

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the lives of children and young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in the UK: A scoping review

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UK.Email: jmp54@kent.ac.uk**Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted everyone in the United Kingdom when restrictions were put in place to prevent the spread of the disease. However, it is thought that children and young people (CYP) with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) would be more affected than others due to existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. A scoping review methodology was used to ascertain what is known from academic literature about CYP with SEND in the United Kingdom. The findings indicate that existing inequalities for CYP with SEND and their families were exacerbated, with impacts on their mental health. Home-learning and home life was also challenging for many, resulting in difficulties with education and physical health. The majority say the experience was negative, but there was a minority who experienced positive impacts because of the restrictions. This minority voice is sometimes a sizeable minority so their views should not be overlooked. Even those who found it mostly negative reported some positives which are of interest. Participants were mostly parent/carers of autistic CYP, and the research did not reach great numbers of CYP with other diagnoses nor did it hear from many CYP directly due to the restrictions in place at the time.

KEYWORDS

children and young people (CYP), coronavirus, COVID- 19, disability, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

Key Points

- This scoping review covers the first papers published about the impact of COVID-19 on CYP with SEND in the United Kingdom up until 30 September 2021; therefore, there will be more published that may alter our understanding of the experience.
- The experience was mostly negative for most people and emphasised existing inequalities, but for some there were distinct positives reported.
- The results highlight the disparate experiences of CYP during this time and emphasise that CYP with SEND are not a homogenous group.
- There is the potential for educationalists and policy makers to learn from what happened during this time and make improvements both for more typical times and to plan for another crisis.

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INTRODUCTION

23 March 2020 transformed life in the United Kingdom when the first lockdown was announced following several weeks of the spread of Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19). For this review, all four nations of the United Kingdom were included; however, the detail and timings of policies differed in each country (Institute for Government, 2021). Similarly, education systems, terminology and provision for special educational needs differ in each nation. Nonetheless, the countries of the United Kingdom share similarities in their stance on disability and CYP with SEND, making it reasonable to consider them together for this study's purpose and it is left to future research to investigate national distinctions.

It appears although everyone was affected by the pandemic, some were more disadvantaged than others (O'Dowd, 2020) and inequalities became clear early in the pandemic. Poverty was behind many of the disadvantages during lockdown, and it has been calculated that it costs three times as much to bring up a disabled child as opposed to a non-disabled child (Dobson et al., 2001), often leading to poverty and vulnerability. Children and young people (CYP) with special educational needs and/or a disability (SEND) are amongst those who may have been vulnerable during the lockdowns. CYP with SEND are defined in UK law as those who need support which is different or additional to what other children of the same age usually receive (Children and Families Act, 2014, sections 20 and 21). A CYP is disabled according to the definition in the Equality Act, 2010, as having a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on their ability to do normal daily activities.

Evidence from surveys conducted by organisations at the start of the pandemic indicated that CYP were especially affected by the restrictions (Sewel et al., 2020). Disabled CYP and their families face barriers and exclusion even in usual times (Broach & Clements, 2016) and initial evidence from studies appeared to show that CYP with SEND were more affected than their peers due to their disadvantaged position in society (Asbury et al., 2020).

The aim of this scoping review was to build on the findings in the grey literature and to determine what had been discovered by academic research about the impact of the pandemic on CYP with SEND and their families and to see what gaps remain for further research. A scoping study aims to present an overview rather than to synthesise findings (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005), and is a tool for summarising literature in an emerging field (Brien et al., 2010).

METHODS

Development of the research question

The period considered was from the start of lockdown in the United Kingdom, 23 March 2020 until 30 September

2021. Information was sought about any impact for CYP with SEND, apart from that involving purely medical outcomes related to COVID disease. The methodological framework of Arksey and O'Malley (2005) was adopted for the review, and their five stages of conducting a scoping review were followed. No other published scoping review is available to the author's knowledge. The protocol for this scoping review was registered on 11 October 2021 at the Centre for Open Science (<https://www.cos.io/>) and can be found at <https://osf.io/zgxpdp>.

Search strategy to identify relevant studies

A search strategy was developed to encompass all alternative terms likely to be used. Twelve databases were searched for studies published between March 2020 and September 2021: Academic Search Complete, British Education Index, Child Development and Adolescent Studies, CINAHL, APA PsycINFO, SocINDEX, Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed, Research in Practice, Social policy and practice and Social care online. The inclusion criteria are shown in Table 1.

Study selection

A total of 593 studies were retrieved from the twelve databases, and a PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1) was created to show the decision process based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Five additional articles were included for screening due to examining reference lists of the articles. Full copies of articles that met the inclusion criteria were then obtained for further reading and charting of the data (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The literature that met the inclusion criteria was then imported into the systematic review software Rayyan©, and two reviewers independently screened the articles. Any discrepancies between the reviewers were discussed, and no disagreements remained to be decided by a third reviewer.

