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ABSTRACT

This study reviewed the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on early childhood and childcare systems in Africa, with particular focus on children aged between 0 and 8 years, their caregivers, and the early childhood education workforce. Using a qualitative research approach, the study adopted a systematic review of literature and secondary data analysis in extracting information from over 150 credible sources, such as reports by global institutions including UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank, and Human Rights Watch. Data were analyzed thematically to assess the effect of the pandemic on the education access, emotional development, nutritional status, protection services, and overall development of young children. The research focused on reaching vulnerable populations, namely children from poor families, children in slum settlements, working mothers, and communities with limited access to digital infrastructure. Purposive sampling was used to reach countries and areas where disruption of education has been most significant, especially those with existing disparities in access to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). The report also points out that there are important gaps in service provision, where most of the children were unable to access online learning platforms due to the absence of internet connectivity, digital media, or parental support. Furthermore, ECCE services, which are considered non-essential, were disproportionately ignored in national crisis response plans, leading to the closure of childcare centers and early childhood educators' precarious employment—most of them being women without social protection working in the informal sector. The crisis highlighted developmental risk factors among young children under the age of three, including exposure to toxic stress, malnutrition due to broken school feeding systems, and disruption of early learning stimulation at a time of brain development. Inadequate systems of coordinated care support for teachers and caregivers compounded these problems further. This paper calls for prompt evidence-based policy action to strengthen ECCE systems and make them inclusive in times of crisis. Some of the most important recommendations include providing financial and technical support to early learning centers, improving digital equity for online learning, mainstreaming ECCE into emergency education responses, and improving intersectoral collaboration to meet the overall needs of children and families. Without these interventions, the long-term developmental and educational losses young children incurred during the pandemic could become irreversible.

Key Words: COVID – 19, Pandemic, Education

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INTRODUCTION

December 2019 saw the outbreak of a novel coronavirus, a severely infectious upper respiratory disease, first recorded in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) falls within a large family of viruses that are known to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) (International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, ISPCAN, 2020). On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) Director General declared the outbreak COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern and on March 11, 2020 the disease was declared as a global pandemic by the WHO (2020).

What started as a single COVID-19 case late 2019 in China, unprecedentedly spread across the whole world within the first quarter of 2020 presenting one of the most serious global health crises with high socio-economic impact (United Nations (UN), 2020). The global COVID-19 outbreak has evolved into a pandemic causing a serious impact on global and national economies, health systems, education systems and ultimately on the fulfillment of children's rights (Loperfido & Burgess, 2020). The crisis has heavily affected the lives of billions of people across the world with an anticipated huge impact on the global economy and Africa in particular (Association for the Development of Education in Africa, ADEA, 2020). According to European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), COVID-19 has affected millions of people around the world with over 34 986 502 reported cases of COVID-19, including 1 034 240 deaths globally as of 04 October 2020, (ECDC, 2020).

In Africa, the pandemic has also triggered an unprecedented health, humanitarian, socioeconomic and human rights crises with over 1,000, 000 confirmed cases of coronavirus across the region as shown in the table below. The most affected countries are South Africa (679,716), Egypt

(103,575), Ethiopia (77,860), Algeria (51,995) and Nigeria (59287) (ECDC, 2020). As of 11 October 2020, 37 287 908 cases of COVID-19 were reported worldwide including 1 073 675 deaths. In Africa: 1 568 091 cases of COVID-19 were reported with 37 849 deaths; the five countries reporting most cases are South Africa (690 896), Morocco (146 398), Egypt (104 387), Ethiopia (83 429) and Nigeria (60 103) (ECDC, 2020).

