



Perspectives on the essential needs of children in early childhood in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic: an integrative review

Perspectivas sobre as necessidades essenciais das crianças na primeira infância no contexto da pandemia de COVID-19: uma revisão integrativa

Perspectivas sobre las necesidades esenciales de los niños en la primera infancia en el contexto de la pandemia de COVID-19: Una revisión integradora

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Identify scientific knowledge regarding the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on early childhood, specifically from the perspective of children's essential needs. **Method:** An integrative literature review was conducted on five databases. The review process involved identifying a research problem, creating a guiding question, performing a literature search, analyzing data, and synthesizing the results. The review included original articles about children under six, published between 2020 and 2022. The theoretical framework of the child's essential needs was used for analysis. **Results:** A total of 22 articles were analyzed. Findings indicated an increase in parental overload and stress levels. The children exhibited behavioral changes, sleep pattern disorders, increased digital media use, and reduced outdoor participation. Protective factors related to the familial bond, child care, and child reception were identified. Closure of daycare centers and schools resulted in a distance between the caregiver, the education professionals, and the fellow parents. In contrast, the reopening of those places brought added support to families. The needs, such as ongoing supportive relationships, developmentally appropriate experiences, and supportive communities, were more highlighted. Physical protection and setting boundaries were less prominent aspects. No experiences examining individual differences were identified. **Conclusion:** The scientific knowledge points to significant vulnerabilities and certain potentialities in child health care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those results suggest considerable impacts on child well-being and development and imply significant implications for nursing practices in Primary Health Care.

Keywords: COVID-19; Child; Child care; Child development; Child health.

RESUMO

Objetivo: O presente estudo objetiva identificar as perspectivas científicas sobre as implicações da pandemia da COVID-19 na primeira infância, focando nas necessidades essenciais da criança. **Método:** Foi realizada uma revisão integrativa da literatura, que incluiu cinco bases de dados. O processo envolveu a identificação do problema, o desenvolvimento de uma pergunta orientadora, pesquisa na literatura, análise dos dados e síntese dos resultados. Foram incluídos artigos originais que envolviam crianças com menos de seis anos, publicados entre 2020 e 2022. A análise foi conduzida tendo como referencial teórico as necessidades essenciais da criança. **Resultados:** Foram examinados 22 artigos. Os resultados indicaram um aumento na sobrecarga e no estresse parental. As crianças apresentaram alterações comportamentais, perturbações no padrão do sono, uso mais frequente de mídias digitais e diminuição de atividades realizadas ao ar livre. Fatores protetores, relacionados ao vínculo familiar, cuidado e acolhimento da criança, foram identificados. O fechamento de creches e escolas distanciou os cuidadores dos profissionais da educação e de outros pais, mas sua reabertura trouxe maior apoio às famílias. Necessidades de relacionamentos contínuos de apoio, experiências adequadas ao desenvolvimento e comunidades solidárias foram mais evidenciadas. No entanto, foram encontrados menos aspectos relacionados à proteção física e ao estabelecimento de limites. Experiências sobre diferenças individuais não foram identificadas. **Conclusão:** A pesquisa científica revelou vulnerabilidades substanciais e potencialidades no cuidado à saúde da criança durante a pandemia de COVID-19. Esses resultados sugerem impactos significativos no bem-estar e no desenvolvimento infantil, implicando na necessidade de ações específicas por parte da enfermagem no contexto da Atenção Primária à Saúde.

Palavras-chave: COVID-19; Criança; Cuidado da criança; Desenvolvimento infantil; Saúde da criança.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Identificar el conocimiento científico acerca de las implicaciones de la pandemia de COVID-19 en la primera infancia desde la perspectiva de las necesidades esenciales de los niños. **Método:** Se realizó una revisión integrativa de la literatura en cinco bases de datos, que incluye la identificación del problema, la formulación de una pregunta orientadora, la búsqueda de la literatura, el análisis de los datos y una síntesis de los resultados. Se incluyeron artículos originales que trataban sobre niños menores de seis años y que fueron publicados entre los años 2020-2022. A. El análisis se llevó a cabo utilizando el marco teórico de las necesidades esenciales de los niños. **Resultados:** Se analizaron 22 artículos. Se observó una sobrecarga y un incremento del estrés en los padres. Los niños mostraron cambios en su comportamiento y patrones de sueño, un mayor uso de

