

## ABSTRACT

### THE CHALLENGES THAT PARENTS FACE AS THEY ADAPT TO THE CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

The following qualitative study uses a phenomenological approach to explore the challenges that parents have been faced with during the current coronavirus pandemic. This study recruited a number of parents that were willing to share their individual experiences as they navigate through the outbreak. The purpose of the study was to identify the significant tribulations that were affecting parents' ability to provide adequate care for their children. These challenges were examined utilizing Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory and former literature regarding past viral outbreaks and their effects. The researcher identified that coronavirus had created significant difficulty in regard to the school closures, dealing with loss, and its effect on one's mental health.

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May 2021

THE CHALLENGES THAT PARENTS FACE AS THEY ADAPT TO  
THE CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

by  
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APPROVED

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

To better prepare for future outbreaks, this study focuses on areas of significance regarding providing adequate childcare during a national quarantine. This study hopes to gain insight into the challenges that parents face as they adapt to the coronavirus outbreak's unexpected effects, using a qualitative study. Due to the novelty of the outbreak, the researcher hopes to discover what areas of focus need to be addressed as other outbreaks occur to ensure child welfare. The researcher hopes to reduce the negative impact children, and their parents are currently facing by stressing the challenges that have been endured due to lack of preparation for national hardship as it relates to outbreaks. The research can also serve as a tool for social service agencies to allocate resources and funds towards communal hardship brought to light by the participants.

### **Problem**

The security of the United States has been recently compromised due to the fast spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), which is a viral infection caused by SARS-CoV-2. This virus has caused dire consequences worldwide; therefore, invoking extreme federal and state restrictions in the United States. As statistical data began to increase on the number of people affected, a mandatory shutdown of all non-essential businesses and schools began to occur. Such a sudden change in daily routine has created a devastating impact on children's development regarding education, relationships, and customs.

The lack of preparation at a multisystem level has affected parents' ability to sustain income while providing adequate childcare. To thrive, parents need to ensure that their children have stability within their environment, relationships and upholding their basic needs such as nourishment, health care, housing, and education. However, many parents have lost essential elements in stabilizing such requirements for their children due

to the outbreak. Mandatory stay-at-home orders have reduced access to fundamental relationships with family, friends, and community and faith establishments that are essential for both parents and their children's well-being. To better prepare for future outbreaks, this study focuses on areas of significance regarding parents providing adequate childcare during a national quarantine. This was examined utilizing a phenomenological methodology and collecting data to determine the factors in question. This study's limitations varied as the disease's course takes place and additional studies are established.

### **Population**

The subjects of this study were six individuals who are parents of school-aged children that have been impacted by the closures of schools. This population is suitable for the study due to their lived experience. Parents were recruited based on having school-aged children enrolled in an on-campus school setting before the coronavirus pandemic. All parents introduced in this study were over the age of 18 and coed to ensure a female and male perspective. All participants were presented with the consent form found in appendix A. The age range of the participants varied from 22-59 years of age. The variation of ethnicity was considered in the selection of the subjects to have a culturally competent result. The recruitment of these individuals was conducted by word of mouth. There was minimal risk for participation in the study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory by Abraham Maslow, which states that all individuals, regardless of cultural, biological, or socioeconomic status, have basic needs that must be met in order for an individual to reach their psychological and self-fulfillment needs (1943). Maslow stressed that humans are motivated by unsatisfied needs. Maslow categorized such needs as physiological, safety, love and belonging

needs, esteem, and self-actualization needs, in that order, which dictates an individual's behavior. Behavior becomes problematic if an individual cannot meet a need or has a setback that compromises their growth ability. This human motivation theory has served as a tool for analyzing human behavior based on an individual's deficiency needs versus their growth needs (Abulof, 2017).

Though many parents are working on their higher tiers of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the coronavirus pandemic has caused significant setbacks nationwide. This has placed many families in the lowest tiers as they try to survive during unprecedented times. This study utilized Maslow's hierarchy of needs to analyze the challenges parents face as they navigate the outbreak. This public health crisis has compromised the livelihood of families, therefore invoking unanimous fear and panic. This theory made sense of the psychological, physical, social, and even financial effects of the challenges the participants face as their ability to parent is compromised.

### **Methodology**

This study utilized a phenomenological method to obtain insight into individuals' lived experiences as they care for their children during the coronavirus outbreak. The challenges parents are being faced with while rearing their children were examined through semi-structured interviews. To achieve maximum and rapid results, the participants were grouped using convenience sampling. Through non-probability sampling, the researcher understood the different lived experiences and situations concerning the effects families have faced during the pandemic. The interview was conducted through virtual communication via the Zoom application in compliance with social distancing guidelines.

The potential benefits derived from this study can be utilized towards future outbreak management and research to improve the current crisis parents are experiencing

during the coronavirus pandemic. The participants themselves are parents facing hardship; therefore, this study can be used to understand continuous hardship better and implement supportive resources to meet the needs of parents. It may be that participants may have no direct benefit from participation; however, such participation could help in developing community outreach programs to better the quality-of-care children are receiving through such unprecedented times. Child welfare agencies could benefit from this study by having a better understanding of what situations have hindered parents' ability to care for their children adequately. They can then use it to manage family systems better.

### **Research Questions**

A questionnaire was used for the face-to-face interview; it contained a mixture of 14 closed and open-ended questions, which allow for in-depth information to be explored as it relates to the problem. These set of questions found in appendix B, were used as a tool to guide the semi-structured interview with the participants. These questions served to conclude the challenges that parents are facing during the pandemic. As the pandemic disrupts education and families' daily routine across much of the country, participants were asked to describe how this has affected their children. They were also be asked to elaborate on how their school districts kept them in the loop as in-person schooling transitioned to online learning. Parents talked about more personal challenges they face, such as economically, emotionally, and at a state level. These questions got parents to reveal what they hope for the future in response to similar outbreaks.

### **Significance of the Study**

Families' safety and well-being are at risk due to the shortcoming of preparation and allotted resources provided nationwide. This study was significant in understanding and managing the challenges families face during a health crisis, notably the coronavirus

pandemic. Future preparation can be achieved to reduce hardship within families. New life alterations have come about the current pandemic, such as parents expected to work from home while homeschooling their children, in addition to surviving through inconvenient new societal mandates such as social distancing and self-quarantining orders. Human behavior has been altered as individuals are forced to regress to their innate behavior to survive as resources become scarce. Priorities have been reevaluated in many family systems as challenges emerge.

Policy reforms have currently come about due to the economic effects of the mandatory lockdowns imposed by federal and state governments. This study can be used to identify what other areas of focus need to be taken into account as not only government, but schools, jobs, and even retail stores adjust to the public health crisis. Analyzing the disparity brought amongst parents due to the lack of resources encourages reform regarding the nationwide response at federal, state, and local levels. This study brought about key issues that are affecting the well-being of family systems. These challenges will continue to impact society, creating a new standard of addressing public health issues. Social workers can utilize this study to enhance resilience, in addition to promoting national-level advocacy to mitigate the effects that COVID-19 will have on the population. This includes mental and physical health resources, educational, financial, social, and nutritional supports.

### **Ethical Concerns**

The researcher foresees minimal risk and concerns as a result of this study. All participation in the study is voluntary and was conducted with adult participants. The study's purpose, risks, and benefits were clearly outlined in the consent form detailing the participant's role. Once the participants give written consent, they were informed that their participation may be terminated at their own will without repercussions during the

study. The interviews were conducted virtually in compliance with social distancing mandates to ensure participants' and researcher safety. The data collected was to remain confidential and stored appropriately, backed up with password encryption, and discarded after the study had been completed. No identifiable information was utilized throughout the study.