Charting the data

Twenty-one papers meeting the inclusion criteria were selected for the review, with the data being charted into a pre-defined table shown in Table 2.

TABLE 1 Inclusion criteria for scoping review.

Participants age	5–25 years old
SEND	Any disability or special educational need
Location	UK
Language	English
Date	26.3.2020–30.09.2021
Type of study	Peer reviewed academic studies

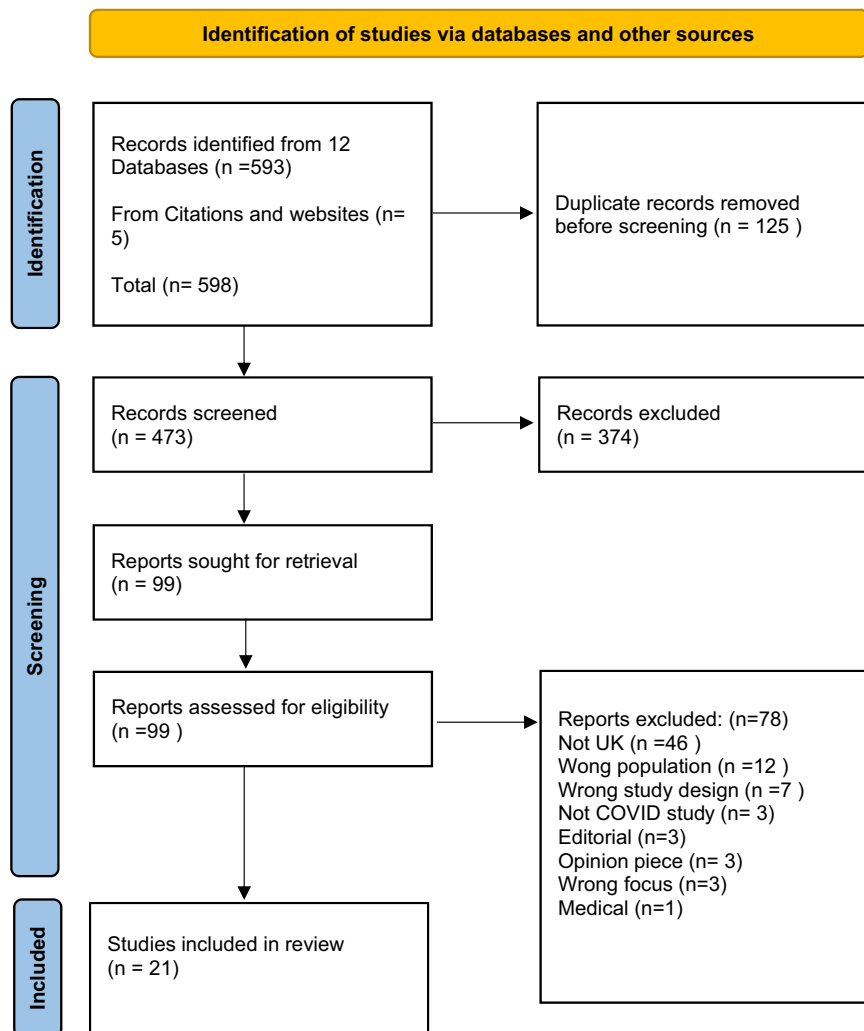


FIGURE 1 PRISMA flow diagram.

RESULTS

Study characteristics

Only two papers collected views directly from the CYP themselves: Beaton et al. (2021) with one young person in the study and McCorkell and Lobo (2021) with seven young people. The other papers used adults as the proxy for the CYP's views. Research has found that parent-reports are relatively reliable for younger children (Rosenberg et al., 2009), but may not be so for adolescents and young adults (Raw et al., 2021). The lack of a direct CYP voice was likely to have been due to difficulties conducting in person research during the pandemic restrictions.

Although many of the studies say they are about CYP with SEND, the majority are about autistic CYP only. Thirteen are predominantly or wholly about autistic CYP (Asbury et al., 2020; Canning & Robinson, 2021; Castro-Kemp & Mahmud, 2021; Couper-Kenney & Riddell, 2021; Gillespie-Smith et al., 2021; Greenway

& Eaton-Thomas, 2020; Hill et al., 2021; McCorkell & Lobo, 2021; Morris et al., 2021; Nonweiler et al., 2020; Spain et al., 2021; Theis et al., 2021; Toseeb, 2021). Three are about CYP with intellectual or learning disabilities (Bailey et al., 2021; Beaton et al., 2021; Rogers et al., 2021) which may overlap with autism, with one paper focusing mostly on CYP with both (Rogers et al., 2021). One paper concerns CYP with mental health difficulties (Thorell et al., 2021) and four do not state the diagnosis of the CYP (Ludgate et al., 2021; Raw et al., 2021; Shaw & Shaw, 2021; Waite et al., 2021). When the participants responding to the surveys were the parents, these were usually female and the CYP with SEND in the studies were mostly male. Most studies were of CYP of statutory school age, from the academic year a child is 5 until the end of the school year they turn 16. However, three studies included children of 3 years of age (Castro-Kemp & Mahmud, 2021; Greenway & Eaton-Thomas, 2020; Morris et al., 2021) and five studies included CYP up to age 17 plus (Asbury et al., 2020; Greenway & Eaton-Thomas, 2020; Rogers et al., 2021; Shaw & Shaw, 2021;

TABLE 2 Included studies.