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medios digitales y una menor participación en actividades al aire libre. Se identificaron factores de protección relacionados con el vínculo familiar, el cuidado y recibimiento del niño. El cierre de guarderías y escuelas aisló a los cuidadores de los profesionales de la educación y de otros padres, aunque la reapertura proporcionó un mayor apoyo a las familias. Las necesidades más evidentes fueron las de relaciones de apoyo continuas, experiencias apropiadas para el desarrollo y comunidades de apoyo. Hubo menos énfasis en aspectos de protección física y establecimiento de límites. No se identificaron experiencias respecto a diferencias individuales. **Conclusión:** El conocimiento científico destaca vulnerabilidades y aspectos positivos significativos en la atención de la salud infantil que sugieren un impacto en el bienestar y desarrollo de los niños, con repercusiones para el desempeño de los profesionales de enfermería en el ámbito de la atención primaria de salud.

Palabras clave: COVID-19; Cuidado del niño; Desarrollo infantil; Niño; Salud infantil.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has impacted a vast number of individuals across numerous countries, with mortality rates varying depending on age group and the presence of comorbidities.¹ Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on the development of children and their families, leading to alterations in behavior, dietary habits, and sleep routines.² The situation was widely regarded as a severe crisis, posing considerable challenges to education, caregiving and child wellbeing. This has resulted in a necessity of considerable adaptability from parents and caregivers in terms of new responsibilities, such as attending to their children's needs and restructuring their work schedules, with women bearing a disproportionate share of the burden.³

The circumstances inherent to this context pose potential vulnerabilities that may, in turn, negatively affect child development. The initial years of life, specifically up to the age of six—a period defined as early childhood—are crucial for developing physical, emotional, cognitive, and socio-cultural dimensions.⁴ Early childhood lays the groundwork for mastering and improving intricate skills such as attention, memory, problem-solving, and critical judgment. These skills are shaped by the socio-emotional interactions experienced during the first years of life and can have lasting effects on growth and development processes.⁴ A lack of caring and affectionate attention in early childhood can lead to impaired physical and socio-emotional health, potentially resulting in adverse outcomes for child development.⁵

Given the significance of early childhood and the vital role of parental involvement in childcare,⁶ it is essential to collate scientific knowledge on the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on early childhood. Doing so allows us to analyze the knowledge acquired in an intrinsic way to a child's essential needs.⁷ These needs include consistent and stable relationships, physical protection and safety, experiences honoring individual differences, developmentally-appropriate experiences, defined boundaries, community support, and cultural continuity.⁷ Each of these factors is deemed crucial for children's growth, education, and well-rounded development. Consequently, the objective of this study is to ascertain the scientific understanding of the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on early childhood within the perspective of children's essential needs.

METHOD

This study is an integrative review (IR). The structure of the IR involved identifying the problem, formulating a guiding question, searching the literature, evaluating and analyzing the data, and, finally, presenting the results.⁸ The guiding question was formed based on the PICO strategy. This acronym stands for P (population): children aged under six; I (intervention): childcare; C (comparison or context): the context of the COVID-19 pandemic; and O (outcome): implications for early childhood. Thus, the guiding question is: "What scientific literature are currently available about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on early childhood, considering the child's essential needs?"

In order to gather relevant material, a diverse range of scientific databases was consulted, including CINAHL, MEDLINE, PsycINFO, SCOPUS, and Web of Science. For a tailored search, we used specific descriptors in English (early childhood, COVID-19, and child development) and Portuguese (criança, desenvolvimento infantil e COVID-19).

For data acquisition, the study mandated criteria of inclusion which was: complete articles published from January 2020 to December 2022, available in Portuguese, English, and Spanish. These articles needed to focus their discourse on children under six years old and debate the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on early childhood. We also characterized the exclusion criteria as follows: review-type articles, web content, advertisements, commentaries, editorials, letters to the editor, studies without abstracts available, and publications not freely accessible online in their entirety.

Two researchers independently conducted the research in January 2023 and made comparison of their results identified commonalities. In case of discrepancies in the articles selected, the input of a third researcher was sought. Figure 1 represents a flowchart detailing the database search and article selection process.