Due to the gravity of the topics examined during the study, the researcher anticipates participants to be vulnerable and experience some emotional discomfort. Resources were provided at the beginning of the study for mental health and nutritional support. This allowed the participant to schedule the most convenient time for them, ensuring privacy and convenience. The interviews had a set duration of one hour per participant. Technological safety measures were taken into consideration by researcher to secure the method of communication with a conference ID and password that was not to be shared with others to assure that hacking does not occur. Individuals who voluntarily participated and followed through with the questionnaire received a virtual five-dollar Starbucks gift card via email as a form of compensation.

### **Summary**

The security of the United States has been recently compromised due to the fast spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). This virus has caused dire consequences worldwide. The researcher hoped to cultivate an understanding of the hardships that the coronavirus outbreak has had on child-rearing. Although previous outbreaks have set a standard for public health preparedness, this outbreak caught many by surprise. The effects have compromised familial ability to suffice care for children as they navigate through the pandemic. The factors that stabilize and negatively impact the ability to adequately parent is to be concluded. The findings serve to facilitate both local, state, and federal policies to ensure families' welfare, mainly the ability to sustain children's well-being during such



outbreaks. These findings unveiled the challenges parents suffer as they navigate through the coronavirus pandemic.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

This chapter examined the theoretical framework of Maslow's hierarchy of needs which was identified when constructing this study. This chapter consisted of empirical studies that address past public health concerns and the paternal effects. Literature reviewed will cover several topics: Understanding the current Coronavirus pandemic response by the United states; Children's ability to thrive; Stability within their environment and relationships; and meeting their basic needs such as nourishment, health care, housing, and education.

### Theoretical Literature Review

#### Origin and History

Maslow's theory has functioned as a foundation for researchers since 1943 when Maslow presented his paper "A Theory of Human Motivation." As his work gained popularity, he extended it into the book *Motivation and Personality* (Maslow, 1970). Maslow gathered his information through his clinical experience as a psychologist. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the importance of holding security and meeting physiological needs in an individual are the utmost essential requirements to reach self-actualizing (Medcalf, Hoffman, & Boatwright, 2013). Abulof (2017) defines the theory in its famous bottom-up pyramid-shaped hierarchy, detailing humans are motivated by the innate need for survival, safety, love, belonging, esteem, and self-realization.

#### Describe the Theory

Greenberg described motivation as the process of provoking, guiding, and maintaining behavior to accomplish a goal (2002, 2013). Maslow (1943) argued that the

attainment of higher tiers only occurred as one began to satisfy the lower tiers. The tiers have been categorized as deficiency needs versus growth needs (Abulof, 2017). The deficiency needs are composed of the first four bottom tiers. These needs tend to increase the longer a person is deprived which increases the person's motivation to satisfy such needs. Once the deficiency needs are met then the motivation to grow can be attained.

### ***Basic Needs***

The most basic needs of Maslow's theory are based on biological human nature to survive. Maslow's hierarchy of needs places food, water, warmth, rest, and breathing in the physiological need's category (Netting et al., 2017). It is not until this tier is fully met that a person can move on to satisfy other needs of the pyramid. Family and society play an important role in determining and maintaining an individual's ability to feel safe and secure. However, as more resources become limited during outbreaks or natural disasters, people begin to panic. A person's survival mode can undergo extreme changes when their safety needs are threatened; subsequently, projecting a flight or fight response (Bezo, & Maggi, 2015). Thus, provoking insecurity which can negatively impact a person's behavior.

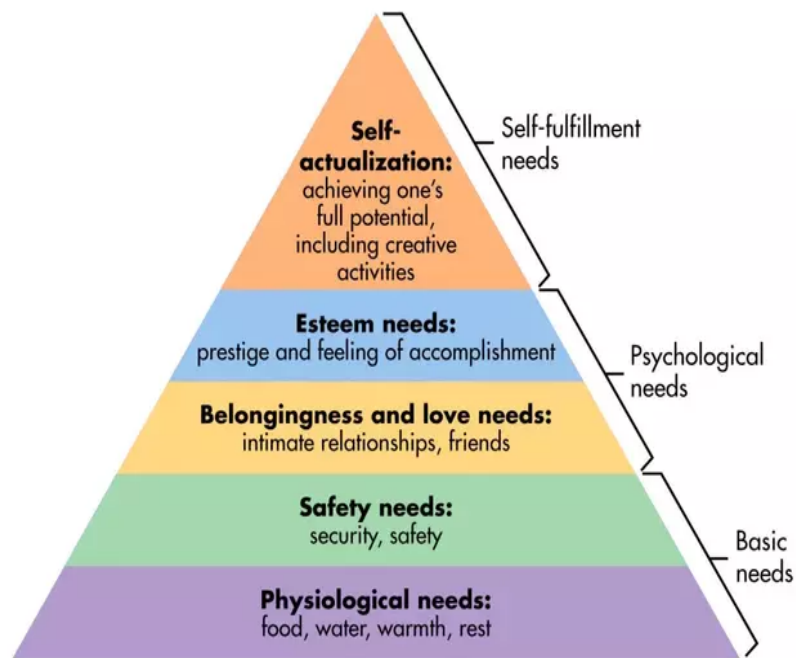
### ***Psychological Needs***

The third level of human needs is interpersonal relationships which motivates behavior. These relationships also go hand in hand with safety needs, for they too correlate with family and society. The feeling of belonging to a certain group is a psychological need that establishes trust, affection, intimacy, and forms friendships. Once this need is met a person is motivated to meet esteem needs. Esteem needs are broken down by Maslow (1943) into two categories which are dignity and status. A person craves recognition and respect to reach self-actualization to increase their self-esteem and grow as a person. Children seek acceptance from their parents and adults such as teachers

or community leaders; therefore, are the most impacted when support is inadequate or insufficient.

**Figure 1**

*Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*



### *Self-Actualization Needs*

The highest level of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs is the self-actualization tier. This tier tends to be met in later adulthood when all the previous tiers of the pyramid have been fully satisfied. At this stage, a person is aware of their potential and begins "to become everything one is capable of becoming" (Maslow, 1987, p. 64). Individuals perceive self-growth differently when in this stage depending on what their focus is at the

moment. This can be parenthood, career, mindfulness, or becoming more in tune with their spirituality. This stage should ignite euphoria and joy in the individual as they see the world for what it is based on their experiences. It is important to note that all stages of Maslow's hierarchy of need are ever changing and can digress based on lived experiences.

### **Use and Application of the Theory in Relation to Social Work**

Maslow's theory states that all individuals, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or socioeconomic status, have basic needs which must be met for an individual to reach their psychological needs and self-fulfillment needs (1943). Maslow's theory has helped develop policies within social services that work within the family systems. This has been done so by addressing what are the basic needs of people and advocating for funds to meet such needs at a local, state, and federal level. This model serves in the field of Social Work as it relates to advocacy and the rights of others; in addition, Barker stated that such advocacy resulted in the empowerment of the individuals that are being served (2014). These programs include but are not limited to Cal-Fresh, CalWORKs, Medi-Cal. Social workers believe in helping others reach their full potential thus using Maslow hierarchy of needs as the baseline to see how far up or down the client is from doing so (Rogers, 2016). Greenberg (2002) reported that people will never reach happiness unless their needs are met. Meeting individuals most basic needs can help improve their quality of life and behavior.

Child welfare in the United States has earned the responsibility of ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children (Auerbach et al., 2015). This includes investigating and preventing abuse or neglect of children. Alongside partnering agencies, child welfare social workers offer an array of services and resources to support family systems in meeting their basic needs to grow and improve (Pecora et al., 2006). Children in the child

welfare system often have been deprived of basic needs both physiological and emotional which causes an array of issues that Maslow best describes as a deficiency to do better (1943). The social worker then examines the behavior of both the child and the parent to develop management strategies to prevent child abuse and protect children from harm (Pecora et al., 2006). Parental Burnout is a phenomenon that tends to occur when parents experience high amounts of stress which can result in reason for suspicion of child abuse or neglect (Raphael et al., 2010). Malnourishment is often due to the deprivation of a child's most basic needs such as water and food. Emotional and physical abuse can come alongside environmental stressors that families are experiencing; thus, social workers help alleviate the abuse by providing health coping skills and expanding their family's resources.

