.
3. Spend time with your parents! This is the perfect opportunity for you to bond with them - so watch your favourite show together, cook dinner together or go for walks together!

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