Education is one of the sectors being heavily affected with the closure of learning institutions in many African countries (ADEA, 2020). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 1.57 billion learners worldwide (91.4% of the world's student population) are unable to go to school due to measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 (UNESCO, 2020). In Africa, this situation will hold back education even further on a continent where already more than 200 million children and adolescents were not learning (ADEA, 2020) and before COVID-19, at least 250 million young children were already at risk of not reaching their full potential. That number is likely to increase exponentially as more people are infected and as more families and communities deal with the socio-economic and the physical and mental health consequences of the crisis (Early Childhood Development Action Network (ECDAN), 2020)

The closure of schools that provide social protection, health, nutrition, learning and socio-emotional nurturing to young children represents an immense threat to their development potential (UNESCO, 2020). For many children and their families, the fast-evolving situation means disrupted education and childcare, family illness and potential loss of household income (The United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2020). Although, some countries have been taking measures to support learning during COVID-19, the general observation is that early childhood development has always been a blind spot in our pre-COVID societies and during school closures, pre-primary education has relatively been

neglected compared to other levels of education (UNICEF, 2020). This implies that many young children are at home unable to attend early childhood education and care, and are therefore entirely reliant on their caregivers for nurturing and to meet their developmental needs. This added burden on families to balance childcare and work responsibilities, compounded by economic instability and social isolation in many cases, is fertile ground for home environments characterized by toxic stress (UNICEF, 2020).

Early childhood, defined as the period from birth to eight years old, is a time of remarkable growth with brain development at its peak. For optimal brain development, children require stimulating and enriching environment, adequate nutrition, learning opportunities and social interaction with attentive caregivers. Under the current pandemic context, access to these opportunities is severely restricted, compromising the healthy developmental trajectory of many children. It significant to ask how the unsafe conditions, negative interactions and lack of educational opportunities during the early years can lead to irreversible outcomes, which can affect a child's potential for the remainder of their life? How can early childhood education be included in pandemic response plans as an equalizer and a changer as states protect and prioritize education as the key to the recovery and the best investment for the future?

Early childhood Education during Covid-19 Pandemic

As mentioned earlier, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted almost every aspect of human life and education is one of those most affected areas. This forced governments across the world to take appropriate measures that largely kept learners from learning institutions. African governments made urgent nation-wide decrees and decisions, among them the closure of all early learning and care programs, schools and learning institutions following the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, as part of the global response to this crisis (ADEA, 2020). Although the pandemic has

disrupted education across the globe, the schooling crisis is more acute in Africa, where up to 80% of learners don't have access to the internet and even electricity can be unreliable, making distance learning difficult, if not impossible (Muhumuza & Devecioglu, 2020). The closure of schools has had huge repercussions on the lives of children with millions of children out of education, exacerbating a situation that was already critical before COVID-19 (Save the Children, 2020).

According to the United Nations Culture and Education agency, Sub-Saharan Africa already has the highest rates of children out of school than anywhere in the world, with nearly one-fifth of children between the ages of 6 and 11 and over one-third of youth between 12 and 14 not attending school (UNESCO, 2020). This exacerbates an already critical situation of children in the world. According to the UNESCO (2017), some 387 million or 56 per cent of primary school age children world-wide were estimated to lack basic reading skills therefore. Accordingly the massive disruption to education access due to the pandemic worsens this existing situation and deprives millions of children their right to education creating a real risk of regression for children whose basic foundational learning was not strong to begin with.

According to the report by the Human Rights Watch (2020), many children received no education after schools closed across the continent in March 2020 as observed. This report captures a mother of a 9-year-old girl in Eastern Congo lamenting that *"My child is no longer learning, she is only waiting for the reopening to continue with her studies."*

In the same report, a mother of two preschool-aged children in North Kivu, Congo, said that *"It does not make me happy that my children are no longer going to school. Years don't wait for them. They have already lost a lot... What will become of our uneducated children?"* (Human Rights Watch, 2020)

The Human Rights Watch (2020) also spoke to a director of a nongovernmental organization (NGO)

in Madagascar that provides education and alternative care services to children who were previously homeless and either orphaned or unable to live with their parents. The director noted that children accommodated with host families did not have any education during the closure. In this period many children received no instruction, feedback, or interaction with their teachers as observed. Similar observations were also made by an education official in Congo in June echoing the experiences of many children across the continent, namely that *"Children are not taught during this period,"* (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