### **Empirical Literature Review**

The security of the United States has been recently compromised due to the fast spread of coronavirus (California Department of Public Health, 2020), which is a viral infection caused by SARS-CoV-2. This virus has caused dire consequences worldwide; therefore, invoking federal and state restrictions in the United States. As statistical data began to increase on the number of people affected, mandatory shutdowns of all non-essential businesses and schools began to occur. Such a sudden change in everyday routine has created a devastating impact on children's development regarding education, relationships, and customs. The lack of preparation at a multisystem level has affected parents' ability to sustain income while providing adequate childcare. To thrive, parents need to ensure that their children have stability within their environment, relationships, as well as upholding their basic needs such as nourishment, health care, housing, and education. However, due to the outbreak, many parents have lost essential elements in stabilizing such requirements for their children. Mandatory stay at home orders has

reduced access to fundamental relationships with family, friends, and community and faith establishments that are essential for the well-being of both parents and their children. To better prepare for future outbreaks, this study focused on what areas are of significance regarding providing adequate childcare during a national quarantine. This was examined utilizing a phenomenological methodology in addition to collecting data to determine the factors in question. The limitations of this study varied as the course of the disease takes place, and additional studies are established.

### **Epidemiology**

World spread disease has been a phenomenon that has undertaken the human population throughout time. These infectious diseases have resulted in high mortality, hardship, and scarcity of resources. Epidemiology is a discipline in medicine that has a crucial role in describing and identifying status, risk factors, as well as analyzing the relationships between health and different hazardous agents (Last, 2001). Epidemiologists are currently studying the relation between past outbreaks with the current Coronavirus outbreak regarding the symptoms and course that it takes on individuals it affects (Jin et al., 2020). In comparison with other airborne diseases this recent outbreak has been caused by genetic mutation through an animal host (Jie Li et al., 2020). In a study analyzing the sequence that seasonal Influenza takes on people, Ruf and Knuf (2014) discovered that most respiratory infection rates vary by climate and geographical location. Such research has helped in the development of treatment, vaccines, and social guidelines to reduce exposure.

### **Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

An outbreak of the novel coronavirus diseases (California Department of Public Health, 2020) in Wuhan, China, and has rapidly spread worldwide. Thus far, it is known that the virus causes a respiratory illness with symptoms such as a cough, fever, and in

more severe cases, difficulty breathing, and even death (Daily Life and Coping, 2020). The elderly and immunocompromised population are at dire risk of contracting the virus; therefore, the federal government has implemented indefinite closures of non-essential businesses, stay at home orders, and closures of schools. As a result of the newness of the virus amongst humans, no approved vaccine or medication has been released to the public. This has caused great hardship to Americans, for they have put their life on hold. Many people were furloughed off work, are getting eviction, and utility shut off notices, as well as dealing with food insecurity.

According to the Department of Public Health, as of April 14, 2020, there were a total of 821 deaths in California; however, this number has significantly increased as of March 2021 to 3.6 million positive cases and 54,377 deaths (California Department of Public Health, 2021). This is because the virus spreads so quickly through respiratory droplets and no preventatives have been developed, per the World Health Organization, the best way to prevent the illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus (Coronavirus, 2020). The World Health Organization (2021) shows death tolls have skyrocketed, as of March 9, 2021 for there have been 117 million total cases confirmed worldwide. Parents are having to adjust to this change by wearing multiple hats and learning as the federal and state mandates role out. They now are having to provide their children with daily education, meals, and security; subsequently, resulting in economic, mental, and physical hardship.

### **Personal Protective Gear Shortage**

World health organizations, governments, and international agencies have all announced measures to help contain the spread of COVID-19. Some of these measures have imposed several restrictions on people's freedoms as well as unprecedented amounts of surveillance across the world which has interfered with that ability to provide



adequate childcare. Individuals have not been able to acquire proper protective equipment making them vulnerable to contracting the disease. The benefits of globalization are too compelling worldwide, and the real challenge has been found to manage the international exchange of goods, capital, technology, and travel more effectively to create stricter domestic measures to manage through this pandemic. Consequently, due to the country's quarantine and halt of international travel and trade, much of the world felt such shortage (Fonseca & Azevedo, 2020). Families have experienced devastating loss as family members cannot be treated due to shortage of available resources (Chow et al., 2020). Many of the local governments modeled after Wuhun, China, and Italy began to stock ventilators and created COVID wards in their hospitals to help contain the outbreak. However, States like New York saw tragedy as they were not prepared and suffered the greatest number of deaths worldwide consequently to the shortages of protective gear (Alpert et al., 2020).

### **Essential Workers**

Health care workers are the front line in such a fight, which has left them vulnerable and at the fault of what many believe to be an unprepared government. Health care workers, first responders, and other essential workers have experienced shortages of protective gear such as gloves, masks, and gowns (Yu-E Liu et al., 2020). Mahajan and Tomar (2020) believe that this was largely due to China being one of the United States' primary sources of supply and halting international trade. Because so many frontline workers are being affected by the shortages of protective equipment, they have been the primary source of exposure to families thus facing the challenge of going back home and exposing their children or self-quarantining away from home (Rowen and Laffey, 2020). Now this poses the question of childcare when they are away from home. Many have experienced isolation from supports due to their elevated risk of exposure which has

added to the stress of the job. This has compromised their ability to hold their employment or sustain their schedule as their resources continue to become depleted. Some workers deemed essential did not receive accommodations to plan for their childcare. As schools closed, many had to use their vacation or sick time to tend to their children. This has contributed to the mental health challenges as parents struggle to keep up with rent and the basic needs of their children with little to no continuous income (Evans et al., 2003).

### **Economic Challenges**

Many families felt the need to stabilize their assets due to the fear of losing them during such economic recessions (Li & Mutchler, 2020). Prearranged public health support should be targeted to those whose sustenance was previously compromised. Many low-income families are often already facing hardship, and during such a downturn in the economy, they tend to be the ones to be the most negatively impacted (Edmiston, 2013). Kousky (2016) explains that policies need to be in place before a disaster strikes to ensure the welfare of the public; furthermore, the most effective and efficient way to go about establishing such policies is by utilizing already established public safety funds and allotted resources to shift when a disaster strikes. The outbreak has caused great hardship to Americans, for many people have been furloughed from work, are getting evictions, and utility shut off notices, as well as dealing with food insecurity. The current unemployment rate has been exponentially increasing as the pandemic continues to affect businesses causing them to close (Roy Morgan, 2020). According to the Employment Development Department (2020), in the US approximately 3.28 million people have applied for unemployment as a direct impact of the outbreak, California alone reports 2,171,800 unemployment claims as of December 2020.

To aid those that have been financially compromised as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, the Congress passed a legislative bill known as the C.A.R.E.S act, which was signed into law by President Trump on March 27, 2020 (Mervis, 2020). The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (H.R. 748), also known as the C.A.R.E.S Act, is a law created to address the economic hardship as a result of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic in the United States US (Department of Treasury, 2020). This act was intended to provide emergency assistance and health care response for individuals, families, and businesses that were affected by the pandemic. This act provides immediate relief to households and businesses in many forms, including cash payments for low- and middle-class-income households, enhanced unemployment benefits, and loans and grants to small businesses to prevent form bankruptcy. Such federal funding was to alleviate states from the economic hardship evoked by the virus. Individuals that filed for a tax return for 2019 or 2018 were entitled to \$1,200 per person or \$2,400 per couple with an additional \$500 per child (US Department of Treasury, 2020). Pandemic EBT was also put into place to aid with the nourishment of children who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals through the federal School Breakfast or National School Lunch Programs (California Department of Social Services, 2020).

