



Families and Community in the Time of COVID-19: Final Report

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You can check out our project pages, which includes team photos, latest blogs and updates from our international partners here: <https://fact-covid.wixsite.com/study>

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COVER PHOTO: Matt Clayton

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Report Summary

The FACT-Covid study examined the experiences of 73 individuals from 38 families across the UK during a year of the Covid-19 pandemic (May 2020-June 2021). Involving parents, children, and grandparents from families in a wide range of circumstances, the research team explored how people understood and responded to social distancing measures, examining how the pandemic impacted them, both within families and across households. The team used qualitative methods to collect the data. Participants reflected on family life during Coronavirus through online or telephone interviews as well as uploading photos, text and videos to a specialist social media app, Indeemo, which captured responses to events as the crisis unfolded over three lockdowns. The findings outlined here are grouped according to themes within the topics of: responding to social distancing; factors affecting experiences of lockdown; coping as a family; and attitudes towards vaccines.

In exploring **responses to social distancing**, the study found that participants welcomed the initial lockdown in March 2020, with some believing that it should have occurred sooner, and that Government guidance should have been more stringent. Participants reported watching the news together as a family in the first weeks of the pandemic and being in general agreement within households about their attitudes to social distancing measures. Families on lower incomes had a higher risk of exposure to the virus, as they were more likely to need to leave home for work and be unable to afford online shopping or bulk-buy groceries.

A common theme in the app posts and interviews was the view that some people were properly following social distancing guidelines and others were not. This led to some ties being severed, while others were reinforced. That is, extended family members and friends with similar perceptions of risk and views on adherence to social distancing were seen more often (on and offline), while contact with those with dissimilar attitudes was reduced.

Overall, participants described breaking and bending social distancing rules more frequently over time as the result of a decreasing sense of risk combined with declining trust in government and growing confusion over official guidance.

Analysing accounts of families in diverse situations allowed practical **factors affecting experiences of lockdown** to be identified. Those on low incomes suffered significantly more stress due to financial insecurity and caring for children 24/7 in cramped accommodation without outdoor space. Families with younger children, single parents, and those whose children have special needs were also severely affected. All parents struggled balancing childcare, employment (where relevant) and home-schooling. Pressure was eased for those who were able to work flexibly from home with sufficient space and/or form childcare 'bubbles' with grandparents, however. While both children and parents emphasised the importance of schools' handling of the crisis, there were marked contrasts in levels of support reported.

Examining **how parents, children and grandchildren coped emotionally** over the course of the crisis revealed that although they were most anxious about health risks during Spring 2020, they adapted quickly to new routines. Access to greenspace was considered important to adults' and children's wellbeing. Families were generally positive about spending more time together and thought relationships between parents, children and siblings had improved. They thought appreciation of intergenerational ties had increased. Grandparents spoke of sadness at missing children and grandchildren who lived at a distance but believed that online communication helped sustain relationships. The third lockdown during Winter 2020-21 was viewed as a low point by most families as stress and fatigue took their toll and bad weather kept them indoors. The impact of Covid-19 on children's mental health was apparent as they described disruptions to education, everyday routines, family relations and friendships and were worried about parental finances and risks to family health.

There was significant divergence in **attitudes towards vaccines** among participants. Whereas most had taken the vaccine or intended to do so, some

voiced concerns over lack of knowledge of its long-term risks or believed they should develop antibodies naturally.

FACT-Covid is part of an international partnership, led by UCL, and this partnership is valuable in comparing experiences of families in ten countries during the pandemic. This report concludes with a series of **key messages and recommendations** based on UK findings. These include calls for financial support for those who are isolating, investment in green spaces, opportunity for mutual learning across schools, continuation of flexible working where feasible and investment in mental health support for a generation of young people affected by the pandemic

Full Report

About the FACT-Covid study

This project documented and examined the experiences of families with children during the Covid-19 pandemic. It aimed to investigate how people reacted to public health measures and why they might do that differently. In particular, it explored differences *within* families (between the experiences of parents, children and grandparents) as well as *across* them (such as between those in affluent and low-income households). The study followed participants over a year (May 2020 – June 2021), looking at the consequences of the pandemic and how families experienced public health measures over these times (such as social distancing, ‘the rule of six’, facemasks in public places and so on). The project is part of an international consortium¹, which took place in ten different countries: **Argentina, Chile, Pakistan, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, Taiwan, the USA**, and the **UK**. Here we report only on the UK findings. For more information on the projects in other countries, see our forthcoming book (Twamley et al 2023a).

¹ <https://fact-covid.wixsite.com/study/i-cofact>

Background literature

The FACT-Covid project was initiated rapidly when the UK government introduced the first national lockdown in March 2020, just after the World Health Organisation's declaration of a pandemic (WHO, 2020). The longitudinal design of this research enabled families' perspectives to be documented over the course of successive lockdowns (see *Table 1: Lockdowns and Fact-Covid Research Timeline* p.11). Findings from research covering a series of themes were published during the pandemic which are relevant to FACT-Covid's broad-ranging investigation of multi-generational experiences, and here we give a brief summary of this scholarship.

Responses to social distancing – The UK government introduced a range of public health measures in 2020 and 2021, including, at different times, bans on meeting with people from other households, requirements to keep two metres away from other people and to wear masks in public spaces, and advice to wash hands frequently. Research showed how attitudes to such measures varied amongst different groups and changed over time. A UK-based survey during the first national lockdown of young people aged 13-24 found that young people (especially adolescent males) did not feel they were at risk of catching the virus or posed a risk to others, and whilst they expressed their commitment to the guidelines and their intentions to follow them, they were not consistently complying with basic hygiene practices (Levita et al., 2020). The introduction of 'bubbles' in 2020 to enable single parent households to see grandparents or other carers was welcomed, but the guidance was complex and did not address the needs of all types of families (Gulland, 2020; Roberts, 2021).

