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Protecting children from maltreatment during COVID-19

COVID-19 took the world by surprise with the only comparable worldwide health event one hundred years prior. The Spanish Flu which began in 1918 was ultimately responsible for the deaths of 50 million people. COVID-19 resulted in a health crisis that was accompanied by the imposition of social isolation measures and, in many countries, a quarantine for various periods of time in order to contain the spread of infection and reduce the burden on health care sectors. These unprecedented measures also generated a worldwide economic crisis. Inevitably, COVID-19 will have serious and potentially long-lasting implications for the mental health of millions of children and their caregivers. In a recent report by [UNICEF Innocenti \(2020\)](#), a worrisome picture of children's well-being worldwide was presented indicating that in many countries children are not provided access to the resources and opportunities needed in order to achieve their full potential. The catastrophic impact of COVID-19 on the lives of children, parents and families worldwide will have adverse consequences for their mental and physical health as well as their long-term development. This issue is dedicated to understanding the immediate and potential consequences of COVID-19 and its impact on child safety, development and on our ability to protect children from maltreatment given the unprecedented social isolation measures employed.

We were honoured to act as guest editors of this special two-volume issue, as the content will contribute to an international discussion of the emerging questions regarding the impact of COVID-19 hitherto unanswered by the empirical literature. The first volume provides preliminary data and research studies that contribute to three fundamental areas of study: (1) how COVID-19 affects individuals previously impacted by maltreatment; (2) how can social and economic policy adjust to meet the needs of children and families; and (3) and promising interventions to address COVID-19 related need.

The impact of COVID-19 on individuals who had previously experienced maltreatment is addressed through several papers. [Guo et al. \(2020\)](#) report on a survey of Rural Chinese adolescents with and without a maltreatment history. [Tsur and Abu Ria \(2020\)](#) examine how COVID-19 anxiety affects adult survivors of child maltreatment, while [Lawson, Piel, and Simon \(2020\)](#) examine the impact of job loss on the psychological and physical abuse of children. [Brown, Doom, Lechuga-Pena, Watamura, and Koppels \(2020\)](#) study how COVID-19 stress and anxiety impacts parenting. Finally, [Xu, Wu, Levkoff, and Jedwab \(2020\)](#) examine how material hardship and parenting stress during COVID-19 have impacted grandparent kinship providers.

The second substantive area for the first volume is the development of policy in response to the conditions resulting from COVID-19 and the need to protect children from maltreatment around the globe. Is the protection of children from maltreatment a priority for policymakers? What kinds of policies are framed and disseminated? Are resources allocated to child protection during the pandemic? These and other issues are examined in discussion and research articles from South Africa from both the analysis of policy documents ([Fouché, Fouché, & Theron, 2020](#)) and interviews with children ([Haffejee & Levine, 2020](#)), as well as from Great Britain ([Levine, Morton, & O'Reilly, 2020](#)), Germany ([Jentsch & Schnock, 2020](#)) and evidence from Japan with respect to the impact of school closure policy on suicide rates in Japan ([Isumi, Doi, Yamaoka, Takahashi, & Fujiwara, 2020](#)).

The third substantive area of the first volume is organized around interventions; more specifically how can practitioners be supported to provide interventions during a pandemic? Initial results from online training programs in the United States are presented in two manuscripts ([Schwab-Reese, Drury, Allan, & Matz, 2020](#); [Wilke, Howard, & Pop, 2020](#)). Another important aspect is brought to the attention by a study carried out in Brazil in an attempt to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the engagement of practitioners in resilience behaviors, taking into consideration individual and socio-ecological predictors ([Priolo Filho, Goldfarb, Zibetti, & Aznar-Blefari, 2020](#)). The first volume sheds light on the challenges in developing interventions to support the rapid return of children from residential care to their homes ([Wilke, Howard, & Goldman, 2020](#)) and to various adapted telemental health interventions examined by [Racinea, Hartwick, Collin-Vézina, and Madigan \(2020\)](#). An innovative tool developed in Canada for screening the vulnerability of children and families takes into consideration the multifaceted nature of the pandemic is described by [Fallon et al.](#)

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(2020).

We hope that the rich body of knowledge and discussions offered in the special issue will inform research efforts to continue advancing theory and practice in protecting children in times of crisis. Moreover, we sincerely hope that the various perspectives and international collaborations presented in the special issue will encourage future collaborations in our field, as COVID-19 has emphasized the crucial importance of joint efforts in protecting children from maltreatment.

We would like to thank the global community of child maltreatment researchers for their interest and their invaluable contributions to the special issue. We are also deeply indebted to the reviewers for their rapid responses given the short deadline. We extend our gratitude ISPCAN for their continuous support in the process of creating this special issue. Finally, we would like to express our appreciation of *Child Abuse and Neglect* Editor in Chief Dr. Christine Wekerle, for her amazing support and inspiration in creating the special issue.

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