### ***Child Care***

Public education in the United States has served many purposes, especially amongst children. Many parents rely on their children attending school as a source of supplemental income, for it provides free childcare, meals, and increases the opportunities for their children to grow. This sense of security has been recently compromised due to the rapid spread coronavirus. School-aged children are faced with staying home. This measure was taken to flatten the curve of coronavirus infections and fatalities. As of March 21, million children in childcare, 57 million students in

kindergarten through twelve-grade had to resume learning and care from home (Donahue & Miller, 2020). Many parents no longer afford to risk their children becoming infected around other children therefore, had to navigate childcare as they were forced to work through the pandemic. Childcare in the United States has always been a flawed system as it is not a subsidized; consequently, being one of the greatest expenses for working parents (Hashikawa et al., 2020). As the pandemic rises so have the costs of childcare as many have had to take extra precautions increasing their expenses. These extra precautions include daily health checks, personal protective gear, enforcing hand hygiene, frequent sanitation and disinfection, group sizing (Oxner, 2020)

### **Mental Health Challenges**

Very little is known about the long term impacts the pandemic will have concerning children's wellbeing due to the novelty of the virus. Previous studies have shown an increase in mental health problems both long and short-term following traumatic experiences (Reifels et al., 2019). Thus far very little is known about the long term effects the pandemic will have concerning children's wellbeing due to the novelty of the virus; however, what is known, is that children are vulnerable when their health and safety are compromised (Edmiston, 2013). Parents are facing a challenge, created by substantial uncertainty as well as emotional and financial stress caused by such mandates, despite keeping their children protected and engaged in their studies at home. Research from previous outbreaks and its effects on children's development propose that such events have a lasting effect throughout their lives (Kousky, 2016). Children can have psychological effects caused by what they observe as natural disasters occur. They can experience countertransference as they witness their parent's inability to sustain the stressors imposed by hardship (Quinn et al., 2014). Studies have shown that to minimize

potential trauma that children face during such pandemics, it is essential to stabilize paternal supports that satisfy both deficiency and growth needs.

### ***Self-Isolation***

Due to social distancing mandates, families are faced with relying solely on their family who live in the household. Children experience countertransference as they witness their parent's inability to sustain the stressors imposed by hardship (Quinn, Briggs, Miller, & Orelliana, 2014). Children are often resilient but vulnerable when their health and safety is compromised. Social supports need to be formed to help mitigate stressors children encounter through natural disasters, (Dyregrov et al., 2018). Studies have shown an increase in child and adolescent anxiety and depression as a cause of quarantine and self-isolation in the United States (Oosterhoff et al., 2020). Self-isolation as defined by Centers for Disease Control is the act of staying home with minimal social contact and going out only for essential needs (Centers for Disease Control, 2020). Family gatherings, hobbies, extracurricular activities, and other forms of socialization has come to a halt as a consequence.

### ***Social Media***

Social media has also instilled fear and panic into the population therefore invoking radical behavior such stalk piling, hoarding, and even looting. Social media has contributed to the mental health challenges individuals' encounter. Both children and parents are tackling secondhand trauma at the sight of what they see on news outlets, social media, and the internet. Secondhand trauma can be viewed when an individual becomes distressed after hearing about firsthand trauma (Hall et al., 2020). In a study focused on the Typhoon that hit southern China in 2017, revealed that individuals who had some type of media exposure following a natural disaster acquired post-traumatic stress disorder (Hall et al., 2020). After the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001

individuals who had higher exposure to graphic content on television were more likely to have PTSD and depression as concluded by a study conducted on 1,008 adults in Manhattan, New York City (Ahern et al., 2002). Gottfried and Shearer (2017) gathered data indicating that 67% of Americans get their news from social media outlets and not from television. This has allowed for information to be more graphic as viewer discretion is not advised.

### ***Burnout***

Parenting alone has a great deal of stress associated with the role therefore creating burnout (Raphael et al., 2020). Mikolajczak et al. (2019) defines parental burnout as “a prolonged response to chronic and overwhelming parental stress” (p.1319). Using an instrument known as the Parental Burnout Assessment (PBA), Roskam et al. (2018) concluded that parental exhaustion increases, emotional distancing begins to occur, and a loss of parental accomplishment is acquired when parent trigger burnout. According to the Pew Research Center, (91%) of adults have reported a significant change in daily routine since the arise of the pandemic, while (44%) have reported a drastic impact (2020). The pandemic will present an additional amount of emotional, financial, and health challenges as parents continue to navigate the health and educational matters of their children.

### **Gaps in Research**

Though there have been several studies in respect to epidemiology, the literature reviewed lacks its connection to social work at a macro level. This can be seen by the panic and chaos surrounding the handling of the epidemic. There were no protocols developed prior to the epidemic because of its novelty. This has been a new variant of coronavirus therefore, not enough research of the spread, treatment, and prevention was developed at the time of this literature review. As the evolution of the coronavirus

occurred the researcher was able to foresee possible challenges parents would be faced with.

### **Summary Current Study**

This study hoped to gain real insight into the lives of parents to see where the challenges of parenting during the coronavirus outbreak arise. Though much research has been presented about the challenges parents already face during challenging times the researcher hopes to learn not only the challenges parents are currently faced with but the factors that play a role in worsening and alleviating such role. Through one-on-one interviews the researcher developed information that can be used to allocate resources and support where needed at a federal, state, and local level. Because support has been compromised in family systems it is important to know: What are the parental challenges faced with during the coronavirus outbreak.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter contains information regarding the researcher's methods of studying the challenges parents are faced with during the coronavirus pandemic. The purpose of the research was assessed through the data retrieved through interviews. The research design used for this study will also be presented in this chapter. Furthermore, the chapter defined key terms and concepts as they correlate with the research as well as the method for data and participants collected. In addition, this chapter includes the human subject risk factors, confidentiality, and disclosure agreement to ensure a minimal risk.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to gain insight on the challenges that parents face as they adapt to the unexpected effects caused by the coronavirus outbreak utilizing a qualitative study. Due to the novelty of the outbreak, the researcher hoped to discover what areas of focus need to be addressed to ensure child welfare as other outbreaks occur. This was done through phenomenological interviewing. As parents experience the current phenomenon the researcher hoped to gain their perspective in order to interpret the common themes discussed by the participants. The researcher hoped to reduce the negative impact children and their parents are currently facing by stressing the challenges that have been endured due to lack of preparation for national hardship as it relates to outbreaks. The research can also serve as a tool for social service agencies to allocate resources and funds towards communal hardship that is brought to light by the participants.

#### **Participants**

Participants in this study were comprised of six individuals who are parents of school-aged children that have been impacted by the closures of schools. This population



was suitable for the study due to their lived experience. Parents were recruited based on having school aged children that were enrolled in an on-campus school setting prior to the coronavirus pandemic. All parents introduced in this study were over the age of 18. Both female and male perspectives of the challenges they are undergoing are sought for this study. The age range of the participants vary from 22-59 years of age. The variation of ethnicity was considered in selection of the subjects to have a culturally competent result. The recruitment of these individuals was conducted by word of mouth. There was minimal risk for participation in this study.

#### **Data Collection**

This study used the phenomenological method to obtain insight into lived experiences faced by parents as they care for their children during the coronavirus outbreak. The commonalities in context to the trials parents are faced with in rearing their children was examined through semi-structured interviews. Such open-ended questions allow for additional information to be gathered and creativity to touch on unknown factors relevant to the focus question. To achieve maximum and rapid results, convenience sampling was used. Through non-probability sampling the researcher ensured a better understanding of the different lived experiences and situations concerning the effects families have faced during the pandemic.

