



Summary of how COVID-19 affected young children and the early childhood workforce

Original article by Emily Tate

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The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated early childhood education since its start in 2020. Young children have engaged in fewer social experiences and learning opportunities. Preschool educators have faced stressful working conditions including job uncertainty, financial hardship, and health concerns. This report aggregates existing evidence on long-lasting effects of COVID-19 on children and teachers and explains how COVID-19 has surfaced issues in early childhood education that have been prominent for many years.

INTRODUCTION

The on-going pandemic continues to impact education severely, especially preschool education. Based on research by the University of Michigan and the Urban Institute, this report reflects on current studies that discuss the COVID-19 pandemic effects in the context of early childhood education, indicating that young children have suffered and that educators have faced unprecedented mental health and financial difficulties.

THE STUDY

Despite many studies that report and observe effects of the pandemic, research-based information remains complex and overwhelming to young learners, early childhood educators, and families. Given their other duties, people without scientific training lack the time and expertise to scour the studies that are most relevant to them.

This report covers the disastrous impact of the pandemic to the already-challenged early childhood education field, which is fragmented and unequal due to resource

disparity and gaps in socio-economic status, emphasizing in particular, the pandemic's effects on children (low enrollment, shorter learning hours) and to educators (stress and financial instability/loss).

FINDINGS

One impact of the pandemic on preschool education is a sharp enrollment decline which has led to missed learning and peer-interaction opportunities for children.

For families, contributions to the enrollment decline include fear of the virus, financial difficulties, and uncertainty about remote learning. COVID-19 has impacted early education programs as well. Centers have faced closures, uncertainty about reopening, confusion and worry, financial instability, and increased operation costs. Private and home-based child care programs experience more difficulties than public ones, because they are not supported by federal funds.

In addition to the traumatic public

¹ I created this brief because I believe the ideas in it may help researchers, practitioners, and community members understand the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic upon early childhood education, esp. on children and preschool workforce. This brief represents my best attempt to summarize and interpret the ideas presented by Tate (2021). All errors or misunderstandings are my own.



Ideas Brief

health emergency and financial stress, early childhood teachers have been confronted with challenging work conditions including frequent schedule changes and new instructional and health requirements. Many teachers sought to build strong relationships with families, but this was difficult under the circumstances of remote teaching and enrollment declines.

The negative impact of the pandemic is far beyond academic outcomes, ranging widely from social skills and emotional intelligence to peer interaction and more. Children from historically oppressed groups, including those from low-income backgrounds and those with special needs, suffered more during the pandemic, because services and support they received before COVID-19 was heavily limited.

Other evidence disclosed in the report includes:

- In August 2020 in Colorado, preschool enrollment dropped by 41%, and toddlers, 32%. In fall 2020, preschool enrollment declined by 34%.
- Lower enrollment leads to less learning hours: In fall 2020 in Louisiana, early childhood educators reported spending only 5 hours teaching per week for remote learners.
- For educators, 60% of teachers in schools and child care centers in Massachusetts indicated negative mental impacts from COVID-19.
- Similarly, 70% of educators in family- and center-based child care sectors in Nebraska reported anxiety about the future.
- Reported stress levels increased by over 10% overall, for early childhood teachers during the pandemic.

“Young children have suffered, perhaps with long-lasting effects, and those who work with them find themselves facing unprecedented mental health and financial hardships.” – Author

IMPLICATIONS

In contrast to most research regarding COVID-19 effects on early childhood education, which are usually overwhelming, confusing and complex, this report offers an overview of existing empirical studies and streamlines the impact, providing evidence on detailed effects both on children and the early childhood workplace.

Overall, the pandemic has been, in a word, devastating for young children, their families, and teachers. Despite isolation and social deprivation, COVID-19 brought some families closer together, as parents spend more time with their children, and smaller class sizes have somewhat led to more individualized care and instruction.

Solutions require us to think differently as a society about our youngest members; and to consider families as partners who can help innovate the best education for their children.

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The original article was one of the EdSurge.com reports about early childhood education.

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