In Kinshasa, some programs provided learners with printed assignments and asked to study on their own. One learner interviewed by the Human Rights Watch observed that *"I was given a study book by my school when it closed, but afterwards had no contact with my teachers. I reread my old lessons... I find math difficult to study at home alone."*

The interviewee added that *"We cannot say that this is normal education, we were just told to regularly reread our notes while waiting for new instructions from the authorities... At first, I thought school would start again soon so I didn't read my notes and then when I saw that it was going to go on, I started to read them. I'd forgotten a lot."* (Human Rights Watch, 2020)

In Zambia, the Human rights Watch reported how a mother of a 6-year-old girl tried to get her daughter to do revision exercises, and three times a week they listen to classes on the radio,

"But it is a program which is not specific for each level of class. It's too complex... Our children have not had any support during this time of pandemic. I fear a drop in children's level after all this time lost." (Human Rights Watch, 2020)

In Kenya it was observed that lack of access to radios, television, computers, internet, and data left many learners unable to engage in remote learning as captured by a teacher in the Mathare informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya:

"My school sends revision papers to parents via WhatsApp twice a month, a marking scheme is sent once the students have made an attempt and the papers are meant to be marked by the parents... The teachers do not communicate directly with us."

Similar sentiments were captured by a student interviewed in Garissa noting that *"There were lessons offered on Wars an Radio but I never tuned in because we don't have a radio."* said a student in Garissa, Kenya.

"None of the students have access to internet-enabled smartphones. Only a handful have access to mobile phones that can support calling and texting functionalities. Digital learning is not an option."

"My school does not offer online classes, but I use YouTube and Google for research. I tend to pick and choose which subjects to research because I cannot stay with my mother's phone for too long because she runs a business." (Human Rights Watch, 2020)

In Burkina Faso, a teacher in Boucle du Mouhoun region said that many students he knew did not have electricity not even a lamp to study as observed:

"Many students don't even have access to radios, let alone TVs. So this is something that will not cover all the students. There will be discrimination. It will not take all children into account."

Nigeria some schools offered online lessons but due economic crisis being experienced by the parents, many children were unable to engage in learning as observed:

"[My three children] join in the school's online classes on my phone because the family has no computer... Although the lessons are on video, the kids only listen to the audio. Sometimes they cannot connect because I do not always have enough data."

"I had to upgrade [my daughter] to a smartphone so she can access online materials, but I am sometimes unable to pay for data from [my] civil servant salary."

"Their teacher called me to tell me to buy a big phone [smartphone] for online teaching... I don't have money to feed my family and I am struggling to make ends meet, how can I afford a phone and internet?" (Human Rights Watch, 2020)

In Morocco, the same situation in which parents cannot afford to support online learning due to financial constraints is anchored by the observation below:

"There is a better plan for faster WiFi. I discussed it with my mom, but she said we can't afford it. Since the connection is not great, I have to prioritize some lessons over others." (Human Rights Watch, 2020)

It is evident that many children did not have any education during the closure. Although, some countries have been taking measures to support learning, pre-primary education is one area that is receiving less attention and this is a potentially serious neglect (Kim & Rose, 2020). Given that early childhood is a critical period in which a child's foundations for lifelong success is laid, the threats to financial, physical, mental and social health of families caused by COVID-19 could possibly affect their children for the rest of their lives.

The closure of early learning and care programs that provide social protection, health, nutrition, learning and socio-emotional nurturing to young children represents an immense threat to their development potential (UNESCO, 2020). This will exacerbate the situation where by more than 200 million children under the age of five in the developing world are at risk of not reaching their full development potential because they suffer from the negative consequences of poverty, nutritional deficiencies and inadequate learning opportunities. In addition, 165 million children (one in four) are stunted, with 90 percent of those children living in Africa and Asia (UNICEF, 2012). According to the Save the Children (2020), increased levels of poverty during the pandemic will push up to nearly 10 million children to drop out of school forever by the end of 2020 and will drive a \$77 billion education funding gap for the

world's poorest children. Therefore, while other critical needs such as health, water and sanitation are being responded to, educational needs for young children cannot be forgotten; it has an equally detrimental impact if left unaddressed.