Out of the 4,582 studies originally identified, 642 duplicates were excluded using the bibliographic reference management tool, EndNote version X9©. This led to a total of 3,940 studies. However, 3,898 of these were subsequently eliminated as their titles and abstracts did not attend the guiding question and inclusion criteria. Of the 42 remaining studies, all of them were thoroughly evaluated. Following this evaluation stage, 20 studies were ruled out due to non-compliance with the inclusion criteria. As a result, 22 scientific articles were selected for this integrative review.

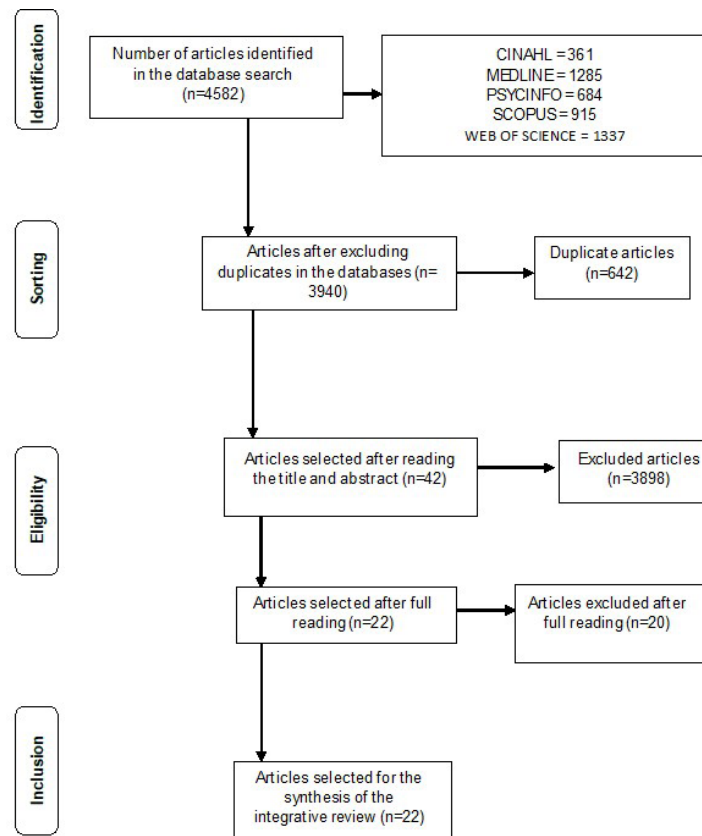


Figure 1. Flowchart detailing the search results in the selected databases. 2023.
 Source: the authors.

RESULTS

Chart 1 shows the characteristics of the 22 articles selected according to authorship, country, type of study, child age group, and objectives.

The research was distributed across various countries, with two studies realized in each of the countries: Germany, Australia, Brazil, Canada, and the United States. One study was conducted in each of the following countries: Chile, China, Colombia, South Korea, Spain, Finland, the Netherlands, England, Italy, Portugal, and the United Kingdom. Additionally, there was a multicenter study involving Chile, the United States, and Mexico.

Regarding the age group of early childhood,⁸ eight articles were focused on children under the age of three, while 14 articles were dedicated to children between the ages of three and six. As for the methodological approach, four studies employed a qualitative methodology, whereas 18 used a quantitative one.

The present integrative review identified various aspects related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The collected data was used in an attempt to align these impacts with the essential needs of young children. A summary of these findings can be found in Chart 2.

The analysis involved extracting aspects corresponding to each one of the essential needs. These included: continuous

supportive relationships (family relationships and interaction between parental caregivers and the child), physical protection and safety (physical care), experiences that respect individual differences (care tailored to the child's age-specific individuality and uniqueness), developmentally appropriate experiences (stimuli for the child's development), setting of limits (strategies and methods for establishing routine), and supportive communities (interactions with other sectors, such as health and education).

