

The Psychosocial Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children, Youth and Families

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Introduction

This paper presents a brief summary of a mapping review study that integrates the empirical state of psychological and social science research on the pandemic into complex models of bio-psycho-social human being.

Since the pandemic spread from China across the globe in early 2020, almost all countries have taken action to contain infections. The consequence in these measures differed significantly. From the beginning, it has been discussed that in addition to infection control, pandemic management must also consider psychosocial consequences for the population, especially for children and adolescents. However, psychological and social science research clearly shows that a comparison of infection protection and psychological damage falls short. More complex models are needed that capture the impact of the pandemic on the psychosocial situation of families more precisely and dynamically [1].

Methodology

Based on two theoretical models, the psychological and social science research on the COVID-19 pandemic was organized in a mapping review. On one side there was the model of a bio-psycho-social view on humankind in the pandemic, based on theories of systemic self-organization and applied to the COVID-19 situation by a German research group [2]. On the other side were the outlines of the psychological impact of pandemics by Taylor related to pandemic scenarios even before COVID-19 [3] and by an Australian working group [4].

Along these model conceptions and outlines, the research state was searched in a theory-guided way within the framework of a mapping review. All aspects found in the research literature were transferred into a dynamic model of the psycho-social impact of the pandemic (Figure 1).

Results

More than 70 scientific publications, studies and reviews were evaluated under the question of which aspects have an impact on the mental health of children, adolescents and families in the pandemic [1]. On the one hand, this showed that many young people were also very clearly able to activate resources and extract benefits from the pandemic situation. Younger children in particular clearly enjoyed the slowing down and more time with

their families.

On the other hand, of course, there were also considerable psychosocial risks. These could be roughly grouped into three categories (Figure 1):

First, the direct and indirect consequences of the disease itself. These include neurological and psychological effects of the virus infection, deaths in the family environment (especially if they involved parents), the consequences of quarantine, and long-term impairments in the performance of family members due to post or LongCovid syndrome.

Second, a number of studies show that young people (especially in the transition to adulthood) have experienced a certain loss of confidence in honesty as well as in the competence of the adult generation in crisis management. Contradictory rules, inadequate protection in schools and educational institutions, and the reduction of childhood and adolescence to being a student while ignoring all age-specific needs have led to frustration, anger, and other emotional crises [1].

The third area then, of course, concerns the psychosocial impact of the pandemic containment measures themselves [1,3]. One of the strongest impact factors seems to be poverty and economic insecurity. On the one hand, the measures are much harder to implement under conditions of poverty, and on the other