Inequalities - Whilst the pandemic and lockdowns have had negative impacts across the population, they have also exacerbated pre-existing inequalities in income, health, access to healthcare, education and wellbeing (Blundell et al., 2021; Burns et al., 2021; Matthewman and Huppatz, 2020). Studies around infection rates, deaths and illness in the UK have shown that deprivation is strongly associated with rates of Covid-19, and that minority ethnic individuals

are two to three times more likely to die from the virus irrespective of age and geographical region (Aldridge et al., 2020). Whereas some households were relatively unaffected economically – such as those where adults were able to work from home, were ‘furloughed’, and/or were able to draw on savings to cope with sudden falls in income – many low-income households with limited resources were significantly affected by reduced incomes (Bourquin et al., 2020; Brewer et al., 2020; Howes et al., 2020; Blundell et al., 2021) and food insecurity (Howes et al., 2020; Goudie and McIntyre, 2021; O’Connell et al., 2020; Smith and Barron, 2020). The severe economic impact on already-struggling households affected many people’s physical and mental health, often exacerbating pre-existing conditions (CPAG 2020; Fancourt et al., 2020; Marmot et al., 2020;). People from minority ethnic groups have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, with existing intersecting factors including structural racism underlying economic disadvantage and reduced resources for health (Katikireddi et al., 2021).

Families’ experiences of lockdown – School closures and the move to schooling from home affected all children and young people, but had a far greater negative impact on children from low-income families, with less access to formal schooling and online learning provided by state schools, particularly during the first lockdown (Blainey and Hannay, 2021; Cattan et al., 2021; Elliot Major et al., 2020), and fewer resources at home such as a computer, broadband or a private space to study (Andrew et al., 2020; Crew, 2020; Smith and Barron, 2020). Preschool-aged children were significantly affected by lockdowns, especially those from low-income households, with reduced access to outside space, resources and opportunities for socialisation, as well as increased parental stress and lack of access to family support services, all of which are likely to impact on young children’s development, behaviour and emotional wellbeing (Crew, 2020; Egan et al., 2021; O’Sullivan et al., 2021).

In the context of the school and childcare closures and restrictions on mixing with other households, parents and carers from diverse socio-economic backgrounds – but especially mothers, those with children with special needs

or disabilities and/or young children – struggled to juggle paid work, childcare and schooling from home (Clark et al., 2021; Pascal et al., 2020). Parents faced a range of intersecting challenges and barriers to supporting their children’s schooling and general wellbeing, including: having children of different ages; being limited by their own education level, mental health problems or English language barriers; struggling to maintain routines, leading to disrupted sleep; lack of inside and/or outside space; temporary or poor quality housing; unaffordable utility bills, affecting online access, light and cooking facilities (Smith and Barron 2020). McNeilly and Reece (2020) have highlighted the central role of mothers in creating safe spaces in the home, but also the challenges in managing the unsettling of roles and responsibilities and the disruption of usual routines. For some, however, home was not a place of safety but increased the risk of exposure to domestic abuse (Anderberg et al., 2020; Gulland, 2020; Smith and Barron 2020).

Intergenerational relationships and support – Parents and children had to negotiate issues which were unproblematic or non-existent pre-pandemic, whilst isolation and confinement to the home disrupted previously taken-for-granted family routines and rituals, creating a need for new and flexible routines and rules (Prime et al., 2020). The combination of economic pressures, greater demands on parents’ time and resources, and reduced parenting capacity increased stress levels and the risk of turning to less constructive parenting strategies and harsh parenting, leading to tensions, conflict escalation and poorer relationships (Prime et al. 2020; see also Brown et al., 2020). Women and parents of young children reported particularly high levels of stress (Pierce et al., 2020). Parenting capacity during the pandemic may have been affected by additional factors such as having children with special educational needs or disabilities (Neece et al. 2020), pre-existing economic hardship, substance misuse, caregiver mental health problems, difficulties in couple relationships, access to external social support, or the effects of partner violence on children’s wellbeing (Prime et al. 2020). In many cases, however, family relationships also served as a buffer: close relationships can have a protective effect and family belief systems may foster resilience (Prime et al. 2020); indeed, some families

reported positive effects of spending more time together at home (Brown et al. 2020; Neece et al. 2020).

Children and young people's mental health – Lockdowns, school closures and social distancing measures increased the risk of loneliness, emotional difficulties, depression and anxiety amongst children and young people (Cowie and Myers, 2021; Levita et al., 2020; Loades et al., 2020), particularly for those who are most marginalised (Cowie and Myers, 2021, p.65). Parents and carers in the Co-SPACE study reported that children's behavioural, emotional and attentional difficulties tended to decrease as pandemic-related restrictions eased, although not for children with special educational needs and disabilities or those from low-income households, who continued to struggle with mental health symptoms (Skripkauskaite et al., 2021).

Attitudes towards the vaccine – The rollout of the vaccination against Covid-19 started in early 2021 and statistics show willingness to be vaccinated varies across ethnic and social groups. Vaccination rates are highest for those identifying as White British (76%) and lowest for people identifying as Black Caribbean (38%), Black African (45%) and Pakistani (45%) ethnic groups (ONS, 2022). Rates are also lower for people living in more deprived areas, those who were not born in the UK, those who are long-term unemployed and those who are limited a lot by a disability (ONS, 2022). Barriers to uptake for young people include not considering oneself to be at risk of becoming ill from Coronavirus, not believing the vaccination is effective and concerns about a lack of research into possible side-effects; these concerns may be amplified by 'a lack of trust in government and misunderstanding of science' (Denford et al., 2022: 1).

Table 1: Lockdowns and FACT-Covid Research timeline

MONTH	EVENT	SCHOOLS AND CHILDCARE	RESEARCH STAGE
March– June 2020	1 st Lockdown	Schools and childcare remained open for key workers/vulnerable children only Partial minimalist opening on June 1 st & full opening early September	Ethical approval granted in April 2020 Data collection gets under way in May 2020 using Indeemo First interviews in May-June 2020
November- December 2020	2 nd Lockdown (England & Wales)	Schools and childcare facilities remaining open to all children	Indeemo tasks continue with responses via video, photos and text
January- March 2021	3 rd Lockdown	School closures except for key workers/ vulnerable children Nurseries remain open Vaccine roll-out begins	Indeemo posts continue Family interviews May-June 2021 Data collection ended

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for the study drew together three conceptual strands in considering how individual families reacted and interacted within the societal context of a global health crisis that upended their 'normal' activities and behaviour.

