

# “My biggest worry right now is the mental health of my children”

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with Ruth Patrick, Maddy Power, Kayleigh Garthwaite  
and Geoff Page

Covid Realities  
Families on low incomes  
during the pandemic



# What is Covid Realities?

- An 18-month research programme – collaboration between the Universities of York and Birmingham, working in partnership with Child Poverty Action Group, and parents and carers.
- Criteria for participation: living on low-income (subjectively defined); and with dependent children under the age of 19
- Participants can:
  - Document experiences through an online diary
  - Respond to a ‘big question of the week’
  - Participate in monthly discussions
  - Create arts-based outputs – audio and zines
- Engagement with researchers and policy makers

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## Life on a low income was already a struggle before Covid-19, worsened by the pandemic

“We spend so much more on electricity, food, gas as we are at home most of the time. We used to have lunch or dinner at my mums after I got the children from school. Mum always picked up little thing for us when she does her shopping like washing powder or sweets or toys. Now we no longer can visit.” **(Roisin G)**



“I am terrified of what the future holds I am a single father trying hard to support myself and a 14 year old daughter on a very low income with no financial help from my ex-partner. we currently survive on deliveries of food from a food bank as I am afraid to leave home and do not have enough money to buy fresh healthy food. we have had no internet connection since the end of December until today which means my daughter has missed the beginning of online learning and I have had to reduce the speed of our internet package to reduce the cost. I just can't see a way out of the current situation that we are in.” **(Erik J)**

# Mental health of parents and carers

I have missed the children not being able to hang out with their friends. I'm suffering from activity fatigue as I try to make the days different and not all merge into one long stay at home. **(Connie G)**

I am 33yrs old . My daughter is 13 yrs old. Am single mum. Who escaped domestic violence from my own family few years ago. I raise my daughter alone. I can honestly say the guilt I feel inside is something I can't explain. I can't afford internet, so my child has not done homework. **(Jasmine)**

There is a constant worry about the future, combined with the feeling of failure about not doing anything well enough when you're trying to be parent, teacher, keep the house in order etc. I do of course appreciate that a lot of people will be feeling like this and these are strange times and not permanent, and there are also lovely times with the kids just enjoying walks in nature and bike rides. **(Melissa F)**



# Lockdown and the impact of restrictions over time

“My and my daughter's mental health are probably the worst hit by this lockdown...My daughter went back to school for one day so it's been hugely disruptive. It's a huge change and she's really missing her friends and teachers...It took a few days for school to get a laptop to us so (daughter's name) couldn't join in the live classes or do any of the work. We got it on Friday and she's very excited about using it.” **(Nellie K)**

“It's cold, it's wet, it's winter! Not only is it winter but it's a lockdown winter. I'm trying to keep my mind together whilst trying to teach 4 kids in different age groups things I'm not even sure I understand anymore! They can't go out to play as the weather is atrocious!! We all have cabin fever setting in.” **(Lexie G)**

# Children with additional needs

“Schools are back in Scotland, my child isn’t. My daughter is 14 and hasn’t stepped inside the school since a bout of unresolved bullying and her mental breakdown in May 2019. It’s been a learning curve to understand my child is on the Autism Spectrum and does not come with crowds, does not understand sarcasm and has high levels of anxiety. Private Tutors were available before Lockdown and a quiet corner of the public library was used for my daughter to work on her schoolwork. The library is still closed and school have lost the tutors due to funding issues. My daughter is at home uneducated.” **(Alex R)**

“Going shopping isn't always a great experience as a suspected Aspergers/ADHD child [who] struggles with change, new and noisy environments. The supermarkets have not put anything in place for any adult or child with learning or mental health difficulties to allow a more calm "normal" shopping experience that has a huge impact later on at home.” **(Georgie O)**



# Looking ahead.....

## Call for 'summer of play' to help English pupils recover from Covid-19 stress

**Exclusive: children should be having fun with friends instead of extra lessons, say experts**



▲ Children play in a school in London last summer. Psychologists have reported behavioural changes in some children after the first lockdown. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

Experts in child development are calling on the government to support a “summer of play” to help pupils in England recover from the stress of lockdown and a year of Covid upheaval.

“Our daughter does not want to go back to school. She does not want to worry about socially distancing, constantly washing her hands, getting her temperature checked etc. She wants to be a normal child.” **(Dotty G)**

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## Summer catch-up schools planned for pupils in England

🕒 4 days ago | 💬 Comments



Coronavirus pandemic



# How can the social security system better support families?

Retain the £20 Universal Credit uplift

Extend the £20 uplift to legacy benefits such as Employment Support Allowance

Address the impact of debt deductions and the benefit cap

Longer term social security reform





# Get involved...

[www.covidrealities.org](http://www.covidrealities.org)

@covidrealities

## Write-ups

A place to find our latest learnings from the project

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"I enjoyed reading the quotes from other people on this site, helped me feel far less alone. I KNEW I wasn't alone, but reading others words helped my FEEL I wasn't alone."



Victoria B,  
July 2020



**Dr Ruth Patrick**

University of York

Are you:

- ☒ a parent or carer living in the UK?
- ☒ looking after children under 19 years of age?
- ☒ and having difficulties making ends meet?

If all three of these apply to you, and **you've read all about the project here**, then click below

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# THANK YOU

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