

Relationship between Childhood Disability or Developmental Delay and COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts on Families across the Canadian Maritime Provinces

De-Lawrence Lamptey, Jessie-Lee McIsaac, Madison MacQuarrie, Randi Cummings, Melissa D. Rossiter, Magdalena Janus & Joan Turner

Journal of Child and Family Studies

<http://tinyurl.com/childhooddisabilitycovid>

Background

The Maritimes implemented public health restrictions shortly after other Canadian provinces recorded their first presumptive COVID-19 case.



How did the pandemic and related restrictions impact children with disabilities or developmental delays and their families?

Methods

This study involved 1976 primary caregivers of children aged 0–8 years, of which 256 (13%) had children with disabilities or developmental delays.

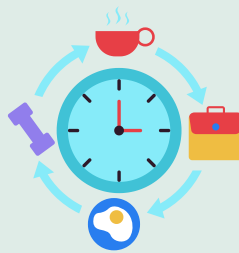
As part of an online survey, caregivers answered 20 close-ended questions, rating each question on a scale of 1 to 5. The questions focused on changes to Family access to resources and social support, parenting Abilities and self-care, and home Routines and Environments (FARE Change Scale).



The more questions a caregiver rated higher, the more positive the caregiver rated changes to their environment as a result of the pandemic. Open-ended questions included in the survey allowed caregivers to provide in-depth description of changes to their family environments.

Quantitative Findings

Overall, caregivers of children with disabilities or developmental delays provided lower ratings of the 20 close-ended questions on the survey compared to those caregivers of typically developing children.



In other words, caregivers of children with disabilities or developmental delays perceived less positive changes to their family environment due to the pandemic compared to caregivers of typically developing children.

Qualitative Findings

Through the open-ended questions on the survey, caregivers discussed changes that were non-specific to disability and disability-specific changes to their family environments, including both positive and negative impacts of the pandemic.



Changes specific to disability

Parents reported: breaks from children experiencing challenges at school, better management of sensory needs, stronger family bonds and more family time.



However, there was also a lack of educational support, changes in behavior and mental health, and a lack of support services during the pandemic.

Changes not specific to disability

Parents also shared that school closures provided a nice break for their children, there was more time to cook and spend time together as a family, and overall the family environment was more relaxed.



They also reported challenges with balancing school and work, increased financial burden, little time for self care and more stress and tension on the family.

Implications

What does this mean for families?

Some of the positive changes to family environments early in the pandemic **allowed families to address** some of their **unmet needs** that they experienced before the pandemic.

In addition to the widespread impacts of the pandemic on families, those with children with a disability or a developmental delay often experienced **additional negative impacts** during the pandemic, specific to the supports and services that they accessed for their children's care.

What does this mean for policy and practice?

Our mixed methods study allowed for deeper understanding of the experiences of families at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Understanding both the positive and negative experiences associated with the pandemic is important to adequately address some of the unmet needs that families experienced before the pandemic into the future.

Our findings also suggest that there is a need for policies and practices to consider and provide more adequate support for families of children with disabilities.