Relationality is integral to family studies (Smart, 2011; Twamley et al., 2021) and our overall approach was relational in examining decisions and practices that were negotiated across and between connected individuals during lockdown. Focusing on family practices, which foregrounds the 'doing' of family in daily life (Morgan, 2011; 2013; 2020), was apt as successive lockdowns, social distancing, school closures and home working caused unprecedented changes in how family life was 'done' in this period. This emphasis on relationality and family practices is especially pertinent in light of the need for family/household members to maintain public health measures to combat the spread of an infectious disease.

Aligned with the relational perspective, the work of Douglas (in Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983) proves useful in interrogating ways in which relationships are affected by risk, which shapes conceptual boundaries, significantly between 'self' and 'other'. An infectious disease is a useful lens for understanding perceptions of 'individual' and 'family' and who is regarded as (safe) 'insiders' or (risky) 'outsiders' as individuals, families, communities and institutions make practical and symbolic efforts to manage risks.

It is also important to consider families' experiences in terms of broader political and social trends. Whereas the neoliberal political agenda has been characterised by state withdrawal from health and social care (Wood and Skeggs, 2020), the pandemic required high levels of state intervention in the behaviour of citizens. In line with their neoliberal approach, personal responsibility was central to the UK government's social-distancing guidelines. As the evidence above and presented in this report shows, there were vast inequalities in the impact of the pandemic among families in different situations.

Yet, these guidelines were framed by an individualised model of behaviour that did not necessarily take circumstances of diverse households into account (Preston and Firth, 2020). We concur with Bröer et al., (2021) in viewing health policies as constructing specific understandings and experiences of risk. Beck's (1992) analysis of the relationship between risk and individualism is therefore highly relevant. His argument that individuals in Western European societies must continuously engage in reflexive decision-making and take personal responsibility mitigating risks arising from globalisation, industrialisation and environmental crises proves applicable in understanding individual families' responses to the Covid-19 crisis.

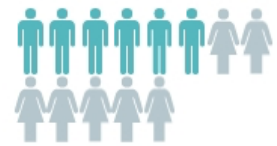
Methods and analysis

We recruited 38 families with children living in various parts of the UK to take part in FACT-Covid. Everyone in the family aged over 12 was invited to participate and parents were also asked to reflect on their children's experiences of the pandemic. In total, 73 individuals took part. Plant names are used as pseudonyms to represent each family for anonymity purposes in presenting the data.



13 young people
8 Grandparents

7 single parents (all mothers)



71% university educated

40% Black and Minority Ethnic

34 = England;
1 = Scotland,
1 = Wales;
3 = Northern Ireland



Income

13 families: < £30,000 p.a.

14 families b/w £30,000 & £90,000 p.a.

11 families > £90,000 p.a.

Most participants (52) used the Indeemo app (<https://indeemo.com/>) to upload a mixture of text, videos and photos. As well as responding to our diary questions and tasks, this enabled the team to have online conversations with participants about their posts. Eleven participants completed an individual interview in June 2020 and 51 participants took part in a final family level online interview in May/June 2021 in addition to their Indeemo posts. The remainder took part in interviews only. All data collection was done online or over the phone. Overall, this provided 900 photographs with captions, 452 videos, more than 900 text posts and some 32 hours of interviews:



- 900 photographs with captions
- 452 videos



32 hours of interviews



900 text posts



where you have shared thoughts, emotions and insights into your lives with us

Analysis of the data was carried out using thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006) and NVivo qualitative data analysis software to enable comparison of perspectives on themes among participants in a broad range of circumstances. In addition to coding the data according to themes, participants' circumstances, including number and ages of children, were summarised in a 'family portrait' and demographic information including employment, ethnicity and household income (HI) was assigned for each case. The analytical strategy entailed both deductive coding in response to the research questions and inductive coding as themes emerged from participants' comments over the course of the pandemic. We thought very carefully about our ethical approach to conducting online research during such difficult times. There were no easy answers and we continued to revisit ethics throughout the project. To read more on this, please see Faircloth et al (2022).

Findings

The study set out to examine how families in a wide range of situations understood and responded to social distancing measures and how the pandemic impacted on them. We group the findings under the following headings:

- 1. Experiences of, and responding to, social distancing guidance**
- 2. Factors affecting families' experiences of lockdown**
- 3. Coping as a family**
- 4. Vaccines**

EXPERIENCES OF, AND RESPONDING TO, SOCIAL DISTANCING GUIDANCE

Understanding the guidance – Participants reported watching the Government's daily update on television in the first weeks of lockdown for news of how the pandemic was developing and the UK response to it. In general, they welcomed the introduction of lockdown as a necessary precaution, with many saying it ought to have happened sooner. Keeping to stringent lockdown guidelines was viewed as relatively straightforward in the initial months.

*I find social distancing measures easy to follow. It's a lot of common sense and thinking of yourself and others around you. We haven't been away many places since the whole lockdown, so we don't have much issues with it. **Freesia Dad (White, Household Income (HI) £16,000-29,000) Interview, June 2020***

Posted by Jasmine Mum on 31st May 2020. She writes: 'Around 8pm after putting my son to bed I'll watch the headlines from the 6pm news on iPlayer or will bring up the Coronavirus daily update. In the latter I usually skip to the part in the middle with the graphs and to see what usually Patrick Vallance, Chris Whitty, or Jennie Harries have to say about them. It's usually nothing surprising, but I think there's something comforting about seeing one more day has passed and the curve's still coming down.'

Family members were generally in agreement about social distancing measures. Participants were largely confined to their homes and socialised with household members, with home becoming a 'safe' location, where rules around social distancing were agreed and maintained.