The interview was conducted through virtual communication via the Zoom application in compliance with social distancing guidelines. The interview detailed audio and video recording to ensure accurate transcription of the dialogue. The video recording was analyzed for nonverbal cues to ensure accurate interpretation of responses; in addition, the audio recording was imported into an audio transcription software. The identity of the participants was concealed in the storing of the information. As Davidson

(1996) strongly recommends the data collected be backed up and secured on an additional hard drive.

### **Interview Guide**

Data collected through a questionnaire consisting of fifteen in depth questions with each participant. These questions served to conclude the challenges that parents are facing during the pandemic. It is evident that coronavirus has disrupted education across much of the country. Participants were asked to describe how this has affected their children. They were asked to elaborate on how their school districts kept them in the loop as in person schooling transitioned to online learning. Parents talked about more personal challenges they are facing such as economically, emotionally, and at a state level. These questions got parents to reveal what they hope for the future in response to similar outbreaks.

*To answer these research question, the following interview questions will be used:*

Q: How old are you?

Q: Are you married?

Q: How many children do you have?

Q: Are you currently employed?

Q: What is your race/ ethnicity?

Q: The coronavirus has disrupted education across much of the country. Can you describe how this has affected your children?

Q: How has your school district kept you informed of what has been going on as the pandemic began to effect on campus schooling.

Q: It has just been a few months so far with these educational changes. Can you tell me what is working well?

Q: What are the main challenges that you have been faced with since having your children home?

Q: How has the school closure affected your family economically?

Q: Are there any financial changes that this pandemic made you question?

Q: How has this pandemic affected your child?

Q: How do you help them cope?

Q: How could the state be better prepared if this happened again in the future?

Q: What are your hopes for the future related to the pandemic and the welfare of your child?

### **Data Analysis**

Using data as presented by Creswell and Poth (2018), such as memos, transcribing, journaling, and audio recording, the researcher gathered information throughout the qualitative interviews to formulate common themes amongst the answers the participants reveal. These codes were composed of factors that parents are faced with in respect to providing adequate childcare during such an outbreak. With Creswell and Poth's (2018) qualitative format, words or phrases that emphasize significance and correlation were put aside and categorized. In turn, these phrases were then subcategorized until they form cohesive themes and issues that can be reduced to achieve the factors required of the study. These themes were organized through categorized spreadsheets throughout the study. The researcher expected the level of difficulty to vary on carrying out the data analysis due to the circumstances of the individuals changing as well as the factors they note as essential as the outbreak carries on in regard to providing adequate care for their children.

### **Trustworthiness**

To ensure that the data collection method holds legitimacy, the researcher conducted a chair overview of the interview guide. This eliminated any discrepancies in the context or phrasing in which the questions asked. The researcher also took into consideration the cultural values the participants disclose to avoid any misinterpretation or impertinence in respect to the delivery of the interview. To avoid subjectivity, the researcher assured the participants were not relatives or friends to avoid partiality in their circumstances. Also, the researcher was mindful of the reactivity in response to the answers that were obtained by avoiding any leading questions. This was done so through appropriate body language, tone of voice, and additional relevant questions to ensure clarity. The research was also mindful of any political bias that may be implied through the questioning in the interview, for the political climate influences citizens' feelings towards the public health response imposed by the government. Also, detailed data was gathered using both long-term observations and intensive interviews.

### **Confidentiality**

Because the participant and researcher have the freedom to choose their desired setting as they interact via zoom, confidentiality must be secured. This was be done by allowing the participant to schedule a time that is most convenient for them, ensuring privacy and convenience. The interviews had a set duration of one hour per participant. Technological safety measures are to be taken into consideration by researcher to secure the method of communication with a conference ID and password that were not to be shared with others to assure that hacking does not occur.

### **Limitations**

Although the method of communication limited the observable data the researcher will obtain, it permits the comfort of the participant as well as eliminates the likelihood of

viral exposure between participants and the researcher. Reliability of the internet connection may hinder the transmission of information between participant and researcher. The researcher determined that the participants will be of similar status therefore not showing significant extremes on the socio-economic spectrum. The researcher estimated the participants fell into the middle-class range; therefore, providing insight to 66 percent of the American population (Staff, 2016). This limitation can impair the studies ability to see the variety of hardship people of different socio-economic status endure. Challenges could be interpreted differently in families that hold different values. The unresidential handling of regulations as it relates to the nation's response to COVID is changing rapidly; therefore, the researcher can expect sudden mandates to change throughout the study.

#### **Credibility/Reflexivity**

The researcher, Kimberly Zapata Soto, is the leading researcher in this study and was supervised by Marcus Crawford, Ph.D., an Assistant Professor for the Department of Social Work Education at California State University, Fresno. Kimberly Zapata Soto is a post-baccalaureate student at California State University, Fresno. She is in her last year of receiving her Master's in Social Work. She has been working with family systems in various social service settings for the last 6 years. This includes medical social work with special attention in geriatrics, collaborative work with the Fresno County Department of Social Services, and children's mental health. The researcher is currently specializing in child welfare through seminars and training provided through the Title 4E. The Researcher is trained in human subjects' procedures and guidelines and has a current CITI training certificate see appendix C.

The outcome of this research is relevant in understanding and analyzing risk factors that children are faced with as they live through the outbreak. The information

that the participants reveal was helpful in finding what has compromised children's welfare during these unprecedented times. As the researcher specializes in child welfare, she hopes to understand how high stress situations compromises the wellbeing of children and their parents' ability to cope. The researcher hopes to expand her knowledge with special attention to factors that have compromised the family system in respect to Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### Introduction

The focus of this study was to understand the challenges that parents are faced with during the current coronavirus outbreak. The questions that were discussed in the interview cover the disruption and communication between the school system and parents, the economic, emotional, and social challenges faced while having children at home, and techniques and resources used to cope during these unprecedented times. This chapter will present the study sample, data analysis, and discovered themes. Navigating the educational system, financial insecurity, low levels of social support from family and friends, and a lack of leisure time are recognized themes in the study.

### Participants

The study sample consisted of six participants who were recruited based on their parental status and meeting the required criteria that was solicited on a social media platform. The participants consisted of both mothers and fathers to give a rounded perspective of parenthood and the challenges they were currently experiencing in respect to the coronavirus outbreak. Four of the participants were female and two were male. They varied in age, ethnicity, marital status, number of children, and employment status as described in (Table 1).

Table 1

#### *Participant Demographics*

Name	Ethnicity/Race	Age	Marital Status	Number of Children	Employment Status
Brianna	White	35	Engaged	3	Unemployed
Maribel	Hispanic	23	Single Never Married	2	Employed
Jason	Native American	31	Single Never Married	1	Employed
Corina	Hispanic	31	Married	4	Employed
Madison	Native American/Hispanic	32	Married	3	Employed
Valentin	Hispanic	29	Engaged	1	Employed

### **Interviews**

The researcher began the interviews with demographic questions that were shared utilizing the share screen option with the participants to follow along and get more acquainted with the process that would take place. They were informed that after the demographic question more in depth and personal questions would occur.

### **Individual Stories**

This study focused on the challenges that parents faced during the coronavirus pandemic, and the effects it has caused on their families. The researcher found that regardless of the diversity within the participants many commonalities were found amongst the challenges they faced. To put their challenges into perspective the researcher will share a synopsis of the current dynamic these parents experience. The following synopses will allow the reader to better understand who the participants are before the themes are presented.

#### ***Brianna***

Brianna is 35-year-old White woman and a mother of three children. Her children are of school age (three, five, and six years old). Brianna and her fiancé were employed full time and had plans to get married this year (2021); however, due to the pandemic she was laid off and has been a stay-at-home mom. This set back not only postponed her wedding but her lifestyle as a mother, provider, and protector.