In relation to family dynamics, the key aspect was parental stress, predominantly identified in families, particularly evident in mothers with a history of psychological disorder or in single mothers.⁹⁻¹² Higher levels of parental stress were more likely to be found amongst lower socioeconomic status families, mothers with a higher level of education and families with older children.⁹ The increase of stress factors was associated to prolonged full-time family life at home.¹³ Some studies have reported parental caregivers expressing concerns about their children's well-being and the uncertain future created by the pandemic, citing worries such as job loss, anxiety, and depression.¹³⁻¹⁵ Maternal stress was linked to less sensitivity and availability when caring for children.¹⁶ In cases of newborns born from SARS-CoV-2 infected mothers, the forced mother-child separation interrupted skin-to-skin contact, breastfeeding, and interactions, possibly impacting child development.¹⁷

Chart 1. Characteristics of the studies included in the integrative review. Brazil, 2023.

Author	Country	Type of study	Child's age group	Objective
Buechel et al. (2022) ⁹	Germany	Cross-sectional quantitative approach	0 to 3 years	To investigate the perceived pandemic burden, parental stress and mental health problems.
Galbally et al. (2022) ¹⁰	Australia	Observational cohort quantitative approach	3 to 4 years	Examining maternal and child mental health.
Joo and Lee (2022) ¹¹	South Korea	Cross-sectional quantitative approach	3 to 5 years	Analyze the mechanisms of the impact of the mother's COVID-19 stress on the children's behavioral problems.
Vet et al. (2021) ¹²	The Netherlands	Cross-sectional quantitative approach	0 to 4 years	To investigate the impact of the pandemic on the magnitude of parental stress and the socio-emotional development of children.
Levickis et al. (2022) ¹³	Australia	Cross-sectional qualitative approach	1 to 6 years	To examine parental perspectives on family involvement with education services and care on early childhood.
Chambers et al. (2020) ¹⁴	England	Cross-sectional with a qualitative approach	3 to 4 years	To explore parental perceptions of children's emotional well-being.
Costa et al. (2022) ¹⁵	Brazil	Cross-sectional quantitative approach	0 to 35 months	Analyze risk and protective factors for children's development.
Duguay et al. (2022) ¹⁶	Canada	Longitudinal quantitative approach	6 to 13 weeks	To provide preliminary data on the contribution of general pre- and post-natal maternal distress to child development.
Wu et al. (2021) ¹⁷	China	Prospective observational cohort qualitative approach	0 to 3 months	To evaluate the potential direct and indirect effects of SARS-CoV-2 infection during pregnancy on early childhood development.
Vian et al. (2022) ¹⁸	Portugal	Cross-sectional quantitative approach	1 to 3 years	To analyze the impact that confinement has had on parental relationships.
Costa et al. (2022) ¹⁹	Brazil	Cross-sectional quantitative approach	0 to 5 years	Investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's behaviors and the needs of their caregivers.
Di Giorgio et al. (2021) ²⁰	Italy	Cross-sectional quantitative approach	2 to 5 years	To characterize changes in the quality of sleep of mothers and children, subjective experience of time, emotional symptoms and capacity for self-regulation.
Dillmann et al. (2022) ²¹	Germany	Cross-sectional quantitative approach	0 to 37 months	To investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the magnitude of parental stress and on children's socio-emotional behavior.
Carrillo et al. (2022) ²²	Colombia	Descriptive scope quantitative approach	3 to 6 years	Learn about the emotional and psychological effects of preventive isolation in early childhood.
Cassanello et al. (2022) ²³	Spain	Cross-sectional quantitative approach	3 to 36 months	Compare two similar samples of infants and young children before and during COVID-19 lockdown to identify possible changes in sleep patterns.
Jáuregui et al. (2022) ²⁴	Chile, United States and Mexico	Cross-sectional quantitative approach	1 to 5 years	Examine changes in physical activity, sedentarism and sleep behaviors.
Linnavalli e Kalland (2021) ²⁵	Finland	Cross-sectional quantitative approach	3 to 5 years	To identify restrictions related to the pandemic and how parental well-being relates to children's well-being and how the interruption of early childhood education has affected mutual well-being.
Hendry et al. (2022) ²⁶	United Kingdom	Longitudinal quantitative approach	8 to 36 months	To analyze the variation in the home environment associated with children's emerging executive function skills.
Aguilar-Farias et al. (2021) ²⁷	Chile	Cross-sectional quantitative approach	1 to 5 years	To evaluate associations between changes in movement behaviors (physical activity, screen time and sleep) and emotional changes in children.
Glynn et al. (2021) ²⁸	United States	Longitudinal quantitative approach	2 years and 6 months to 6 years	To investigate mental health symptoms in preschoolers and test the hypothesis that maintaining family routines serves as a protective factor for children's mental health.
Watts and Pattnaik (2022) ²⁹	United States	Cross-sectional qualitative approach	4 to 5 years	To explore the perspectives of teachers and parents on the impact on children's development of practical, social and emotional skills.
Fitzpatrick et al. (2022) ³⁰	Canada	Cross-sectional quantitative approach	2 to 5 years	Identify the use of digital media by young children.