Author and date	Topic	Population	Nation	Type of study and methodology	SEND
Asbury et al., 2020	Mental Health (MH)	N = 241 parent carers	95% England, remainder Scotland and Wales	Qualitative question within quantitative survey	82% Autistic
Bailey et al., 2021	Well-being	N = 397 parent carers of CYP 5–16 years	UK	Quantitative Longitudinal survey	LD
Beaton et al., 2021	Inclusion, school and social experiences	N = 6 stakeholders of CYP with SEND including one YP	England	Qualitative Interviews	LD
Canning & Robinson, 2021	Home life	N = 8 parent carers of CYP 5–13 years	England	Qualitative. Interviews and social media responses.	Autistic/complex needs
Castro-Kemp & Mahmud, 2021	School	N = 83 parent carers of CYP 3–12+ years (mean 10.5 years)	England	Mixed methods, Survey	Majority autistic
Couper-Kenney & Riddell, 2021	Human rights and education	N = 16 mothers of 24 CYP	Scotland	Qualitative. Interviews	Not stated
Gillespie-Smith et al., 2021	Caregivers coping strategies and stress	N = 43 parent/carers of CYP with Neuro developmental disability (NDD) and 67 typically developing children	UK	Mixed methods survey	NDD mostly autistic
Greenway & Eaton-Thomas, 2020	Home-learning	N = 248 parents	UK	Mixed methods survey	Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH). Autistic 73%. Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) 49%
Hill et al., 2021	Home-learning	N = 6 parents of autistic CYP	UK	Qualitative. Interviews	Autistic
Ludgate et al., 2021	Home-learning	N = 71 parents	England	Qualitative survey	Not stated
McCorkell & Lobo, 2021	Home-learning	N = 7 autistic CYP 12–15 years	Scotland	Qualitative Interviews	Autistic
Morris et al., 2021	Social communication and physical activity	N = 176 parents in T1 and 54 in T2 of CYP with ASC 3–12 year olds (mean 8.7 years)	T1: 58.5% England, 40.9% Scotland, 0.6% Wales T2: 87% England 13% Scotland	Quantitative surveys at 2 timepoints	Autistic
Nonweiler et al., 2020	Emotional and behavioural	N = 453 parents of CYP 4–15 years (mean 10.4 years)	UK	Quantitative survey	NDD - autistic and ADHD
Raw et al., 2021	MH	N = 3046 parent carers of CYP 4–16 years (mean 9.2 years)	UK	Quantitative survey	Not stated. Some CYP with SEND

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Author and date	Topic	Population	Nation	Type of study and methodology	SEND
Rogers et al., 2021	Mother's experiences	N=8 mothers of CYP with LD up to 18 years	UK	Qualitative interviews	LD/Autism
Shaw & Shaw, 2021	Home-learning	N=137 parents of CYP 4–18 years (50.3% 11 to 18, 49.6% 4–11 years)	England	Qualitative surveys at 2 timepoints	Not stated
Spain et al., 2021	Perspectives of Health & Social Care professionals & researchers	N=37 professionals working with autistic individuals. 51% worked with CYP	England	Mixed methods survey	Autistic
Theis et al., 2021	Physical activity and mental health	N=125 parents and health service providers	UK	Mixed methods survey	LD and physical disability, 41% autistic
Thorell et al., 2021	Home-learning and MH	N=508 UK parents of CYP 5–19 years	7.6% UK within study of 7 European countries	Quantitative survey	CYP with and without MH difficulties
Toseeb, 2021	Sibling conflict	N=504 parents of CYP 5–18 years	England 94% Northern Ireland 3% Scotland 2% Wales 1%	Quantitative survey	75% autistic; more than half had comorbidities
Waite et al., 2021	MH	N=461 parents of CYP 4–16 years (mean 7.1 for 4–10 years, 13.3 for 11 to 16 years)	UK	Quantitative surveys at 2 timepoints	Any

Toseeb, 2021) or to age 19 (Thorell et al., 2021). Studies were included if the mean age was within the inclusion criteria or if the information about the target age group was identifiable. Ethnicities were only recorded in six of the papers (Asbury et al., 2020; Castro-Kemp & Mahmud, 2021; Couper-Kenney & Riddell, 2021; Raw et al., 2021; Toseeb, 2021; Waite et al., 2021) where they were largely white British or white. Seven studies were quantitative, nine were qualitative and five were mixed methods. Fifteen were surveys, and six were interviews.