*We haven't had any disagreements within our family regarding the roadmap. We are all clear on what we need to do and how to do it. **Echinacea Dad (White, HI £60,000-89,999) Indeemo note, May 2020***

We would like watch the news together and kind of like discuss what to do and my mom like for example she would simply say you're not going out anywhere. Time allowed outside was like groceries and stuff like maybe once every two weeks or something.



*So yeah, and we would just watch the news together then just talk about stuff. **Violet Daughter (aged 17, South Asian)***

As the weeks went by, we continued to ask for reactions to new developments around guidance on social distancing. Families generally reported becoming less clear

about what was allowed and what was not as guidance changed and new announcements were made.

*I understand the 2m rule, face masks, unlimited exercise. But I am finding it harder to keep up with the latest rule on how many people can meet up and where. **Jasmine Mum (Mixed, HI £60,000-89,999) Indeemo note, May 2020***

Levels of risk - Responses to Indeemo prompts and interview questions showed different views on levels of risk to health. This ranged from a small minority who compared the virus with the common flu, to those who were very worried about the potentially fatal nature of the virus. Some people felt more vulnerable because of their ethnicity or pre-existing health issues such as diabetes or asthma.

Analysis of the data showed that families on low incomes were more likely to be exposed to the virus due to having to leave the house more often than those who could afford online shopping or bulk grocery purchases. Families on lower incomes were also more likely to have jobs that did not allow homeworking. For instance, Nerine Dad was very conscious of potential exposure to the virus in his job as a taxi driver:

*We've been ok because I've had to take extra care, extra measures. I have to go the extra mile, even do things the government never advised to, I had to use my common sense to do extra cleaning. **Nerine Dad (Black, HI £30,000-59,000) June 2020, Interview***

Behaviour of others – A common theme was the view that some people were properly following the guidelines and others were not.

*So, lot of people, they have their own kind of um understanding of what social distancing means and many people they just didn't care, so especially outside of the house, in the workplace it was so difficult to follow social distancing. **Huckleberry Dad, (Black, HI £16,000-29,999) Interview, June 2020***

Participants observed others around them getting more relaxed as coronavirus continued:

*As we were driving by the coast, we came across bars with extremely long lines of people crowded almost shoulder to shoulder. The closest we come to breaking the rules is when we walk down a street with people. I find it easy enough to walk around people, but my sister uses a wheelchair and when people approach, they rarely get out of her way until the very last second and they are well within 2m. It is also hard for my dad pushing her chair to manoeuvre her out of the way on a narrow path. **Bacopa Daughter (Aged 15, white, HI £30,000-59,999) Indeemo note, July 2020***

Some participants reported disagreements with friends or extended family members who had different attitudes to social distancing. For example, Ilama Dad, whose wife has pre-existing health issues, said relationships were affected as friends took a more relaxed approach to lockdown:

*We celebrated Eid at home. But lots of other people went out, they went to other people's houses...Friends think we are very strict, our family, but we should follow the rules to minimise the effect of this pandemic but people sometimes don't understand...I have people say one time, 'can you come to my house' and I say 'I can't, it's lockdown' and then a second time, 'can you come tomorrow afternoon' and I say 'no it's still lockdown, I still can't go'. And then they say, 'I'll meet my other friends, it's only you who can't come because of lockdown'. **Ilama Dad (South Asian, HI <£16,000) Interview, May 2021***

Breaking and bending rules – Indeemo posts and interview comments referred to bending or breaking guidelines more frequently as time went by. By the point of the second (Wales and England) and third lockdowns, people justified breaking the rules for childcare purposes, as a means of supporting others, coping with isolation, or protecting their mental health.

I have bent the rules for childcare and for company. Once I had 5 zoom meetings back-to-back and we weren't supposed to see anyone yet but I

*called my mum to ask if she could look after [son] outside in the garden for a few hours as he'd had a meltdown the day before. **Dahlia Mum (White, HI £16,000-29,999) Indeemo note, September 2020***

*There were two occasions where we met up with three friends who don't have children, three adult friends, and I think our rationale for that was um... I think it was to do with mental health that we would be as careful as we could, but we needed to do that to sort of keep going... Then we also met up a couple of times with two of Clover daughter's friends each time with one of their parents there and again we tried to maintain the distance, but it doesn't really work very effectively with them. And I think again our rationale there was partly to do with our mental health and partly to do with her mental health. **Clover Dad (White, HI £39,999-59,999) Interview, June 2020***

Trust in government - The main factors influencing changing attitudes to social distancing over time were decreasing sense of risk and declining trust in government.



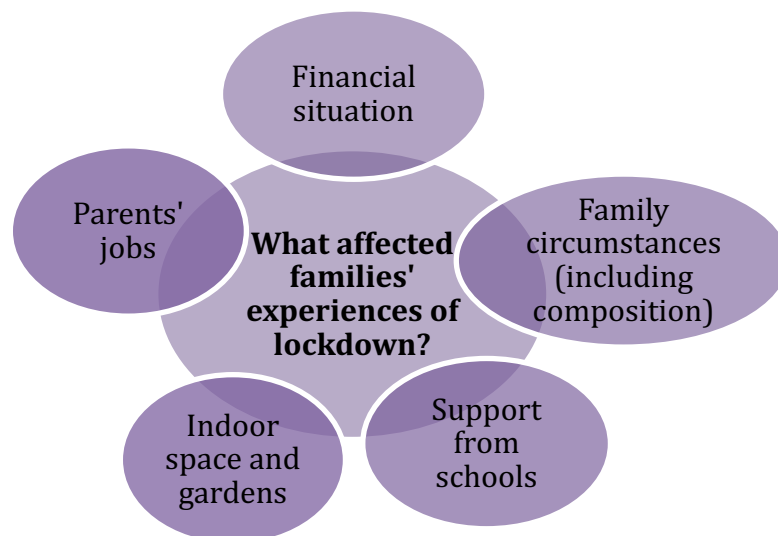
This photo was submitted by Croton Mum (White, HI £90,000-119,999) on the 11th November 2020. She writes: *'I have nothing to say about this that is polite. This was different from last lockdown and represents poor political leadership, poor planning and a lack of evidence based policy making. (is there any evidence that links time in a supermarket with increased transmission rates?). Also things classed as essential were arbitrary [...] Last lockdown I limited my trips out, I'm so cross that I didn't bother this time.'*

Participants referred to matters such as the Welsh government's U-turn on the definition of 'essential shopping' (as above) and Dominic Cummings, then Chief Advisor to the Prime Minister, not being punished for breaking social distancing rules.