The Number of Children Affected by the Closure of Schools during Covid-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic led to school closures in nearly every country in the world, putting approximately 1.5 billion children and youth out of school impacting 87.6% of the world's total enrolled learners (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020). Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94 per cent of the world's student population and up to 99 per cent in low and lower-middle income countries (United Nations, 2020). Worldwide, learning crisis existed before the coronavirus pandemic, with an estimated 260 million school-going-age children out of school and **175 million pre-primary** aged children not enrolled in pre-primary education (UNICEF, 2019). Further, an estimated 53% of children in low- and middle-income countries cannot read proficiently by age 10 (World Bank, 2019). In this case, the pandemic is only exacerbating pre-existing education disparities by reducing the opportunities for many of the most vulnerable children living in poor or rural areas, girls, refugees, persons with disabilities and forcibly displaced persons to continue learning.

According to UNESCO data base, **1.277 billion children are out of school** worldwide due to school closures linked to the coronavirus pandemic while 702 million learners from pre-primary through secondary are out of school due to nationwide school closures in developing countries (UNESCO, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in history affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners with an estimate of 23.8 million additional children and youth (from pre-primary to tertiary) dropping out of school or lacking access to school next year due to the pandemic's economic impact alone (United Nations, 2020). According to UNESCO, an estimate of 473,933,356 learners ranging from pre-primary

to upper-secondary education is potentially at risk. In Africa, and particularly in the Sub-Saharan Africa, COVID-19 has worsened the situation of education. Prior to the pandemic, 47 per cent of the world's 258 million out-of-school children lived in the Sub-Saharan region. In this region a very large number

of schools had already been closed for several months because of severe insecurity, strikes, or climatic hazards (United Nations, 2020). Thus the COVID-19 pandemic worsens an already awful situation. Figure 2 below captures this trend.