Impacts found

The impacts reported were grouped into six themes: mental health, home learning and life, school, social impacts, physical activity and health, and human rights.

Mental health

Seventeen of the papers mentioned some impact of COVID on mental health, one study reported no change in mental health (Bailey et al., 2021) possibly because it was completed very early in the pandemic, and 13 papers reported a minority of participants had experienced improved mental health. Sometimes, this minority was sizeable, such as the 45.8% of 83 parents in the Castro-Kemp study. However, none of the seven young people in the McCorkell and Lobo (2021) study expressed strong feelings of anxiety despite many parents in other studies mentioning this. It may be that different age groups or SEND types were affected differently or that parental reports of their CYP's mental states were not accurate (Raw et al., 2021), but this is not clear from existing data. Improvements were reported in mood, sleep, seizures, obsessive and compulsive routines and speech, with some CYP appearing more relaxed and exhibiting less challenging behaviour (Rogers et al., 2021). The mothers in Rogers et al. (2021) study attributed this to the reduction of task demands and a less pressured life. Ludgate et al. (2021) found that 84% of parents reported some unexpected positive impacts during the lockdowns, including less stress, more family time and some educational benefits. CYP found that being able to wear what they liked, get up when ready and eat what and when they wanted to, improved their feelings of well-being (Spain et al., 2021).

Less than half (34.1%) of parents in Shaw and Shaw's (2021) study reported a negative impact on their own mental health. The reports varied for CYP with SEND. Worry and low mood were found to significantly decrease during lockdown in those with SEND but significantly increase in those without SEND (Waite et al., 2021). This could indicate that for some CYP with SEND, school may not be the best environment for their mental health (Castro-Kemp & Mahmud, 2021). In

contrast, Nonweiler et al. (2020) found that CYP with neurodevelopmental disorders (NDD) compared to their neurotypical peers had a higher prevalence of emotional symptoms (42% vs. 15%) and autistic females were reported to have higher emotional symptoms than males.

Bailey et al. (2021) were able to compare mental health before and after COVID restrictions, using pre-COVID data from the longitudinal 1000 Families Study (Hastings et al., 2020) collected in 2017. Wave 2 data were collected just before or during the first lockdown in 2020, inadvertently creating a before and after COVID study of mental health. It was reported by parents that mental health for CYP with intellectual disabilities was at similar levels in the first lockdown compared to prior to the pandemic. The authors acknowledged that any impacts may have taken longer to take effect and that there may have been a difference in the participants who chose to complete the survey during or after the lockdown as compared to those who completed it before.

A mixed picture of impacts on mental health is suggested as 10 of the studies reported that for the majority of CYP there were negative impacts to their mental health during the restrictions (Asbury et al., 2020; Castro-Kemp & Mahmud, 2021; Couper-Kenney & Riddell, 2021; Greenway & Eaton-Thomas, 2020; Ludgate et al., 2021; Nonweiler et al., 2020; Raw et al., 2021; Rogers et al., 2021; Theis et al., 2021; Waite et al., 2021). As stated above, this majority was sometimes small but in other studies it was significant, for example in the Theis et al. (2021) study over 90% reported a negative impact on mental health. About 65% of the Theis et al. (2021) respondents rated mental health as worse during lockdown compared to before, mentioning restrictions at school, special facilities and outdoor play together with a deterioration in family relationships. Returning to school had a positive impact on the majority of CYP's mental and physical health, despite fears of the virus (Castro-Kemp & Mahmud, 2021). However, 45.8% of parents in this study said their CYP were calmer at home when schools were closed and became more anxious on returning to school.

Results in Castro-Kemp and Mahmud (2021) study indicated that parents in deprived neighbourhoods and ethnically diverse parents were more likely to report negative effects of school closures on their CYP's mental health, and on their own physical and mental health. Poorer parental mental health was also mentioned in four other studies (Asbury et al., 2020; Gillespie-Smith et al., 2021; Rogers et al., 2021; Thorell et al., 2021). Families led by lone adults appeared more at risk of mental health issues (Asbury et al., 2020) as did CYP who were single children, where there was family conflict or the parent had mental health difficulties (Raw et al., 2021). In the Thorell et al. (2021) study, families with a child with an existing mental health diagnosis reported more positive effects of schools being closed for CYP than for parents and more negatives for the parents than for CYP. This could be interpreted as the stress of school whilst dealing

with a mental health difficulty being alleviated for the CYP but enhanced strain for parents juggling work with home learning.

The parents' coping strategies were shown to be instrumental in affecting the CYP's risk of distress (Gillespie-Smith et al., 2021) with some increase in stress being linked by parents to not getting any break from their CYP, as much support ceased overnight (Couper-Kenney & Riddell, 2021; Gillespie-Smith et al., 2021; Raw et al., 2021). This, along with education becoming remote and almost all therapeutic services reducing if not ceasing completely, created a very difficult and unequal situation for parents of CYP with the most complex SEND (Couper-Kenney & Riddell, 2021; Gillespie-Smith et al., 2021). Parents also stated that the uncertainty of the situation and dealing with CYP with a low tolerance of uncertainty was very challenging (Gillespie-Smith et al., 2021; Ludgate et al., 2021) increasing stress for both CYP and parents.

