



NATIONAL
CHILDREN'S
BUREAU

The Impact of COVID-19 on Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities



Aims of the study

- **Engage directly** with children and young people with SEND
- Ensure diversity in the **range of different types and severity of disabilities and special educational needs** and
- **Understand and track the experiences** of this group

Methodology

- **Partnership** approach with Mencap, SENAC, Specialisterne and Council for Disabled Children
- 60 interviews and four focus groups
- Conducted over a 6 month period - Sept 2020 to March 2021

Participants/children's ages

- Parents/carers (5-21 years)
- Practitioners (Birth-25 years)
- Young people (15-25 years)

Findings: Impact of Covid-19

- Fear of the virus
- Fearing illness – children's & parents

"As the schools closed, obviously the whole anxiety level was increased because you are worried is he vulnerable or is he not vulnerable? Might he get it? Might he not get it? What would happen if he did?" (Parent).

- Bereavement

Findings: Impact of the restrictions

What lockdown meant for parents:

Little or no childcare; Working from home; home schooling;
no respite

Negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing

For children:

Disruption to routine; loss of learning & development – social
& emotional learning, academic learning, speech,
coordination, communication

Findings: Impact of the restrictions

Immediate impact of lockdown:

- Little or no childcare
- *"...my husband...had to come out of work, then [when schools closed]. One of us had to come out of work".*
- *"My work became very much secondary...Because they were here, I couldn't really work with them anyway and their lives were more important than me getting any work done".*

Findings: Impact of the restrictions

Mental Health & Wellbeing of Parents: Stress and anxiety

- *"We had never had a break from him at all. So, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week for months, it was just us and him... So, I think we are quite shattered at the moment".*
- *"There's the three of us here now and we have no break at all. Because (my son) would have been at school five days a week. [His Granny] would have met him a few of those days in the afternoons and he would have gone down to his [Granny's] for a few hours on a Saturday. And you were getting none of that."*

Findings: Impact of the restrictions

Mental Health & Wellbeing of Parents: Stress and anxiety

"I remember having a conversation with my manager and said it felt like I was getting burned out... To be honest, I'd had enough. I had to weigh up what was more important. My boy or work. And it was really affecting me as a parent..."

"...I had to then home school plus work full time. I was stuck in a kitchen from eight o'clock in the morning, sometimes earlier because I got up earlier to get work done, until maybe five, six...It was very stressful on me as a parent trying to do everything"

Findings: Impact of the restrictions for children

Disruption to routine:

- *"... (our daughter) was okay for maybe the first two weeks and then it started to take effect on her. When (she) is at school she sleeps well, she eats well, her behaviour is good and she progresses. (But then) her whole mood just changed. She just whined and cried all day long. She didn't sleep some mornings. She'd sleep from twelve (midnight) to three and then that would be her up for the whole day... And then she stopped eating as well."*

Findings: Impact of the restrictions for children

Disruption to routine:

- *"...it was very claustrophobic. The behaviours just went through the roof...it became very extreme and emotional, very emotional...it was just me and the children. There was no let up at all... Like logically everybody's... having those experiences. But because you are in the centre of it, in your home... It is more than that. There's no let-up"*
- *"I remember one time at nine o'clock I was just about to go out the door and he just lay on the floor and started screaming. And just having frequent meltdowns, his behaviour changed"*

Findings: Impact of the restrictions for children: Disruption to routine:

Because she was very angry and cross, she was taking a lot of anger out on her brother. He is only one and a half...and he got really afraid of her. And he couldn't understand. He was trying to comfort her and she was lashing out at him... She was screaming and it led to him screaming... she took a lot of her anger out on him. We couldn't leave them in the same room. She would have grabbed his hair and dragged him to the floor. Real angry and frustrated. He got a wee bit afraid of her... And it was very hard seeing her hurt him... But she would have pushed him down the stairs and she dragged him by the hair to the ground and kicked him.

Impact of restrictions: Loss of learning & development

- *"Home schooling is very difficult with him. He has a full-time classroom assistant in school. And trying to keep [him] on task, focused and concentrating...is extremely difficult. Lots of tears. Lots of upset and anger having to do the work at home"*
- *"...it has become more difficult as the weeks have went (sic) on.....we have struggled more with the home schooling, them being at home, over this lockdown, because it is winter"*
- *"...they (school) have so many facilities that we don't have (at home). They sent me a lovely video of him in the lights room the other day and they have this new projector. [My son] just was so at ease in it. And he's missing all of that"*

Impact of restrictions: Loss of learning & development

- *"...I could see the children who came to me whose parents had done absolutely no work with them at all during lockdown. And you could see that they had dipped massively... The majority of the children seemed to have gone down".*

Impact of restrictions: Loss of learning & development

- *...in terms of speech and language and... AHP services... we are sitting here in November and my boy hasn't had one, one-to-one speech and language appointment"*
- *"I tried to get help from autism services (from the HSCCT). They weren't doing anything because of COVID."*
- *"...the big thing I noticed with (my son) was his speech. He has no words. But he used to always say loads of sounds and that's the big thing with special school. There are all the therapists on site. And then that was cut straight away".*

Impact of restrictions: Loss of learning & development

- *We have no OT [Occupational Therapist] present here in this moment... We've had no physiotherapy all year (Teacher).*
- *...he also has difficulties with his foot and because... he's not accessing the physio...who would be looking at that."* (Parent).
- *...[my son's] physio, speech and language therapy and OT are all connected to the school. They close the school... And suddenly we are cut off from that." (Parent)*

Priorities for recovery

- Keep education and respite facilities open
- Speed up the implementation of changes already identified as failing in the SEN system
- See education holistically
- Much better coordination between the health & education
- An improvement in the recording & safe sharing of data between agencies.

Recommendations

- Better planning
- Recognise longer-term impacts of the pandemic
- Children and young people with SEND should be a priority group in mental health
- Adequate mental health & wellbeing support for parents/carers
- Employers need to consider the levels of stress that practitioners have experienced since March 2020 & work with their employees to recover and avoid total burnout.

The last word...

I think maybe COVID should waken up a lot of people...we don't have enough support for children with special needs. We just don't have it and how are we going to get it? But then is that up to parents to keep going and going and going? [It's] very hard to keep fighting all the time... (Parent).

For more information...

You can read more here: <https://www.ncb.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/news-opinion/insights-impact-covid-19-children-and-young-people-send-northern>

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