#### ***Maribel***

Maribel is a 22-year-old Hispanic female. She is the biological mother to a 5-year-old and is currently caring for her 6-year-old sibling who has been living with her this past school year. This living arrangement was due to her mother's inexperience with online technology and difficulty navigating social distance learning. Maribel is employed



as a fulltime community advocate but has recently transitioned to telecommuting as a direct effect of the pandemic.

***Jason***

Jason is a 31-year-old Native American male and a father of one. He states this is his daughter's first year in school as a Kindergartener, so she never experienced being in a school setting. He is currently employed part time while remaining a full-time graduate student. As a single father his current living arrangement includes his parents, which serve as an added support in caring for his daughter.

***Corina***

Corina is a 31-year-old Hispanic female who is currently employed full time. She has been married for 10 years and is a mother of four children ages 9, 8, 5, and 3. Due to the pandemic her spouse had to resign his full-time employment to help their children with social distance learning. This decision was made as their supporters were not English speaking or familiar with online navigation, in addition to the high daycare costs as a direct effect of additional online schooling fees.

***Madison***

Madison is a 32-year-old Hispanic/Native American woman. She has been married for twelve years and is a mother of three children ages 4, 6, and 12. Not only does Madison work full time but her husband and her own a small business that has been impacted during this pandemic and has resulted in her being the primary breadwinner. She is an essential worker and currently employed; however, her hours have been reduced because of the local stay-at-home orders decreasing sales. She states that due to her husband's health her family has to take extra caution in their activities of daily living and limit their social interactions.

***Valentin***

Valentin is a 29-year-old Hispanic male who was recently engaged. He shares 50/50 custody of his 12-year-old son with his previous partner. Valentin currently lives with his fiancé and younger adult brother. His fiancé also works full time and is considered a mother figure for his child. He has limited support as his parents passed away when he was a teenager, subsequently, inheriting parental responsibility for his brother and sister at a very young age.

**Research Question Results**

Using a phenomenological research design, this study focused on areas of significance regarding providing adequate childcare during a national quarantine. The analysis of the interviews revealed the participants faced the most challenges with the following themes: school closures, loss, as well as mental health and wellbeing.

**School Closures**

The challenges faced during the COVID-19 outbreak have been extensive amongst parents, as they point out the uncertainty with adapting and navigating social distance learning. The school system disruption caused an array of challenges as it was unprecedented and unexpected. Through the respondents' perception of the school closures the researcher was able to determine specific context amongst the main challenges parents are faced with while navigating the online school system. The following challenges were identified as subthemes in relation to the school closures: communication, grades, and childcare.

**Communication**

All participants disclosed the challenges with the communication between the school system, their children, and themselves. Brianna stated:

They told us that my kids weren't going to be able to attend class anymore, but they would find an alternative way soon. It took them more than a couple of weeks to actually figure out how they were going to do this. Finally, they figured that zoom was going to be the way. I had no clue what it was like navigating zoom, so I had to teach myself how to do it, nobody taught me how to use zoom.

Zoom has been an online virtual meeting application adapted by many districts to deliver instruction to children, however different school districts switched to Teams which is a Microsoft software that allows group chats. Corina mentioned:

One minute we learn one thing and teach our kids and then all of a sudden, they switch it on us, so now here we have to learn a new piece of software.

The participants felt that communication was very poor; however, the researcher found that the barriers with communication had different outcomes with each child. Vincent found that his son became more resourceful as he often met with the teacher one on one; however, Brianna found it harder to get individual meetings to clarify instruction for her child. The participants did recognize that communication began to improve as time went on and further adjustment began to occur. Corina stressed:

The teachers were just as confused as we were, but as time has gone by, I started to receive more fluent communication. Teachers were starting to use different ways to contact me. At first it was just voicemails, but it started to become text alerts, letters, and now emails.

It has been almost a year since children have been in the classroom, instead they have been learning from home which has greatly impacted their academic performance. Madison shared:

My youngest has always been top of her class, she is in the GATE program and reads well above grade level. Now she is failing more than half her classes. I understand that paying attention and sitting in front of the screen is a lot harder

compared to being in class where they know that they have the teacher to guide them and help them stay focused.

Vincent too found that his son was failing a significant number of classes. He stated that his son often blamed the format of learning to be confusing and hard to stay focused on. Corina stressed, keeping her children focused on the teacher while they adapted to their new devices and environment has been a struggle. Not only are the children having to adapt to a new routine, learning environment, but to the tools that they are given. Corina shared:

As a working mom, checking all four of my kids' homework is nearly impossible, I have to trust them and give them the responsibility to keep up with the homework. It was working just fine until I started to see the decline in the grades. They gave me excuses like I can't find the assignments on the webpages, it's too much work, it's so repetitive.

Single child households seemed to have less stress towards grades instead stressed the ability to keep their children engaged in the material presented to them. Maribel felt “teachers were being too hard on children giving them too much busy work.” Maddison supported such challenges by conveying:

I feel like the schools don't take into consideration the other responsibilities we have as parents. Teachers are assigning so many assignments, all at once, that it not only makes it difficult to keep track of them but holding the kids accountable to meet the deadlines is difficult.

### **Childcare**

As school closure took place, many parents were faced with the challenge to find adequate supervision for their children. Parents with more than one child reported to have

a harder time finding childcare in addition to care that could provide “educational guidance” and “technical support.” Madison stated:

You know how much the cost to take care of one child at a daycare is? Just imagine how much I would pay for three kiddos. My entire salary would go to childcare, working at that point is pointless. My husband and I are alternating our schedules in order to keep our jobs and care for our children.

Jason agreed with Madison and stated:

My girl is only in kindergarten. She doesn't know how to read let alone use the computer. The extra online learning assistant fees that were added to the cost of day care are far beyond my budget; it's simply unbelievable.

The study found that most bilingual participants that did have an available adult that would be willing to provide care for their children could not accept due to their language barrier and “unfamiliarity with technology.” Corina added:

My suegra (mother-in-law) is retired so she is available to care for my kids when my husband and I are at work, but the problem started the first week she tried. She couldn't get the kids logged on to their Zoom accounts and couldn't assist the kids when their computers would freeze or log out. She is Spanish speaking and has absolutely no experience with technology. I couldn't put her or my kids through a year of that, so we had to make sacrifices and my husband quit his job.

Parents like Brianna and Corina's husband were faced with the obligation to resign their job to care for their children. Others like Jason and Maribel had to negotiate accommodations with employment, schooling, and/or internship to telecommute to be able to watch their child. Jason explained:

I work part time and by the time the PM kindergarten class begins I come home and log online along with my daughter. Grad school is a beast and having to focus

while assisting my daughter has been hard. I have no idea what I would have done if I had to go to class or attend my internship in person.

### **Loss**

Mandatory stay at home orders reduced access to fundamental relationships with family, friends, and community establishments which were essential supports for families. The loss of connection amongst these bodies have caused distress in different aspects of their lives. As previously described some parents had to resign their employment which in turn resulted in financial loss. Children have had to suffer the deprivation of socialization as a consequence of isolation and social distancing mandates which in turn impacted their mental health. The following challenges were identified as subthemes in relation to loss: loss of fundamental relationships, financial loss, and loss of security.

#### **Loss of Fundamental Relationships**

The participants revealed that witnessing their children deprived from their social lives so abruptly has been heartbreaking. Brianna shared her challenge in persuading her children to socialize with family and friends as they have become too exhausted on the school's online format that they do not long for any video calls. Pertaining to her children, Madison shared:

Emotionally it affects them because they are sad, they don't understand why we have to stay away from others. Also keeping them physically active is difficult because they are just staying in the room. They are staying inside the house; they are not going outside and playing. Or like they normally do at school during recess or PE.

Her fear was that her children were going to be “antisocial” due to such isolation. Corina stated that the halt of church service has put a spiritual strain on her family as she often sought the support of her congregation. She stated:

You know spirituality is what keeps faith alive right now, and now more than ever our families need it. I feel my family is starting to lose hope and lose their faith. I feel the churches are just as essential as the hospitals! They are what heal us from within during these types of tragedies.