Home-learning/home life

Seventeen papers reported on either home learning or home life. Greenway and Eaton-Thomas (2020) reported that they found neither socio-economic status nor SEND diagnosis appeared to affect the home-learning experience which contradicts other studies which showed that poverty impacted parental and CYP mental health (Asbury et al., 2020; Castro-Kemp & Mahmud, 2021) which would affect the home environment and ability to learn. Digital inequalities were reported (Beaton et al., 2021; Canning & Robinson, 2021; Couper-Kenney & Riddell, 2021; McCorkell & Lobo, 2021) which would also have been impacted by the affluence of the family. Some families had adequate technology, but many were using one device for multiple children or to work from home in addition to providing home-learning (Canning & Robinson, 2021).

The home-learning experiences were reported as being mostly negative for most families in the studies reporting on this. Parents complained there was no coordination between subject teachers sometimes resulting in too much work being set (Canning & Robinson, 2021; Greenway & Eaton-Thomas, 2020). Some CYP complained that much of the work was boring and mostly revision and that digital platforms used by schools were difficult to use (McCorkell & Lobo, 2021) meaning that some were unable to view resources (Shaw & Shaw, 2021). The technology often depended on a parent's input, putting more stress on them and made homeworking challenging (Canning & Robinson, 2021).

A major complaint from families was that there was much less differentiation for their CYP with SEND than when they attended school (Canning & Robinson, 2021; Greenway & Eaton-Thomas, 2020; Ludgate et al., 2021;

McCorkell & Lobo, 2021; Morris et al., 2021; Shaw & Shaw, 2021). Parents said the pace was too quick for their children (Canning & Robinson, 2021) and resources were inappropriate (Shaw & Shaw, 2021), resulting in parents spending time adapting the work (Canning & Robinson, 2021; Shaw & Shaw, 2021). Home learning was reported as more difficult for younger children than older ones as they needed more support from parents (Thorell et al., 2021). However, some secondary pupils commented that they needed more support than was provided by the school (McCorkell & Lobo, 2021).

Many CYP saw home and school as separate entities and they refused to do any schoolwork (Canning & Robinson, 2021), responding negatively to their parent becoming teacher (Shaw & Shaw, 2021). Some CYP also did not like teaching staff coming virtually into their safe home space and did not engage with them (Canning & Robinson, 2021). A common complaint of the participants was the lack of support for families from the school (Canning & Robinson, 2021; Couper-Kenney & Riddell, 2021; Gillespie-Smith et al., 2021; Ludgate et al., 2021; McCorkell & Lobo, 2021; Morris et al., 2021; Rogers et al., 2021; Shaw & Shaw, 2021; Spain et al., 2021; Thorell et al., 2021). Families were trying to balance the different needs of their members along with providing home-learning whilst working from home or continuing working with little childcare provision (Shaw & Shaw, 2021). Families were concerned about their CYP getting further behind with their education and were not sure if they were effectively helping their CYP (Greenway & Eaton-Thomas, 2020; McCorkell & Lobo, 2021; Morris et al., 2021; Shaw & Shaw, 2021).

However, three studies reported home-learning as beneficial academically (Canning & Robinson, 2021; Greenway & Eaton-Thomas, 2020; Hill et al., 2021). These studies were mostly or entirely of autistic CYP, but this benefit was not only found for them although it appears to be more marked. There is mention of a YP with Down syndrome in the Beaton et al. (2021) study also doing better academically by taking more agency in her learning due to working with less directed support. However, this is a single individual, and there is not enough evidence to make firm conclusions. Some families felt the CYP achieved more with less pressure and without the distractions of the school environment (Canning & Robinson, 2021; Greenway & Eaton-Thomas, 2020; Hill et al., 2021; Ludgate et al., 2021; McCorkell & Lobo, 2021; Rogers et al., 2021; Thorell et al., 2021). These studies include a large proportion of autistic CYP and so it is not known if this affect is true of CYP with SEND generally.

Parents commented that they knew more about their child's education because of this experience and better understood their child's strengths and struggles (Beaton et al., 2021; Couper-Kenney & Riddell, 2021; Ludgate et al., 2021). For some families, improved relationships resulted from spending time together without external demands (Couper-Kenney & Riddell, 2021;

Ludgate et al., 2021; Shaw & Shaw, 2021). Some parents felt they could be more creative with learning, working it around the CYP's interests at a time that worked best for them (Canning & Robinson, 2021; Ludgate et al., 2021; Shaw & Shaw, 2021) resulting in greater academic engagement (Hill et al., 2021). The CYP in McCorkell and Lobo's (2021) study stated that they liked the more varied computer programmes they used at home rather than always writing like they did at school. Some felt the ability to mute, switch off the camera or take time out whenever they needed to, suited their CYP better than school.