*In my eyes this government has lost any authority - scientific, moral or otherwise - to tell me what to do. I'd like to think I'll continue to use good judgement, but I will not listen to them. **Begonia Mum***
(White, HI £30,000-59,000) Indeemo note, May 2020

A lack of trust created confusion and anxiety over whether and how to follow official guidance, creating more work for participants as they sought to find more 'reliable' information. As noted in wider literature outlined previously, political trust and social trust are often linked, and indeed we noted a lack of trust amongst our participants that the wider public were sufficiently following social-distancing guidelines, leading to a circumspection and exclusion of people from outside the home. Family members and friends who were understood to have similar understandings of the risks the C-19 virus poses were welcomed into the virtual and sometimes literal space of the household, but others were excluded. While comfort and intimacy created and sustained amongst some family and friends is something to be celebrated, the attendant exclusions may lead to fragmentation and a reduction in social cohesion overall. We argue that the individualised and at times surveillance approach of the UK government contributed to these processes of inclusion and exclusion (see Twamley et al., 2023b).

2. FACTORS AFFECTING EXPERIENCES OF LOCKDOWN



Financial situation – Families on low incomes experienced much more stress than those in stronger financial positions. For instance, as a single mother of three on Universal Credit, Elderberry Mum was unable to afford basic items such as formula milk for her baby when shortages led to price increases during the early days of lockdown.

*We are worried about money in our family because my mum does not get enough benefit... we ration food and nappies for my brothers. Sometimes my mum does not eat much for me and [names of brothers] to be ok and she leaves them without nappies to have for nighttime. **Elderberry Son (Aged, black, HI <£16,000)***
Indeemo note, May 2020

Parents on low incomes reported being relieved to receive vouchers in place of free school meals:

*The benefits system has been helpful as well, it's been a big impact because if there was no recourse to funds, I don't know where we'd be. We'd probably be in huge debt and have a lot of costs to cover. So, there was provision. I remember there was this erm voucher that they sent to families from schools, they sent the voucher for shopping. That was a huge impact because they send those, I think it's £30 per school age child. So that was a huge impact. **Nectarine Mum (Black, HI £30,000-59,999) Interview, May 2021***

Some parents did not have wi-fi or sufficient electronic devices for their children to use for home-schooling. In contrast to this, families on higher incomes had numerous computers, laptops and tablets and also bought educational toys and craft activities to keep children entertained:

*I bought some online packages for her which she used and also like we're well enough educated that we can educate and support our children, and we had enough computers in the house and we had enough wifi and things like that, but lots of people haven't been in that position. **Croton Mum (White, HI £90,000-119,999)***
Interview, June 2021



Photo of a craft activity with her daughter making a 'robot' costume from Gardenia Mum (South Asian, HI £30,000-59,999) Indeemo, May 2020.

Most participants were in jobs but still concerned about how the economic effect of the pandemic might affect their employment. Heather Mum was among those whose family income was immediately reduced as her cleaning business was affected severely by lockdown:

*The situation with our finances has been very difficult in the beginning because we got very scared, like very scared. I couldn't go to work anymore so for the time that we went from working outside the housing the working in most of the time and having the children around me while working and I was very scared about the future. So, I applied for Universal Credit. It was very difficult to get in touch with them in the beginning, but we managed so yes we do yet Universal Credit as well because my husband's earnings and my earnings from the work that I do are not enough to support the family. **Heather Mum (White, HI £16,999-29,999) Indeemo note, June 2020***

By contrast, a number of those on higher incomes reported saving money on outgoings such as travel, nurseries and leisure during pandemic:

*The pandemic has improved our finances. I have either been working or furloughed on full pay. My husband has continued to work from home on full pay. As we are both being paid as per usual but have significantly lower outgoings due to lockdown restrictions, we find ourselves better off. **Bacopa Mum (White, HI £30,000-59,999) Indeemo note, July 2020***

Indoor space and gardens – The importance of sizes of homes and access to gardens to families' experiences of the pandemic became highly apparent over the three lockdowns.

*We're lucky, we have a big house for the three of us. Plenty of rooms for whoever's working to get away. We've got a big garden, so there's no sense of being sort of stuck in. **Xylosma Mum (White, HI >£120,000) Indeemo video, June 2020.***

Again, by contrast, living in a small home with no outdoor space in which to exercise or play made lockdown particularly difficult for some families.

*There's myself and three little ones, eleven, ten and six. We basically live in a tall tower block in one bed and these times are challenging because nobody's got any space to themselves, there's no privacy. I fear that if any one of us got the virus, then there's no place to isolate. So, it's been challenging, it's been very difficult in that sense and it's just trying to keep the kids occupied as well, with no technology and the school's being shut and whatever. **Mallow Mum (Asian, HI <£16,000) June 2020, Interview***



Xylosma Mum (White, HI >£120,000) says of her garden in an Indeemo post, June 2020:

We've got a big garden, so there's no sense of being sort of stuck in. Very grateful for the garden for obvious reasons.

Family circumstances (including composition) – Families come in many different forms and there was diversity among those who took part in our study. Experiences of lockdown were greatly influenced by each family's specific circumstances, particularly its composition. This includes the age and number of children, with parents of younger children and those with larger families reporting greater challenges. Participants who were able to form 'childcare bubbles' with grandparents found the pandemic much more manageable, with one family deciding to do so before this was officially permitted due to the arrival of a new baby.