Source: The authors.

Chart 2. Description of the positive and negative implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and their correspondence with the essential needs of children. Brazil, 2023.

Children's Essential Needs	Implications in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic	
	Positive	Negative
Ongoing Sustaining Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parental concern for children's well-being and development Living with grandparents Increased parental involvement in childcare Families with better acceptance of the uncertainties of life situations More proactive families, motivation to change routine, share care and manage stress Greater incorporation of child protection elements and reaffirmation of parental care Greater opportunity to bring family relationships closer and deeper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact on family relationships Parental stress and low optimism Discontinuous and restrictive relationship Children's mirroring of mothers'/fathers' symptoms such as anxiety and depression Maternal depression and difficulties in strengthening relationships Parental overload and tensions in relation to parenting Irritability, tiredness and difficulty concentrating for caregivers related to emotional and behavioral changes in children Pregnancy, prenatal and postnatal anxieties Deterioration in the relationship with the child Lack of developmental skills in conflict resolution, problem-solving and creative thinking
Physical Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More positive behaviors related to fewer physical symptoms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in sleep duration and sleep quality High rate of crying compared to the period before the pandemic Problems with breastfeeding Altered gross motor skill scores in mother-child separation situation Unable to discharge physical energy due to confinement at home
Experiences that respect individual differences	-	-
Developmentally appropriate experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerns about the child's development and sharing new experiences Children adapted better to changes in behavior in homes with higher levels of parental education Appropriate play activities More parental time in enriching activities with the children Pre-planned environments at home allowed for calmer situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of opportunity to practice certain skills resulted in a sense of loneliness and anxiety Break in the daily routine Temporary interruption of relationships with peers and games Greater attachment to the caregiver Children's sense of regression due to possible compromises in the socialization experience Possible negative effects of restriction-related stress on emotional health and cognitive development Emotional vulnerabilities and weaknesses in subjective development
Setting Limits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restrictive measures with time limits on the use of electronics Ways to organize your routine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased access to electronics for children with parents who worked from home, as a way of keeping them busy Excessive use of screens
Stable, supportive communities and cultural continuity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents recognize the importance of school Appreciation of the efforts of educators to provide and follow up on ongoing support for families and children Intersectoral actions to support female-headed households More connection with family online More time together with the child Greater support with the reopening of nurseries and schools Day care as a protective factor in parent-child relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interruption in access to early childhood education Loss of connection with educators Educators reported more behavioral problems, aggression and agitation Children anxious about being separated from their parents when they return to nursery school Lack of access to play areas Deterioration of external factors, with increased poverty and social vulnerabilities Loss of support from grandparents and neighbors Lack of public policies to support mental health and promote appropriate parenting practices, routine management at home and how to deal with misbehavior.

Source: the authors.

However, several positives were noted, such as childcare task distribution and reducing overload and, consequently, stress levels.¹⁹ Furthermore, this context provide increased opportunity for strengthening familial bonds.^{10,14-16, 19} One study suggested that residing with grandparents could be a protective factor for early childhood development.¹⁹

Concerning children's physical care, studies identified a decrease in sleep duration, and the repercussions on children's socio-emotional development were associated with sleep pattern alterations, stress, and maternal emotional control.^{20,21} The majority of children reportedly experienced disturbed sleep patterns, including changes in total sleep time, bedtime, wake

time, frequency of nighttime awakenings, and occurrence of nightmares.^{15,20,22,23} Moreover, the access to electronic devices in the bedroom at night was pointed as a contributing factor in the reduction of sleep quality.²⁴