Toseeb's (2021) study was different as he investigated sibling conflict within families with a CYP with SEND during the early part of the pandemic. He discovered that the CYP with more complex needs appeared to be protected from being picked on or hurt by their siblings during lockdown. It may be that those who were non-verbal or not independently mobile were not seen as competitors for parental attention as their need for support was obvious (Kowal et al., 2002). However, generally family relationships were reported to have deteriorated (Theis et al., 2021; Toseeb, 2021) with victimisation of a CYP with SEND by their sibling increasing during lockdown but then decreasing once schools were fully reopened (Toseeb, 2021). Perpetration of violence by CYP with SEND towards their siblings was not found to increase in lockdown but there was still a slight decrease when schools reopened (Toseeb, 2021). As well as sibling conflict and violence, there was the risk of violence between family members, including child to adult violence mentioned in Rogers et al. (2021) study.

School attendance

Schools were kept open for keyworkers' children and vulnerable children only, which could include CYP with SEND. The Asbury et al. (2020) study showed that although 44% of the parents of school aged children with SEND in the study were offered a school place, only 8% had taken it up due to concerns about catching or transmitting the virus. Despite their vulnerability, some children were prevented from attending by guidance from the DfE saying that they should only go into school if carers could not keep them safe at home (DfE, 2020), which was open to interpretation. According to Couper-Kenney & Riddell, only 1% of all children in Scotland attended school in lockdown, and most of those were keyworkers' children rather than those with SEND. Parents felt that those who remained in school during the lockdowns benefitted from the routine of attendance despite changes, and they were less anxious than they would have been if they had remained at home (Canning & Robinson, 2021).

On returning to school, parents were concerned about their CYP catching or transmitting the virus (Castro-Kemp & Mahmud, 2021; Ludgate et al., 2021), changes at

school for the CYP to adjust to or about returning to a setting that was not meeting their CYP's needs (Ludgate et al., 2021). An obvious advantage however of being back in school was that the CYP would have access to the resources they had missed whilst at home (McCorkell & Lobo, 2021). Returning to school after the closures was considered mostly positive for the CYP's mental health but as a mixed or negative experience for some (Castro-Kemp & Mahmud, 2021; Ludgate et al., 2021).

Social impacts

The positive social aspects for some CYP were that any social difficulties of attending school were removed entirely. This resulted in reduced social pressure (Ludgate et al., 2021) and fewer worries about being bullied (Hill et al., 2021). However, although parents saw these as positives for the CYP, it is not necessarily positive long-term to avoid social contact which could create personal growth and resilience (Rubin et al., 2009). The change to conducting meetings online was seen as positive for many, as more professionals could attend as it freed up time previously used for travel. Families found it less stressful and many CYP found it less threatening (Beaton et al., 2021). However, this was not the case for all families, as changes were often made to the professionals who met with families remotely, making it challenging for some CYP to deal with unfamiliar faces with no prior relationship to seeing them on screen (Canning & Robinson, 2021).

Many CYP missed being part of a class and the social contact that takes place in a normal week (McCorkell & Lobo, 2021). This could include friends, professionals, therapists and carers as well as contact with the extended family and family friends (Canning & Robinson, 2021; Ludgate et al., 2021).

There were a variety of perceptions by parents about their CYP's social communication skills during lockdown and on return to school. Most parents believed that their child's self-regulation and co-operation skills, but not their communication skills, had worsened during lockdown (Morris et al., 2021). Communication skills did not worsen and had even improved for some participants during lockdown with the possible explanation that there may have been more frequent child-parent interactions whilst at home (Morris et al., 2021).

Physical activity and health

Three papers reported on physical activity changes and all found physical activity mostly decreased for CYP with SEND during lockdown with Morris et al. (2021) finding it increased for most on return to school. About 61% in the Theis et al. (2021) study reported a reduction in physical activity levels during lockdown. Parents said the reasons

for this were the closure of specialist facilities CYP with SEND needed to exercise or a lack of access to groups or equipment necessary (Theis et al., 2021). However, it was also reported that some CYP did more physical activity than usual in lockdown (Theis et al., 2021), with a daily walk being one of the few options available in the first lockdown (GOV.UK., 2020).

Theis et al. (2021) found that a significantly higher number of CYP with a physical disability were in the group who reported positive changes in physical activity, and this group may have benefitted from being able to take part in online fitness classes started in lockdown or by spending more time playing in the garden or cycling. Additionally, both under and overeating were reported due to anxiety or boredom (Couper-Kenney & Riddell, 2021), and for some CYP better eating habits due to less stress was mentioned (McCorkell & Lobo, 2021; Spain et al., 2021).