In hopes for the future parent shared their desire for their children to thrive but expressed their fears as consequence to the traumatic effects gained through the loss of fundamental socialization during the peak years of adolescence for their kids. Vincent stated:

I fear my son is not going to be able to socialize like a normal person, well what our normal is, he may become socially awkward in the sense of starting friendships, relationships, and being able to communicate with others when all this is over. I fear for him when he is not able to communicate with his teachers in person and gets in trouble for it or with his future employers.

### **Financial Loss**

Financial loss has been a challenge that parents have been faced with. Participants that had one child reported to have little to no financial loss during the past year. Maribel stated:

I am blessed to have the opportunity to keep working from home, so my income has not changed. I just make sure that I wake up on time and get my son ready for online school. What is hard is having to step away from my Zoom meetings when he needs help or can't find an assignment on his computer.

It was discovered that parents with multiple children had a significant loss of income. The losses were accounted for in reduction of hours, layoffs, and having to resign due to lack of childcare. Madison stated that her husband's small business began to feel the impact that COVID had on the economy as more and more clients began to decrease. Madison explained:

Due to the epidemic my husband's business began to slow down. People were also afraid to go out of their houses or have people around them. This impacted my job at the grocery store because we weren't getting as many people that were shopping there. So, I'm supposed to be full time and working 80 hours a week, but now I'm lucky if I get 60 hours a week.

Though loss of job due to lack of childcare was a reasonable cause for unemployment benefits a participant mentioned feeling "embarrassed" that her family had to result in government assistance to sustain their family. Others like Vincent felt grateful that he was able to find an essential job after being laid off from his previous employment. Such "financial stress" as quoted by all participants, has resulted in adjustments to their lifestyle choices. Madison buys only the essential items, Maribel no longer finds going out for fast food practical, and Jacob states that going out is rare due to having to pay for babysitting at extremely high costs. Brianna emphasized:

We buy what we need, not what we want which our children have internalized as a form of punishment, and it is one of the hardest things to explain to a toddler.

### **Loss of Security**

Security has been compromised since the start of the pandemic. Many parents referenced that this was a result of the delayed National and State response. Jason stated:



If our president would have set a mandatory shut down from the get-go, we as parents would not be so blindsided. I would take fourteen days over this whole year of chaos.

Maribel described her challenge to acquire essential items such as toilet paper and groceries. She claimed:

The state should have rationed out essential items and outlawed the hoarding of goods. Our families had to suffer going without such basic necessities like water, beans, food, even toilet paper. It's ridiculous! What had me worried is the price gouging on everything. We were set up for failure as a nation.

Corina voiced feeling “scared”, she feared that there was a possibility of her life as she knew it was no longer soon and struggled with adapting to the new structure of parenting. Brianna mentioned it was hard to explain to her children that the pandemic could result in the loss of a family member. She added:

I feel it is important to keep my children in the loop of what is going on around them. I feel that I’m putting their life at risk if I shelter them of the outcomes that can come about catching COVID.

Parents lack reassurance that they are going to obtain the resources that they need to provide for their families such as obtaining and keeping a stable income, paying off their rent, and being able to provide for necessities.

### **Mental Health and Wellbeing**

During the interview parents described it being challenging seeing how the climate around the pandemic had taken a toll on their children’s mental health and wellbeing. They stated that the sudden change in environment, methods of socialization, and education had impacted their children’s ability to manage. They stated the lack of support often made them “hopeless” and “desperate” that the climate would improve.

Constant fear and isolation were factoring that parents had to take into consideration when developing coping strategies for their children. The following challenges were identified as subthemes in relation to mental health: lack of motivation, mood and behavior, as well as coping.

### **Lack of Motivation**

With the restrictions put into place and people isolating at home, participants are starting to feel their daily routines are becoming repetitive. They feel a lack of motivation as the days go by. Vincent stated that his child's grades were starting to suffer. When questioning where his son's grades were suffering his son stated it was because he lacked motivation as he was just doing repetitive work and had no immediate compensation.

Vincent described his routine:

I wake up, have my kid eat, log onto school, eat, log on to school, do chores, watch television, or play his video games, then shower and sleep. Now imagine doing this every day for the past year with no signs of the world changing its exhausting, I can understand him.

### **Moods and Behavior**

The excess amount of time that families are spending together is bringing to light issues that are resulting in conflict. Corina stated:

My children share one bedroom and the youngest sleeps with me. The two older boys are constantly fighting, bickering, and getting grounded. I understand that they must feel so frustrated being around one another 24/7, but it's starting to get harder trying to enforce the rules and getting them to respect each other. I started to have a time schedule for them to spend alone time in their rooms so they can destress, but it's not always followed through.

Brianna felt that her children had begun to display attention seeking behavior that often resulted in her being overwhelmed. Like Brianna, Jason experienced the same with his daughter; however, stated that he had to set boundaries as it was starting to interfere with his online schooling.

### **Coping**

Though mental health challenges were identified because of the pandemic, parents demonstrated resilience as they formed coping strategies for their families. Many parents identified the need for their children to feel compensated for their good grades and behavior. Corina, Madison, and Maribel rewarded their children by taking them to their favorite restaurants instead of cooking at home. Brianna said:

We do picnics, so we try to normalize what we're going through. So, after their class, we take a lunch and call it a picnic. So, we take them get drive through then eat in our backyard. Then we play, and just kind of like normalize it for them as much as we can. But I mean we could only do so much.

Though they were not able to eat at the restaurant the children viewed it as an incentive. Outdoor activities were used to encourage socialization between siblings and changing daily routine. Madison shared:

On Sundays my husband fires up the grill and my kids and I make the sides. then after they get to choose whatever board game they want for the night. This gives us something to look forward to and distract us from the chaos going on.

Many parents believed that the best way to cope was to provide honesty. Brianna used age-appropriate jargon and literature to educate her children on the corona virus and ways to prevent exposure. Vincent found that with sharing custody of his son he had to make sure to educate his child on his hygiene and the importance of wearing his mask. Vincent added:

Usually what we try to do is just talk to my kid and just keep asking him questions and ask if he need help, you know, and just try to find different websites or programs that can better explain what is going on.

Corina and Madison stated that they had to limit their children's exposure to social media and news outlets as it was increasing their children's anxiety and instead gave them an age-appropriate update on the essential facts.

Many parents felt that by displaying faith their children did as well. Corina, Madison, Vincent, and Briana shared their faith-based practices and stated that though their worship centers were closed they still practiced devotion at home. Brianna stated:

We've made it a routine to pray. So, we pray for our family we pray for their little cousins, and what I tell them to do is when we're praying to say the names out loud. I ask them who do you want to pray for today and then they tell me. I started to notice that they are starting to do it on their own.

### **Summary**

This chapter focused on the challenges that each parent faced as well certain themes that became evident during the interviews. Each participant shared the hardships that they faced regarding their experiences with the school closures, loss, and mental health. The researcher identified their coping strategies and shared the motivation behind the study. The following chapter will reveal significant findings, implications for social work practice, strengths, and limitations of the study; in addition, it will discuss future research recommendations.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

### **Introduction**

This chapter concentrates on the significant findings the researcher collected through the data analysis. The purpose of this study was to obtain firsthand insight of the challenges that parents face as they adapt to the unexpected effects caused by the coronavirus outbreak utilizing a qualitative study. This chapter will also illustrate the studies implications of social work practice. In addition, the strengths and limitations of the study will be uncovered as well as the recommendations for future research.