Another significant finding was the correlation between the absence or reduction of physical symptoms and the positive behavior and mood in children.²⁵ Structured and pre-planned days emerged as a protective factor for children's physical and psychological well-being, while a well-planned environment proved conducive to children's mental health.^{10,20}

Results highlighting beneficial experiences for children's development identified a rise in family time and a stronger family connection as protective factors.^{10,20} Activities enhanced by affection were found to promote children's development.²⁶ Parental efforts to explain the concept of a pandemic and related precautions, without compromising child well-being, was emphasized.¹⁴

On the contrary, some studies reported negative behavioral manifestations in children, including a rise in tantrums, fights with siblings, frustration, irritation, listening difficulties, and attention-seeking behaviors.^{9,14,22,27-29} Signs of hyperactivity and inattention were also reported.^{20,22} Physical inactivity and sedentary behavior among children also increased as a result of the pandemic.²⁴

Social isolation was linked to feelings of sadness and loneliness and was found to negatively affect important developmental skills like conflict and problem-solving, as well as creative thinking. Comparison between pre-pandemic and post-peak pandemic periods displayed a delay in children's social and emotional skills.²⁹

On the issue of imposing limits, one study indicated that parents struggled with establishing routines, providing play and corrective activities when necessary, and frequently need outside assistance.¹⁹ However, signs and symptoms were less prominent in families with more established routines, suggesting the implementation of routine care as a protective factor for child development.²⁸

Screen use before bedtime was associated with difficulties in controlling children's tempers, particularly for those with greater accessibility to these devices.^{24,30} Parents who set time limits and restrictions on-screen use were less likely to expose their children to excessive device use.³⁰ In terms of the need supportive communities and cultural continuity, the closure of nurseries and schools during the pandemic isolated parental caregivers from education professionals and other parents, thereby eroding community networks.¹³

The reopening of nurseries and schools provided an increased support for parental caregivers and children.²⁵ However, the anxiety caused by child-parent separation when children returned to nursery school emerged as a source of parental stress.¹² Conversely, parents recognized and appreciated the educators' efforts to support families and children.¹³

The drastic changes induced by the COVID-19 pandemic prompted families to embrace life's uncertainties and motivated changes in routine, sharing of responsibilities, and stress management.²⁹ Situations of social vulnerability were more pronounced in families led by women, while protective factors were

observed in families participating in income distribution programs and those where children resided with their grandparents.¹⁹ In the results, no elements focused on individual care and attuned to the child's age specificities were identified, indicating a potential gap in providing experiences that respect their unique differences.

DISCUSSION

The research results shed light on the positive and negative implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on early childhood, in diverse and global contexts. Findings underscored the need for maintaining continuous relationships, providing developmentally appropriate experiences, and fostering supportive communities. There was, however, less emphasis placed on the physical safety, protection, and limit-setting for these children. The need for experiences that respect individual differences did not receive specific attention.

The six essential needs of children form a theoretical framework for defining universal needs, which, if not met, could hinder a child's ability to grow, learn, and develop properly.⁷

The findings pointed to numerous negative aspects in terms of continuous supportive relationships. These were exemplified by increased parental stress, fatigue, and parenting challenges. However, there was a greater opportunity to strengthen and deepen intra-family ties and share care responsibilities, which to some extent helped to alleviate parental stress. Likewise, families prepared to accept life's uncertainties and with effective parental engagement placed greater emphasis on the child's well-being and development.

The dimension of parental stress, were characterized by projected parental symptoms and behaviors onto the children, directly impacting their relationship and behavior. This underscores the significance of fostering resilience, and promoting clear parental roles and guidance in order to create a safe environment conducive to early childhood development.³¹

Many caregivers, particularly mothers, demonstrated resilience in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic's challenges. However, for many, the lack of support, day-to-day instabilities, and difficulties accessing resources amplified the stress.³² One study indicated that even though a majority of families rose above these adversities, instances of violence instigated by another family member or, less frequently, by the caregivers themselves were reported. Such caregivers admitted to feeling frustrated and violent due to impatience with the child.³³ The COVID-19 pandemic has thus created impasses and intensified challenges in parenting.