Single parent families experienced being the lone adult responsible for meeting all their children's needs during lockdown especially stressful:

*No granny to mind my 3 year old and I am a single parent... I am freelance and if I don't work I can't pay rent To have to cope with more housework and more childcare on top of the same or more work has been exhausting...[son] gets frustrated at me working very quickly and has started sitting on my hands to stop me working.. He sometimes gets worried about me coughing and worried I'm going to get sick. He gets lonely. **Dahlia Mum (White, HI £16,000-29,999) Indeemo note, September 2020***

Families with children who have special needs or disabilities were severely affected by school closures and changes to routines while also lacking support they usually received from extended family members or professionals:

My son has disabilities of autism, dyslexia, and epilepsy. This means medication has to be monitored regularly, he needs to eat on time, the constant change has been a huge struggle. He tried to take his life in May and we have been coping with the fallout from that as well as working etc. To be frank this has been one of the hardest periods in the last 5 years since he was diagnosed.

Katsura Mum (White, HI £30,000-59,999) Indeemo note, June 2020.

Parents' jobs – Work situations also varied greatly, with some parents furloughed (usually during the first lockdown) or well supported by their employers, while others struggled to balance work alongside home schooling without their usual arrangements for childcare. This proved particularly difficult for dual-earner couples who were also under more pressure in their jobs due to Covid-19:

*We have both been working 80 hours plus a week. We are constantly interrupted by the kids (which is OK but means we neither work effectively nor care for them effectively)... My brain feels muddled, I am missing things, snappy, arguing, pondering divorce or maybe just running away. We argue a lot about who does what in the house and with the children (tasks and time). **Croton Mum (White, HI £90,000-119,000) Indeemo note, August 2020***

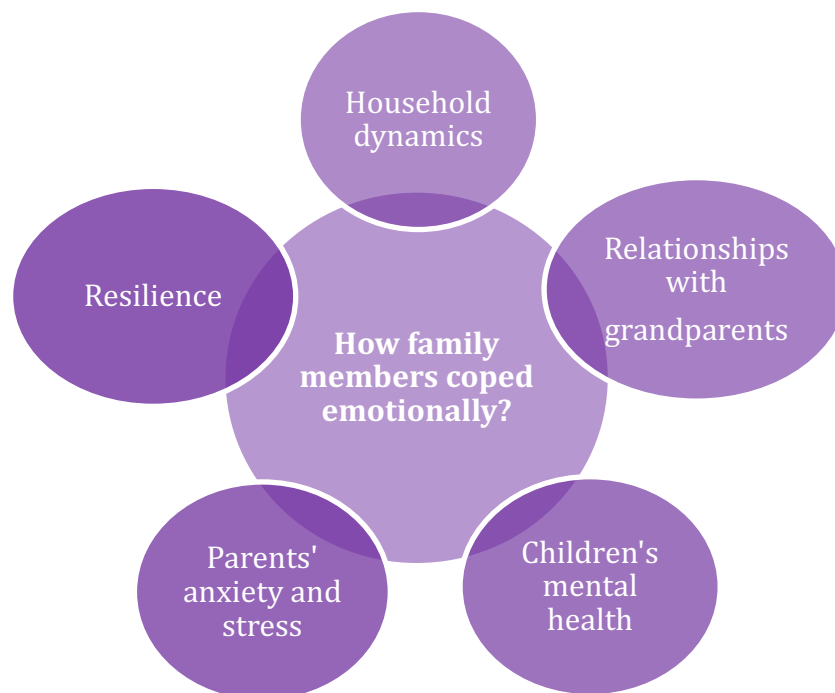
Support from schools – Participants' Indeemo posts and interviews showed the way individual schools handled the pandemic was a major factor affecting families' experiences. Parents and children described varying levels of support from schools in dealing with the shift to remote learning, sometimes even within the same family. Most families reported improvements by the third lockdown, with laptops for children who needed them, better communication with parents and more stimulating online lessons.

*Our school went into gear quickly, I know most schools did and some didn't. Speaking to siblings and friends who've got kids in different schools, I know that wasn't always the case and I was so grateful for the support the school gave us in so many ways. If you want an example, for those of us who don't have tech at home, that was a massive thing during the first lockdown. At that point I didn't even have a reliable smartphone. I have subsequently got one but at that point I didn't. Everything suddenly moved on-line overnight. So for those of us that didn't have tech at home they printed out paper packs.... And secondly, they recorded videos of the teachers telling stories and they posted them on our WhatsApp group ...The third thing they did was all the class teachers rang their children, physically rang us and spoke to the kids to see how things are going. **Oleander Mum (South Asian, HI <16,000) Interview, May 2021***

*I find it kinda hard now because especially I haven't had much guidance from school. So mostly I just watch, um, videos on how I prepare for my A levels at times, by like other students. Um. I think it is sometimes difficult to concentrate doing the same thing, but it's like the same routine every day and also do the same thing. Because everything is online as well... So just hard like staring at a screen or being on technology all day so it kind of makes me lose my concentration. **Ilama daughter (Aged 16, South Asian, HI <£16,000) Interview, May 2020***

3. COPING AS A FAMILY

The involvement of whole families is a strength of the FACT-COVID study. As well as practicalities affecting experiences of the pandemic, parents, children and grandparents described how their relationships and mental health were affected and how they coped. Hearing about experiences over the course of the year showed that, although they were most anxious about health risks during Spring 2020, families quickly developed new routines and generally enjoyed spending more time together. The third lockdown during Winter 2020-21, was viewed as a low point by most families as stress and fatigue took their toll and bad weather kept them indoors.