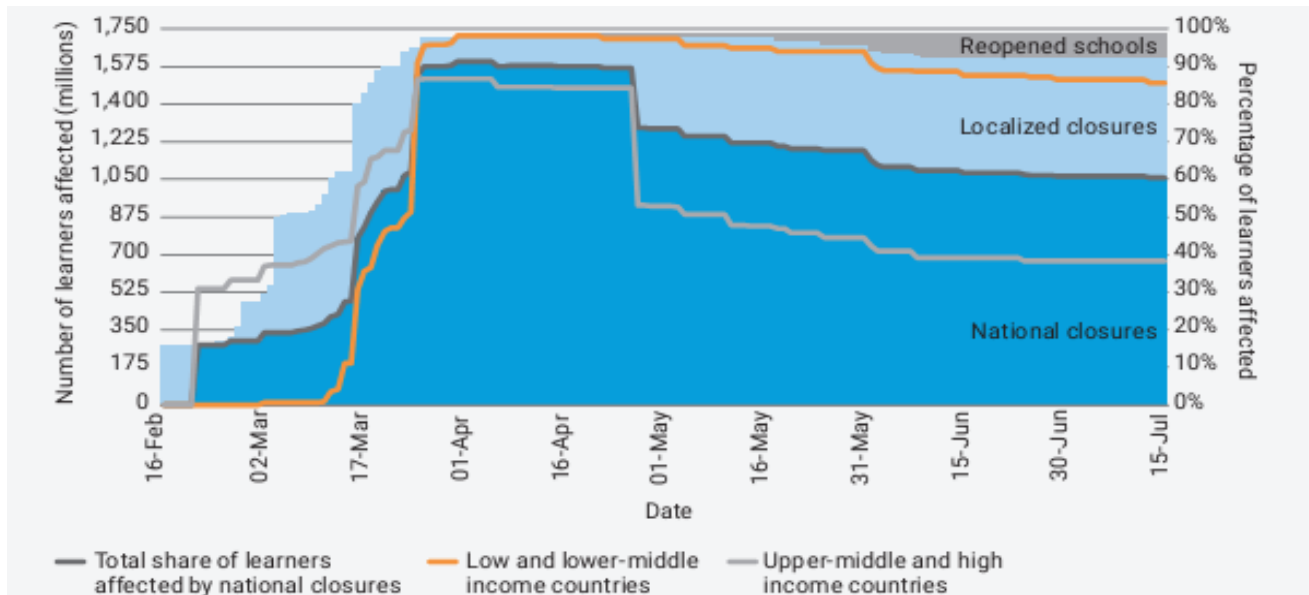


Figure 1: Number of children affected by school closures globally

Source: United Nations Policy Brief, 2020

The disruptions caused by COVID-19 to everyday life meant that as many as **40 million children** worldwide have missed out on early childhood education in their critical pre-school year (UNESCO, 2020). They thus missed a stimulating and enriching environment, learning opportunities, social interaction and in some cases adequate nutrition. This is likely to compromise their longer-term healthy development, especially those children from poor and disadvantaged families (United Nations, 2020). According to the Save the Children, this is an enormous missed opportunity, given the important access to quality early learning can be to set young children on a brighter path to lifelong learning so the world can ill-afford further deterioration of children's learning .

The Situation of Child Care during Covid-19 Pandemic

This section looks at the state of childcare industry which include childcare facilities and workers therein, as well as childcare workers within

households. Across the world, countries are implementing measures to curb the spread of COVID-19. In many countries, compliance has meant mandatory closure of childcare facilities, preschools and mandated home-based work (UNESCO, 2020). The COVID-19 crisis presents new challenges for childcare and for parents globally adding an extra layer of difficulty on top of existing economic crises and other challenges (Gromada, Richardson & Rees, 2020). As much as the measures are meant to protect public health, juggling work and care responsibilities at home, and coping with a loss of income, are among the challenges facing families (UNICEF, 2020). These challenges are even greater for women who are disproportionately affected by the crisis as they make up the majority of health care workers and are more likely to lack social protection. Before the COVID-19 outbreak women were already performing more than three-quarters of unpaid care work globally and that is likely to have

increased (UNICEF, 2020). For working parents, the uncertainty surrounding child care and in-person instruction for school-aged children is unprecedented, with a cascading set of consequences on family life, education, and earnings (Bateman, 2020). Even parents who have thus far avoided layoffs and been able to work from home are performing a nearly impossible balancing act every day, keeping up with their own work while caring for and teaching their children (Bateman, 2020). Many others have been laid off, left their jobs to care for their children, or been forced to cobble together temporary child care arrangements as they continue to report for work at essential jobs, such as nursing and grocery work (Bateman, 2020).

The spread of Covid-19 is making childcare a crisis and its impacts substantially worse, threatening to put this already-vulnerable industry into a tailspin (NAEYC, 2020). Closed early learning and care centers can present a significant challenge to working parents, including frontline workers, and for vulnerable children who depend on such facilities for care, nutrition, and stimulation (UNESCO, 2020). As employees try to meet their new work and family obligations in these unprecedented times, the loss of childcare options and school closures presents a parallel crisis especially for working mothers, who in many cases assume more care responsibilities than men (UNICEF, 2020). In the United States of America, the coronavirus has exposed and exacerbated deep inequities in the nation and has wreaked havoc on our child care system (Sethi, Staub & Robbins, 2020). Prior to the pandemic, there were approximately 675,000 childcare providers in the country, predominately small businesses, who were already operating on thin margins. The public health crisis of COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on the childcare industry. In the spring of 2020, many childcare providers closed their programs to follow public health guidance, leading to lost revenue for months at a time (Sethi, Staub & Robbins, 2020).

