

A Systematic Review of How COVID-19 Influenced the Incidence of Child Maltreatment Higher than Time

Melissa Kibbe*

Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, Boston University, Boston, USA

DESCRIPTION

Over 90% of children and adolescents faced school closures, while social interactions were limited and out-of-home leisure activities were canceled, disrupting daily routines and preventing contact with friends and family. In both high-and middle-income countries, many parents handled remote work with childcare and homeschooling. Meanwhile, essential workers such as healthcare staff, cleaners and grocery employees faced the challenge of organizing childcare while working outside the home. Economic pressures from rising unemployment and wage cuts heightened stress, leading to increased family conflicts. Unsurprisingly, studies reported rising levels of parental stress, burnout and mental health issues across countries, which in turn negatively impacted parenting. In extreme cases, this led to neglect, physical and psychological violence in families, regardless of income level. While this review focuses on high-income countries, the unique challenges faced by families in low-and middle-income countries have been explored elsewhere.

Although much theories exists about the heightened risk of Child Maltreatment (CM) during the pandemic, evidence on how child protection systems responded to increased exposure is still limited. Understanding these responses is critical for identifying gaps in support and protection systems. Systematic reviews on CM during the pandemic yield mixed results, for instance, analyzed 12 articles from various sectors and countries and found that five studies reported increased CM, six noted a decrease and one found no change. Another review covering 25 studies published between March and October 2020 found a general decline in official CM reports, yet other sources, such as testimonials, helpline calls and reported CM risk factors, suggested an increase. Despite increased helpline calls, official reports showed a decrease in CM allegations but an increase in severe cases. Additionally, 22 studies highlighted lockdown measures as a key risk factor for CM, with population-based data from 12 countries revealing negative impacts on Child Protective Services (CPS) operations due to the disruption of in-person services. CM reports varied widely by region. Overall, systematic reviews on CM rates during Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) present insufficient findings, primarily due to differences in data sources and populations studied. Most

reviews were based on medical and psychological databases and only focused on the early stages of the pandemic, missing the long-term effects on CM rates in later periods.

This gap is significant, as the impact of the pandemic on child protection systems likely extends beyond school closures and shelter-in-place policies. Economic downturns may take time to affect families and services, with financial strain potentially increasing exposure and reducing the number of identifiable incidents. Decreased tax revenues may also strain social services, limiting their capacity to support families. To address this gap, our review aims to summarize findings from monthly breakdowns of CM reports throughout the pandemic. By focusing on administrative data from child protective services in Western high-income countries published in English or German, we looked to ensure greater comparability and reduce variability from differences in child protection systems. Standardized administrative data on reported CM incidents is often not enough in low-income countries and even many high and middle-income European nations lack sufficient data collection protocols. To complement our findings, a parallel systematic literature review was conducted to explore the broader effects of COVID-19 on CM rates. Upcoming studies could enhance our understanding by combining reported CM incidents with population-based proxies for maltreatment prevalence, allowing for a clearer assessment of how well child protection systems have responded over time.

CONCLUSION

While many, including researchers, are relieved that the COVID-19 pandemic as a global health emergency is over, the scientific community seems to be losing momentum on this once-urgent topic, with fewer specific calls for research. While the shift in focus to other pressing issues is understandable, it may be premature. There is still much to learn about the pandemic's long-term impact on child maltreatment. Most of the studies included in this systematic review focus on the period up to the end of 2020, which coincides with the initial phase of lockdowns. As a result, comprehensive conclusions about the overall effects of the pandemic on reported CM incidents cannot be drawn from these findings. Future research should

Correspondence to: Melissa Kibbe, Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, Boston University, Boston, USA, E-mail: mailssakibbe@bu.edu

Received: 27-Aug-2024, Manuscript No. LDAPR-24-34737; **Editor assigned:** 29-Aug-2024, PreQC No. LDAPR-24-34737 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 12-Sep-2024, QC No. LDAPR-24-34737; **Revised:** 19-Sep-2024, Manuscript No. LDAPR-24-34737 (R); **Published:** 27-Sep-2024, DOI: 10.35248/23854529.24.11.090

Citation: Kibbe M (2024). A Systematic Review of How COVID-19 Influenced the Incidence of Child Maltreatment Higher than Time. Adv Pediatr Res. 11:090.

Copyright: © 2024 Kibbe M. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

distinguish between the impacts of lockdowns-during which some families may have experienced (e.g., reduced schedules)

and the prolonged pandemic-related restrictions, which remain underexplored.