Household dynamics – Families’ levels of anxiety and stress during the pandemic were greatly affected by their unique situations, as discussed above. The number and ages of children, pre-existing relationships and parents’ employment situations all influenced levels of emotional pressure and strategies for coping within households. Parents frequently shared difficulties in meeting demands of 24/7 parenting in Indeemo posts and interviews:

*I think the sense of sort of tension in the house from all sides was definitely a lot stronger post-Christmas, early January, February. You know [Begonia Dad] is still having to work at home, [three children] all being at home and just you know this, or friction that sort of caused... [children] fought horribly, which they never, ever have really done. They bicker a little bit. But you know, really aggressive, awful fighting and the day they went back to school it instantly stopped. **Begonia Mum (White, HI £30,000-59,000) Interview, May 2020***

Despite challenges of home schooling and working from home, parents and children also appreciated having time at home together without the demands of the school run and commuting. They created new routines for working, eating and leisure. Although they missed friends and extended family and their usual leisure activities, many found the slower pace of life and not having to socialise or rush to after-school activities relaxing:

*We were outdoors a lot, we would go out to the parks and stuff like that. But now we were kind of all kind of bonding more as a family, like if that makes sense. There was nobody in the background to kind of bother us. **Grevillia Mum (Black, HI £16,000-29,000) Interview, May 2020***

Participants generally believed relationships between parents and children and between siblings had improved during the pandemic:

*Both my dad and my mum they used to go out a lot for work reasons and I was at school and I didn't get back 'til late as well because I take the train. I think it's just nice because when they finished their work and when I finished my schoolwork, we didn't have to have the time to travel before we could be together as a family. **Gardenia Son (Aged, 13, Mixed Black/South Asian, HI £30,000-59,000) Interview, May 2021***

My relationship with my two brothers, I think has changed, in that I do currently feel like our relationship is closer, especially with the younger [brother] as we both do our schoolwork at the same table

*everyday so we do mess around and where we usually argue a lot, and still do to be fair, we are closer now because of this. **Daffodil Daughter (Aged 16, White, HI £30,000-59,000) Indeemo note, May 2020***

The ability to work from home was welcomed in allowing parents (particularly fathers) to spend more time with their children. Many wished for more flexible working to continue after the pandemic:

*One positive feature of lockdown is the time that we have together as a family. When I finish work, instead of an hour's drive home, I come downstairs and I'm instantly back with my family, which has meant that we can do stuff like impromptu barbecues in this fantastic weather. **Daffodil Dad (White, HI £30,000-59,000) Indeemo note, May 2020***

This was echoed by Daffodil Son (Aged 13, White, HI £30,000-59,000), who posted this photo in May 2020 with the caption: 'We have barbeques more regularly which is exciting and I 100% approve'.



Relationships with grandparents – Eight grandparents took part in the research, one of whom already lived with his daughter and her family, and three of whom formed 'bubbles' with their children and grandchildren. The four grandparents who had lost the regular contact they usually enjoyed with their families found this distressing. Participants commonly spoke of strengthening bonds between generations, despite physical absence however, and of gaining

mutual support from regular phone and video calls, quiz nights and other on-line activities.

Loss of direct contact with children and grandchildren is the greatest loss we experience in lockdown. We are learning to interact and understand one another more via video technology.

Kalmia Grandmother (White, retired) Indeemo note, May 2020

Meanwhile, young people voiced fears over their grandparents being at risk:

My relationship with my grandparents has been affected, as I definitely spend less time with them. My maternal granny lives in a care home and we aren't allowed to visit her like we normally could. Once a week, family members can talk to her through a window in the care home, but we can only go once every 3 weeks because we take turns with my aunts. [...] I am worried for my grandparents, especially my grandad who had pneumonia around Christmas time.

*I am also concerned about the care homes and the potential for there to be an outbreak. **Bacopa Daughter (Aged, 15, White, HI £30,000-59,000) Indeemo note, July 2020***

Families with grandparents living locally described their delight at visiting them during periods when restrictions were lifted. Those families whose grandparents live abroad communicated as much as possible, but found going such long periods without seeing each other tough:

The low point has been not being able to see family in India, for me personally [speaking to her mother in India every day via zoom] that's definitely been different that she's been able to see him more often and I get to see her. But it's been really hard because we normally try to go once a year and then they come once a year.

Zenobia Mum (South Asian, HI >£120,000) Interview, May 2020

Children's mental health - The impact of COVID-19 on children's mental health was apparent from comments by both parents and children themselves. They have faced disruptions to education, everyday routines, family relations and friendships and they worry about parental finances and family health. On

top of this, like adults, they are living through a dangerous and risky period in history: and many of them demonstrate a new awareness of death and illness as a consequence:

*Because my dad is the main one going out - apparently for males the risk is more, and then if you like a black ethnic minority... we are telling him you should be really safe. Make sure you wear a mask and gloves and everything. **Illama daughter (Aged 14, South Asian, HI <£16,000) Interview, May 2020***

*It was getting very depressing you know, watching the news you know the death toll rising higher and higher **Gardenia Son (Aged, 13, Mixed Black/South Asian, HI £30,000-59,000) Interview, May 2021***

While some parents and young people described school closures as a time of peace for those children who are more introverted or suffer social anxiety, parents also voiced concerns about their children missing out on socialising and schooling.

*I really think lockdown had an impact on my mental health, which was hard. Because you don't really see anyone as often, so it has an effect on that...I think that's when I did go a bit downhill. I think like because the weather has an impact on it because you can't go outdoors and if you do there's not much sunlight. And also it makes you feel alone and it's hard to reach out to people when you haven't seen them in so long. **Violet Daughter (Aged 17, South Asian) Interview, May 2021***

*With the January/February lockdown, the time of the year was more difficult, you couldn't get out as much, it was a lot more gruelling and I think because my daughter started primary school in September, it's been so stop and start and my daughter in the past few weeks seems to be getting nightmares. **Rose Mum (White, HI £16,000-29,999) Interview, May 2021***

My son is due to finish school this year and now he's being told that he might now even sit his GCSEs. This is going to have a devastating effect on all the year 11s this year. My son has special

*needs and already feels he's not worthy of anything due to his dyslexia and other issues. **Lavender Mum (White, HI <£16,000) Indeemo note, January 2021***

The reopening of schools was warmly welcomed by most parents and children, who were happy to see their friends and take part in face-to-face activities within their allocated 'bubbles'.

*I don't think I appreciated how much it was affecting [two infants' school children], 'cause they don't verbalize it until they went back and they saw their friends and then they are both, they're just so happy now to go back to school **Pansy Mum (White, HI £60,000-89,999) Interview, May 2020***

Parents' anxiety and stress - Diary entries and videos parents posted on Indeemo and their comments during the first interview showed they were most anxious about health risks at the start of the pandemic.