In the Castro-Kemp and Mahmud (2021) study, 50.6% of parents responded that school closures had a detrimental effect on their children's physical health, but 49.4% said it had not. In this study, the two parents whose children remained at school during the lockdown reported no adverse effects of the lockdown on either physical or mental health. Managing CYP's physical health was challenging for most parents due to lack of services and support (Spain et al., 2021). Parents of children attending special schools and parents of girls were more likely to report negative effects of school closures on their children's physical health (Castro-Kemp & Mahmud, 2021). It is likely that those attending special schools may need more support and specialised equipment in order to be active. Doing the actual COVID tests for CYP was also reported as very difficult (Rogers et al., 2021).

Human rights

Only the Couper-Kenney and Riddell (2021) paper looked at the impact of the pandemic in Scotland through a children's rights-based lens. The paper found that 'scant regard was paid to the rights of children with Additional Support Needs and Disabilities' (p1, 20), despite Scotland having legislation to protect CYP's rights (Education (Scotland) Act, 2016). It is likely that this situation existed across the United Kingdom due to the speed with which restrictions were put in place.

CYP views

There were not enough CYP participants directly involved in these studies to report what they said about the impacts of the pandemic, but the McCorkell and Lobo (2021) study was an exception. Although the study was small, autistic CYP in school years 8–10 in

mainstream schools were interviewed directly. The CYP stated they missed being part of a class but that they liked the ease of communicating with their teachers via email or the chat function. They all had access to an iPad through their Local Authority but there were frustrations with the digital platforms due to unfamiliarity and technical problems. However, they preferred the variety of learning using videos, class sessions, quizzes and games online to the emphasis on writing when attending in person.

Sleep duration lengthened for some CYP with the acknowledgement they were sleeping a lot more because there was nothing to get up for. Others mentioned they felt going to sleep later and starting the day later improved their well-being and learning and they benefitted from the ability to create their own routines. Any worries expressed were about the virus itself and about falling behind with their education. They felt sometimes that the work was not differentiated enough for them but that it could also lack challenge.

Beaton et al. (2021) included one YP with Down syndrome, who was interviewed simultaneously with her mother. This YP had taken on more control of her learning at home, organising it and deleting links to avoid things she did not want to do. Her artwork improved whilst at home as she took ownership of what was produced with the support of the Learning Support Assistant at school. As a result, she was entered into the art GCSE exam.

DISCUSSION

It appears that existing inequalities for families with a child with SEND have been further exposed due to the restrictions (Boddison & Curran, 2022). Some parents reported they felt isolated and forgotten and some considered that CYP's rights, as stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) were not upheld (Couper-Kenney & Riddell, 2021). For many of the families, there were considerable negative impacts of the pandemic which need addressing to be prepared for future emergencies. There has been an understandable focus on mental health of carers and their CYP with SEND due to existing vulnerabilities pre-pandemic (Cresswell, 2021). Additionally, home-learning was found to be an area that all parents felt unprepared for and unsupported, especially those whose children required more specialist support.

However, what this review also shows, is that for many of the findings it is possible to find a conflicting outcome in another paper or even in another part of the same paper, showing the situation is complex. The studies reviewed were all completed early in the pandemic when the population was adjusting to the restrictions, and future studies may discover a different picture once time had passed. Even for the same CYP or family,

they sometimes reported a positive experience within a largely negative experience (Shaw & Shaw, 2021) and for a minority of families, despite the surrounding negative media narratives, they experienced largely positives during this time (Ludgate et al., 2021). Many of these positives were found for autistic CYP, as the studies' participants were largely or solely made up of this group.

Some CYP, therefore, experienced an improved quality of life during the restrictions. This is an indication that the school environment may not be conducive for optimal well-being for some. This does not mean they should remain at home, but that schools should be aware of the extent their environment can cause stress and consider ways they can adapt to accommodate greater diversity. It is unclear as to which groups benefitted and which struggled during lockdown as even within a single group, such as autistic CYP, there are mixed results. Most of the CYP in these studies were neurodivergent, but there is not one picture of their experience, with the heterogeneous nature emphasised.

It is not possible to know whether any advantages of lockdowns applied to CYP with diverse disabilities. For a CYP with complex needs who requires specialist support to learn, the picture may not be as positive, but it is not known currently as the studies did not gather sufficient differentiated information from this group. However, there are some indications there were benefits for a larger group of CYP with SEND. For example, more physical activity occurred for some CYP with a physical disability (Theis et al., 2021) and more engagement with learning for some CYP with MH difficulties (Thorell et al., 2021). Whether this translates into better health and academic attainment is not yet known.