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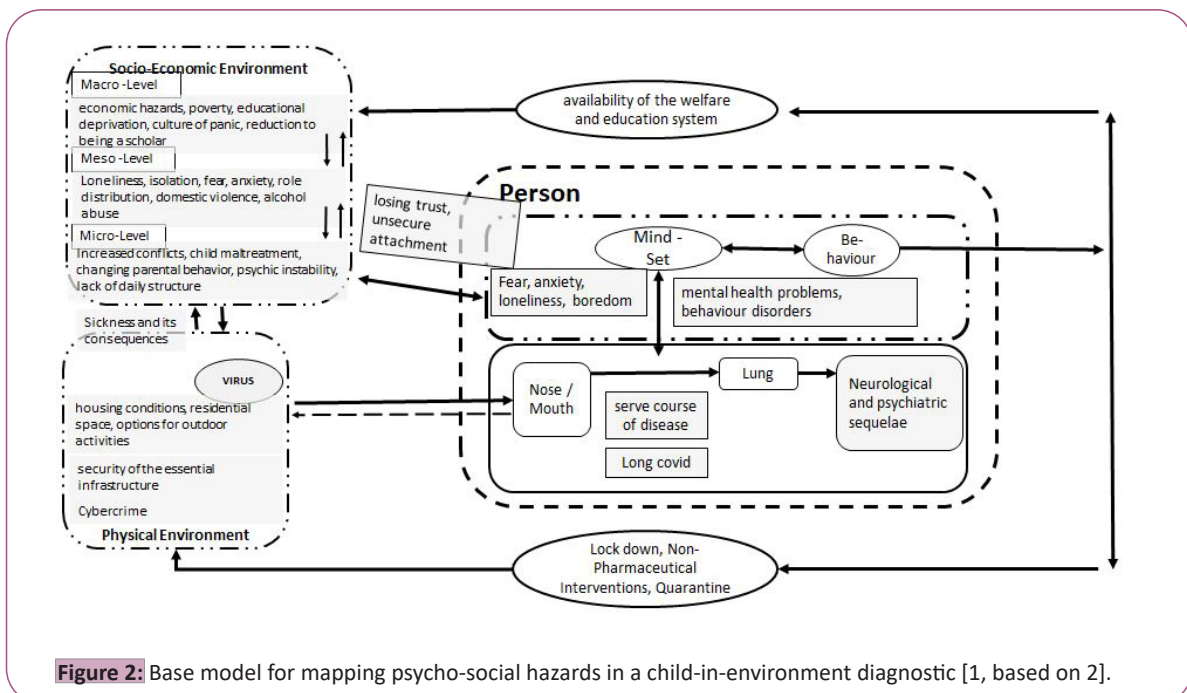
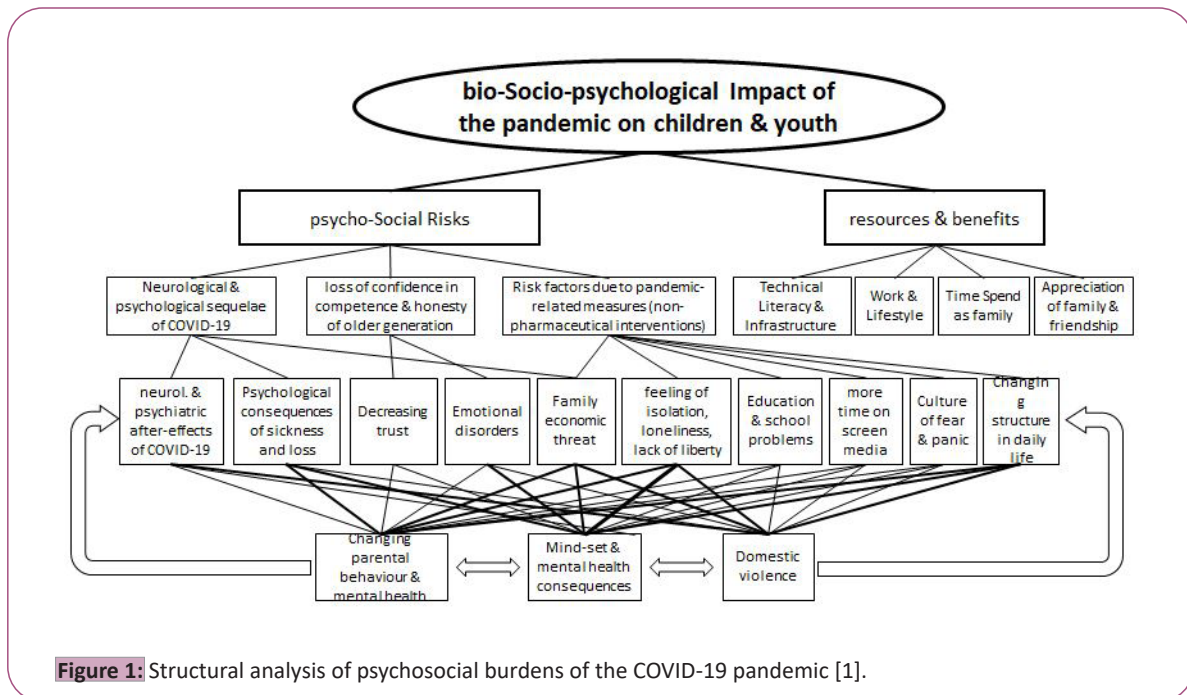
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hand, many of the measures (closure of stores and restaurants, cancellation of events, prohibition of services close to the body) have pushed families into considerable risk of poverty or social relegation. However, problems with home schooling including a drop in educational achievement, feelings of anxiety and loneliness, increases in sexual violence on the Internet, and changes to the point of breakdown in daily structure and around sleep-wake rhythms also posed significant risk potential where they occurred.

All of these factors, which unfold in a complex interplay between the environment and the young person in a dynamic circular effect (**Figure 2**), now act on three central categories: The change in parental behaviour, the young person's mental health, and the conflict dynamics in the family, up to the risk of increasing family violence. At the same time, when problems arise here, these three factors feedback on the risk factors and increase their influence [1].



Conclusion

What the mapping review has shown is that, on the one hand, the psycho-social impact of the pandemic is neither exclusively negative, nor simply counterpart (so-called "collateral damage"), but must be considered in a complex dynamic model. The same measure that is difficult for many families can also be very relieving psychologically for others. Effective protection against psychological suffering thus first and foremost requires a complex and dynamic view of the psyche. In addition, practitioners need tools to analyze the individual experience of the pandemic (diagnostic panel) in order to offer targeted and resource-oriented support to young people. Many strategies for both preventive protection and support when problems have arisen can be derived from a dynamic view of the psychosocial impact of the pandemic, which cannot be achieved with a blunt insistence on a dualistic view (infection protection vs. psyche) or cheap euphemisms that do not correspond to psychological evidence, such as "long lockdown" or "collateral damage."

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