*With no family support in the country we can't afford to have my husband and me fall sick because there's that huge worry about who's going to take care of our son then! Especially if we need to be hospitalised...so yes being very cautious. **Zenobia Mum (South Asian, HI >£120,000) Indeemo note, June 2020***

A number of families tested positive for COVID as the study went on, with two parents reporting long covid symptoms. Most knew friends or extended family members who became infected, including some deaths. Parents and grandparents were also highly conscious of the overwhelming emotional and economic toll a year of living through a pandemic had taken:

The past year has been rough on everybody what with all the lockdowns and people's mental health. For me it's been a very difficult year mainly for the fact of all the people that have died. Not from covid and i have been unable to travel or attend funerals. Also just walking about and seeing the high streets shops shut down and knowing that a lot of places will not open again due to

individual people business not being able to survive is so sad.

Lavender Mum (White, HI <£16,000) Indeemo note, March 2021

Participants appreciated being able to see friends and family members outside of their own households when restrictions eased, with examples of holidays with grandparents being highlights of the year. Easing of restrictions also gave rise to uncertainty as to how to interact whilst keeping safe for some people however:

Since I heard about easing the lockdown, I have been feeling more anxious, as now it's harder to know what the right thing to do is.

Allium Mum (White, HI >£120,000) Indeemo note, May 2020

Resilience – Overall, the resilience of families in dealing with stress and helping each other cope with the challenges of the pandemic was evident:

*I do appreciate my husband, even though he works so much. He lost a lot of weight and everything, it was so stressful for him, but still he was coming home and playing with the children and everything when he had time and he was always having something good to say to me, that the food was nice or he'd do something nice. So appreciating small things has helped a lot. **Heather Mum (White, HI £16,999-29,999) Interview, June 2021***

Across all generations, pictures were posted of exercise activities and participants said they found this helped cope with the stress of lockdown. Daffodil Grandmother (White, retired), for example, told us about doing Joe Wickes' 'ten minute workout for oldies'.



Lastly, some participants also commented on the value of connections with neighbours and membership of voluntary networks to their mental health:

*There's so much borrowing and swapping and giving away and it's just been a revelation actually to see how our small local area could become so positive. It's been great. **Acacia Grandmother** (White, retired) Interview, May 2020*

4. ATTITUDES TOWARDS VACCINES

Vaccinations against the virus became available to adults based on their age and vulnerability over the course of the research. The Omicron variant emerged after the study ended, causing the Government to urge people to have boosters. Vaccines also became available to some children after the study ended.

Take up – Out of the 60 adults who took part in final interviews in May/June 2021, 40 had either had the vaccine or intended to do so. Most participants who received the vaccine had not drastically changed their social distancing behaviour but reported being able to see elderly parents without feeling they were putting them at risk.

*As soon as you know, it was announced on the news that anybody over 42 could, we phoned up and well went on the app you know and booked one straight away. **Kalmia Mum (White, HI £90,000-119,999) Interview, June 2021***

Reasons for not wishing to take the vaccine included concerns over long-term effects, not wanting to be dictated to by the government or wishing to build up natural immunity. Most of those who were reluctant said they would get vaccinated if it became essential for purposes such as work or travel:

*I'm not enthusiastic about it, partly I feel because I've had covid and I feel like I'd rather get other strains and allow my body to learn from it. I feel like I'm in a position to allow for that, I'm a healthy person. But if these passports come in then I'll have to have it, but I'm not running because I don't feel I need to, you know. **Iris Dad (South Asian, >£120,000) Interview, May 2021***

Participants reported their discomfort around those who made different decisions about taking the vaccine. For example, Freesia Mum and Dad (White, HI £16,999-29,999), preferred not to tell people that they had not taken the

vaccine, feeling that many people would not understand or sympathise with their decision.

Key Messages and Recommendations

A series of key messages emerged from our analysis of data collected during the FACT-Covid research that are of relevance to public agencies, voluntary organisations, parents and advocates for children and families. Based on those findings, we propose the following recommendations for policy and practice, which draw on evidence from the study.

Public health

- The findings reflect that families tended to be unclear about Government guidelines, particularly as the pandemic continued, and that a lack of trust in politicians undermined their compliance. **This indicates that guidance needs to be coherent and clearly communicated with senior figures ‘leading by example’ in their own social distancing behaviour.**
- The findings show that moralistic and individualistic discourse around social-distancing guidelines and vaccinations can create divisions amongst communities. **This means that public health and safety messages need to be communicated in a way is non-judgmental and promotes collective responsibility.**

Financial support

- The findings show that the most deprived families faced the greatest financial hardship, stress and risk as existing inequalities were exacerbated during the pandemic. **This means that financial support needs to be rapidly accessible for families in need and that support for those who are isolating is crucial, particularly for lower income families with little social support and those in crowded housing.**
- The ‘Furlough’ scheme greatly reduced stress for families with young children. **This shows it should be considered for future pandemics.**

Exercise and well-being

- Access to parks and open spaces was extremely important for all generations of families to exercise, relax and recuperate during the pandemic and was especially valued by those who had no garden. **This underlines the vital need for investment in parks, urban greenspace and open spaces for the health and wellbeing of all generations.**

Education

- The findings revealed vast inconsistencies in types and levels of practical and emotional support provided by schools during home schooling. **This suggests that a review and opportunity for mutual learning across schools should be undertaken so that schools are ready to respond rapidly and more effectively in the case of another lockdown or pandemic.**

Balancing work and childcare

- Many families enjoyed having more time together and a slower pace of life, which suggests that a restructuring of work, leisure and care could be beneficial for the well-being of individuals and families. **This shows that flexible working should continue beyond the pandemic, where feasible, as an option for all.**

Family support

The findings make clear that single parents and families with children who have special needs found lockdowns particularly difficult. **This underlines the need for further attention and support for lone parent families and those with children with special needs or disabilities.**

Children and young people's mental health

- The findings highlight that a generation of young people has been severely affected by the pandemic and the long-term effects this has on their education and mental health needs to be carefully considered. **This shows that investment in mental health should be a top priority to avoid long term affects at a population level.**

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