Parental bonds significantly influence a child's development⁵ and impact the other essential needs. Therefore, strengthening parenting is an action that must be addressed and nurtured in professional practices, given its relevance to human development.³¹ Early childhood is pivotal for child development, with long-term impacts. It is essential to ensure appropriate stimuli for this age group to facilitate safe and healthy learning.^{1,5} Developmentally appropriate experiences, such as stimulating activities, play, and new interactions, foster self-confidence and a sense of

acceptance, care, and love. Experiences that respect children's individual differences by providing personalized care, disregarding standardized expectations and accepting behavioral, physical and sensorial skills are also crucial during this important developmental stage.³³

The period of social isolation was interpreted positively, the interruption on habitual family's routine provided more time for families to play with their children.³⁴ However, the lack of motivation from parental caregivers was noted as potentially detrimental to a child's emotional and social well-being. This points to the importance of incorporating age-specific activities and adequately stimulating skills as contributors to healthy child development.

This study also emphasizes the importance of setting boundaries. However, the difficulty of doing so was noted, especially within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Adjustments in routines, such as remote work, posed challenges in managing childcare, work, and household chores. Additionally, the time spent on digital devices became a significant concern in childcare during the pandemic.³⁵ Increased use of digital media by children was identified as a coping mechanism for parents to focus on other tasks.³⁶

The use of digital technology is a norm in modern society, yet it is imperative to exercise caution with children's excessive screen usage. There is a need to highlight the importance of supervision and promoting socially conscious usage of digital media.³⁶ In this context, difficulties could lead to damage to children's development, taking into consideration the essential needs. Therefore, setting appropriate boundaries and encouraging and recognizing suitable behaviors are essential. The current research highlights the crucial role of a supportive community and the potential for collaboration between the healthcare and educational sectors, both of which are intimately related to children's daily routines and care.

However, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic - coupled with its consequences on general wellbeing and mental health - existing studies draw attention to the repercussions on children's growth, such as diminished access to healthcare, nutritional deficiencies, and poverty, particularly in already disadvantaged or vulnerable situations.³⁷ The pandemic has interrupted connections with health professionals, limiting initiatives that encourage child development due to the fear of infection, discouragement, and frustration. This has resulted in delayed or absent activities and hurdles in maintaining child assistance with families.³⁸

The extended closure of childcare centers³⁹ has brought forth socio-health implications for children living in socially vulnerable conditions, further intensifying pre-existing inequality. In this regard, persistent learning challenges pose long-term issues, imposing additional barriers to achieving the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals.³⁷

The synergy of services is critical in enhancing outcomes, emphasizing the potential of collaboration between healthcare and educational sectors within the PHC framework, supported always by a supportive community. This approach places the focus on

essential interconnected and interdependent needs,⁷ especially in early childhood.

In this research, the theoretical reference allowed an analysis to distinguish the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for children. It is crucial to understand that the division among the six needs is not absolute but must be seen in an articulated approach to comprehending what is crucial for healthy development in early childhood.

CONCLUSION

The scientific knowledge of IR underscores both negative and positive impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on early childhood development. The analysis sheds light on significant vulnerabilities and potentialities in children's health care, affecting their well-being and development, particularly concerning their essential needs. This study offers valuable insights for Primary Health Care professionals, with direct implications for nursing practices, in home visits, consultations and community intersectoral collaborations scenarios. The results indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has substantial impacts on children and their families, creating long-lasting and uneven situations. In this context, Primary Health Care plays an integral role.

In the realm of childcare, it is vitally important to closely observe daily situations in an effort to pinpoint vulnerabilities and devise strategies to mitigate them accurately. Consequently, in the sphere of nursing care, there is a critical need for opportunistic and innovative interventions that foster both individual and collective health and development. Crafting partnerships with families to ensure a comprehensive childcare is a necessary measure. Such partnerships provide instrumental support, fostering a system of shared responsibilities while enhancing complete development.

However, the present study does possess certain limitations tied to the selection of complete articles focused on the socio-emotional implications of children and parenting, published in the duration spanning from January 2020 to December 2022. Other aspects related to the COVID-19 pandemic process were being studied and analyzed. Aspects relating to physical protection and safety in situations of increased exposure to domestic accidents and care in emergency and urgency units, among others, were not analyzed. Thus, studies referring to this period require continued analysis due to the complexity of the longitudinal repercussions involved in the object of investigation.

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