### **Significant Findings**

The researcher identified additional basic needs that had not been recognized or prioritized prior to the pandemic. The inability to sustain basic needs forced parents to stock up on essential items such as food, water, and surprisingly toilet paper. As the severity of the pandemic increased, people began to hoard proper protective equipment such as masks, gloves, and disinfectants. These were items that were not previously classified as essential; thus, the state was not prepared for the shortages that were most vital to families. According to Maslow's (1943) theory, essential needs are items that are required for survival. Through the data analysis the researcher found that this theory did not anticipate the adaptive needs of parents facing a viral pandemic. The interviews identified a significant impact in the lives of the participants that did not suffice their essential needs, for example Brianna emphasized the decline in her mental wellbeing as the shortages arose within her community. Others that worked in the medical field revealed that they had more security as they had a small supply of PPE in their homes. According to Mikolajczak and Roskam (2018), parents encountered the deficiency in supply and demand of resources which inhibited their balance in the ability to identify the risk factors that parents were faced with in respect to their experience or perceptions

of their family structure. Individuals now saw PPE as a menace to ensure their families wellbeing making it a vital resource.

The six participants of the study were able to share the most intimate parts of being a parent as they opened up about the tribulations they faced as they care for their children during a national pandemic. In correlation with Maslow's hierarchy of needs the researcher was able to identify the challenges that parents encountered. Parents began to identify their insecurities as a consequence of sudden alteration to their family dynamic. Their resources began to deplete as the pandemic began to compromise the health of their loved ones. The corona virus disrupted the ability to provide the most basic human needs which has impacted the welfare of children and parental behavior. Behavior, as defined by Bezzo and Maggi (2015), are compromised as individuals live off "survival mode", these behaviors are dictated by the "horror, fear, mistrust, sadness, shame, anger, stress and anxiety, decreased self-worth, stockpiling of food reverence for food, overemphasis on food and overeating, and need to hoard" (87). The participants indicated that fear created the inability to sustain their families due to their job security becoming unpredictable. In addition to balancing their new responsibilities as the sole educator, provider, and caregiver, parents were left to manage to adapt towards their new reality.

#### **Implications for Social Work Practice**

While conducting the research it has become apparent that much work still needs to be addressed in the field of social work as it pertains to the challenge's parents are facing during the pandemic crisis. Families have been affected by unprecedented times due to COVID-19, which have caused immediate implications as well as long lasting mental health concerns that will become apparent within time due to the trauma encountered.

Parents have now had to navigate through a yearlong adaptation process that has been paved through trial and error. The participants felt a substantial impact within their own social supports as they had to result to their nuclear families. The interpretation of the data collected by the researcher identified a need for supplementary assistance to suffice the loss of support. As the participants shared their experiences, the researcher found that entities required for childcare, financial stability, and education were the most prominent community supports which had the greatest impact on parents' ability to navigate through the pandemic.

The participants felt the lack of preparation in regard to the absence of their local resources created distress as there was a significant gap with no advisory amongst parents. The local, state, and national involvement determined the outcome of suffrage within each family. The researcher found that advocates such as social workers would be vital in advocating for funds as a safety net towards struggling individuals raising children. This implementation would negate food insecurity, homelessness, academic success, and improve parental mental health thus ensuring children's wellbeing.

The study identified the need for social workers to quickly adapt to new policies and procedures while following local, state, and federal regulations. As a national crisis arose social workers were essential and in high demand in their field of work. Unfortunately, due to the high demands it became apparent that there was a decrease in social servitude. Through data analysis the researcher has identified a disproportion in compensation and recognition amongst the social work field. This has gone unrecognized; however, as the global crisis research evolved so did the need for social workers.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

The researcher identified substantial strengths and limitations within the study. The strengths highlighted in the research emphasized the resilience within a family system. A platform was created through the research for families to voice their hardships and identify their own strengths and weaknesses. The information gathered will serve as a foundation for future generations and provide what will be known as historical data. This data will contribute to the evolution of health and human services as it relates to epidemiology.

The limitations that have become apparent during the research are associated with the method of data collection. Due to the social distancing mandate the researcher was not able to gather sufficient observable data thus depending on verbal data. The researcher was limited to the number of participants gathered for the study due to the increased responsibilities creating an impacted schedule. Inclusivity could have enhanced the study as three main ethnic groups were represented and neglected a large portion of the population. The main focus of the study was geared towards parents of school aged children which did not represent a portion of the population. In addition, the researcher found all the participants in the study were heterosexual which left out the LGBT community and the additional hardships they face as parents. The participants were predominantly middle class which resulted in the lack of diverse socioeconomic representation within the participants. As the nation's response to COVID changed rapidly the researcher anticipated evolving limitations; however, the themes in the study appeared to be consistent as the year unfolded.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The researcher has identified recommendations for future research that will enhance the current study. The first recommendation would be an increase in participants of diverse backgrounds as many families have been affected by the pandemic. The ability



to increase the sample size would allow for data to be collected in a larger quantity which would identify the significant resources needed for future pandemics. This could be done through quantitative methods. It is important for future research to be inclusive of all family dynamics to ensure equality and cultural representation. During the course of the study, the researcher focused on the parent perspective which allowed for substantial data. However, for future research it is suggested to include the perspective of the children by creating a child-oriented questionnaire to better understand their emotional needs.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

This chapter focused on the lived experiences of parents who shared their challenges as they navigated through the corona virus pandemic. This data was gathered in order to better understand and serve the population in need. The research provided novelty in the area of health and human services in respect to epidemiology and vulnerable populations. Each participant's perspective and insight were valuable in understanding the severity that a world health crisis has on the population with emphasis on parents and child welfare. The researcher hopes that the study will provide a foundation for professionals to understand the need to reduce the negative impact children and their parents are currently facing by stressing the challenges that have been endured as a result of preparation for national hardship. The research can also serve as a tool for social service agencies to allocate resources and funds towards communal hardship that is brought to light by the participants.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM



# CONSENT FORM

California State University, Fresno  
 Department of Social Work  
 Parental Challenges During COVID-19 Interview

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Kimberly Zapata Soto under the direct supervision of Marcus Crawford, Ph.D. We hope to learn about the relationship between parents and the challenges they have faced during the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a parent, and you identified facing challenges during the current outbreak.

If you decide to participate the interview will last approximately 60 minutes. We cannot guarantee you will receive direct benefits from participation in this study, but the information you provide will help inform service providers about the challenge's parents are facing during the coronavirus outbreak. In gratitude for participating in the survey you will be compensated with a \$5 Starbucks Card.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Your name will not be associated with interview transcript and identifying information will not be included when your interview is transcribed.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with CSU Fresno, the Department of Social Work Education, or the researchers. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. The Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects at California State University, Fresno has reviewed and approved the present research.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep. If you have any additional questions later, please contact Kimberly Zapata Soto via email at [kimyz2624@mail.fresnostate.edu](mailto:kimyz2624@mail.fresnostate.edu) or Marcus Crawford, Ph.D. at [marcus crawford@csufresno.edu](mailto:marcus crawford@csufresno.edu).

**YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE, HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

## INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Q: How old are you?
2. Q: Are you married?
3. Q: How many children do you have?
4. Q: Are you currently employed?
5. Q: What is your race/ ethnicity?
6. Q: The coronavirus has disrupted education across much of the country. Can you describe how this has affected your children?
7. Q: How has your school district kept you informed of what has been going on as the pandemic began to effect on campus schooling.
8. Q: It has just been a few months so far with these educational changes. Can you tell me what is working well?
9. Q: What are the main challenges that you have been faced with since having your children home?
10. Q: How has the school closure affected your family economically?
11. Q: Are there any financial changes that this pandemic made you question?
12. Q: How has this pandemic affected your child?
13. Q: How do you help them cope?
14. Q: How could the state be better prepared if this happened again in the future?
15. Q: What are your hopes for the future related to the pandemic and the welfare of your child?

## APPENDIX C: HUMAN SUBJECTS CERTIFICATE