Discussing the positive impacts is not to dismiss the hugely difficult situations many CYP and their families experienced which are documented here, but to balance the rhetoric and learn from it. What emerges is that the experience was not an equal experience due to the diverse nature of the participants, families, needs and circumstances. Care needs to be taken not to overlook the minority experience amongst the majority. For example, many CYP expressed relief at not having to go to school and reported improved mental health, as did some parents who normally were trying to get the CYP to school. What would make education a better experience for these CYP? Shaw and Shaw (2021) hoped that schools will be able to provide 'greater equality and inclusivity in educational provision, by developing blended models for in-school and remote learning' (p1, 60). This could provide a partial answer for some who struggle with attendance (Ofsted, 2021), especially now the focus post-COVID is very much on attendance issues (GOV.UK, 2022). Pre-pandemic, parents had increasingly chosen to send their CYP with SEND to special schools despite UK schools theoretically becoming more inclusive (Black, 2019). It therefore appears that some parents do not agree that mainstream schools are

always the best place for their CYP with SEND (Castro-Kemp & Mahmud, 2021).

Some CYP expressed satisfaction at having more control of their learning, resulting in better engagement than when at school (McCorkell & Lobo, 2021), which was also reflected in some of the parent's views (Couper-Kenney & Riddell, 2021). Having greater autonomy is an important aspect of motivation for learning and growth according to Self Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Another aspect of SDT is relatedness or having a connection with the people around you. It is possible that some CYP made better connections with peers and teachers when online or attending school in smaller groups, than usual. Using the chat function to contact a teacher discretely or connecting with peers via social media may have, for some, increased their feeling of relatedness and well-being (Couper-Kenney & Riddell, 2021). This, however, is set within the bigger picture of technology as a barrier to learning and engagement for many (Couper-Kenney & Riddell, 2021; Rogers et al., 2021). For some CYP, the perception of their competence, the third strand of SDT, could also have been raised, by having more agency of their work at home (Couper-Kenney & Riddell, 2021). However, it is also clear that many CYP struggled during remote learning, needing the support and routine of school to learn, seeing home as entirely separate (Greenway & Eaton-Thomas, 2021).

Most parents found home-learning challenging and 71% in the Greenway & Eaton-Thomas (2021) study would not wish to do it again. It would also not be realistic for all due to the logistics of work and family responsibilities. Nor is it universally desirable due to safeguarding risks when children are isolated from professionals' scrutiny (Schooling, 2017). However, some parents now feel more confident and wish to continue with home-learning post lockdown (Ludgate et al., 2021), as they felt their CYP were calmer and did better academically.

The overwhelming majority of the studies were from an adult perspective despite the research being about CYP. This was partly due to difficulties with research during lockdown, together with time constraints in gathering views in a rapidly evolving situation. However, in the future, the CYP's voices need to be heard from academic research (Castro-Kemp & Mahmud, 2021).

It is also important to note that a section of the SEND community was probably not reached by any studies to date; those who hover close to crisis point even without a pandemic. These families may have been trying to survive and may not have had the resources or inclination to share their views, but it is important to investigate their experiences in future.

Strengths and limitations of the scoping review

The review was completed whilst the pandemic was ongoing, and the studies reflect the earlier part of the

pandemic. This inevitably provides an incomplete picture. However, the findings revealed people's reactions to an unprecedented event, whilst still experiencing it. By gathering studies for CYP aged 5 to 25 years, it is hoped the review will provide a broad understanding of what has been found for CYP with SEND in the United Kingdom. However, most of the research was of school-aged children and so older CYP's views may not be accurately reflected. As few CYP were directly engaged with the research, further study is needed to verify the views expressed. Most of the participants were parent/carers of autistic CYP so the findings may not be generalisable to CYP with other SEND. Additionally, most of the studies were completed online, so may not have engaged with families with limited access to technology or the ability to participate in this way. Therefore, the views expressed will not be representative of the whole SEND community.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped by studying the effects of the pandemic on CYP with SEND, improvements can be made both for more typical times or during another crisis. There is a wealth of data within these studies and more will be published in future, creating a fuller picture of longer term impacts the restrictions had for families. It will take time to fully understand all the implications of the data, but it is an opportunity to learn from this unprecedented event and make changes within society to improve CYP with SEND and their families' lives, lives which are often more challenging than for others in usual times. It is apparent from this review, however, that care needs to be taken not to adopt a one size fits all approach but needs to be person centred to be effective. Looking in more detail at what appear to be some contradictory but valuable findings may enable policymakers to find a variety of ways forward. Greater emphasis on online education for example, would disadvantage the majority of CYP with SEND, but for a small minority this may be how they learn best if it could be delivered in a holistic way whilst still encouraging social engagement. Alternatively, it is a chance for schools to look at their environment in the light of what some families said about not having to attend school during lockdowns.

What is clear is that further investigation is warranted to gather CYP's own views, especially adolescents and young adults, to see whether they agree with statements made on their behalf by parent/carers and professionals. Also, information from more ethnically diverse participants is required along with research in Northern Ireland and Wales to provide a fuller picture of the whole of the United Kingdom. Additionally, the views of CYP with a wide range of SEN and disabilities and families of CYP with more profound SEND, who so far may not have been included, should be sought.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship or publication of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

This is a scoping review and the data that support the findings of this study are available in the public domain from the databases listed in the article. There are clear references to each of the papers used for this review in the article.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethics approval was not required for this review.

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