According to Malik, Hamm & Sojour (2020), at the outset of the pandemic, nearly two-thirds of child care providers in the US said they could not survive a closure that extended longer than one month and the Center for American Progress estimates that the country could lose half of its licensed child care capacity without government intervention (Malik et al., 2020). Millions of American workers, hoping to get back to their jobs once the public health risk has sufficiently decreased, will not be able to do so until they have safe, reliable, and affordable child care. This has major consequences for the reopening of the economy but also has important implications for income and educational inequality, racial equity, geographic equity, and a potentially significant decline in the number of mothers in the labor force (Malik et al., 2020)

In New York, child-care programs were considered essential, along with groceries and doctor's offices. But due to surge of COVID-19 infections, many child-care centers shut down. But among those that made the difficult decision to remain open were many of the smallest in-home care programs, often called family daycares (Hurley, 2020). It was reported that despite a swelling share of parents who must continue working but suddenly have no support, many child-care programs were severely under-enrolled because parents are losing jobs, working from home, or simply out of fear as reported by a daycare owners; *"I thought my phone would be ringing off the hook, and it's super quiet."*

"I closed my daycare because the families are all self-isolating, some families quit due to the coronavirus. I'm trying to suspend my accounts for a few months. This is crazy!"(Hurley, 2020)

Data from the National Association for the Education of Young Children and Early Care (NAEYC) & Education Consortium suggests that programs around the US lost nearly 70% of their daily attendance in one week during the pandemic, with many saying they could not last a week without getting paid. This low enrollment is leaving daycares

in a precarious position without significant resources and clear guidance. Child care programs are stuck between a rock and a hard place. Upwards of 70% of childcare providers are working with families who are keeping their children at home; yet half are also fielding requests from families needing space for their children due to school closures (NAEYC, 2020).

According to NAEYC survey report, childcare providers would not survive a closure of more than two weeks without significant public investment and support that would allow them to compensate and retain staff, pay rent or mortgages, and cover other fixed costs. 30% of childcare providers would not survive a closure of any amount of time without support. 17% would not survive longer than a month while only 11% of programs are confident they could survive a closure of an indeterminate length without support (NAEYC, 2020).

Adams and Todd (2020) note that, child care cannot be an afterthought during this crisis. In the longer-term, the consequences of a lack of child care will force some workers particularly mothers to make impossible choices for their children and their families. Some will choose not to return to school or work potentially reducing the economic security of their families. But many parents will need to go back to work to maintain employment and keep food on the table and a roof over their families' heads. Many of these parents will do so with a new reality. Sethi, Staub & Robbins (2020) reported that parents with low incomes twice as likely to report that they won't be able to or do not know if they will be able to return to their previous care arrangement, compared to households with middle or high incomes. With reduced access to licensed care options, some families may rely on family and friend caregivers. Others facing limited options may be forced to leave their children in less reliable, safe, or unstable caregiving situations.

The decline of childcare industry during the pandemic also has got implication on the emotional, physiological and cognitive development of the child. According to UNICEF, childcare is

essential in providing children with integrated services, affection, protection, stimulation and nutrition and, at the same time, enables them to develop social, emotional and cognitive skills (UNICEF, 2020)

"Education disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic are preventing children from getting their education off to the best possible start, childcare and early childhood education builds a foundation upon which every aspect of children's development relies. The pandemic is putting that foundation under serious threat." (UNICEF, 2020)

Research by UNICEF indicates that at least 40 million children worldwide have missed out on early childhood education in their critical pre-school year as COVID-19 shuttered childcare and early education facilities. The closures have exposed a deeper crisis for families of young children especially in low- and middle-income countries, many of whom were already unable to access social protection services (UNICEF, 2020). This situation has worsened the childcare crisis which existed before the COVID-19 pandemic; where by unaffordable, poor-quality or inaccessible childcare and early childhood education facilities forced many parents to leave young children in unsafe and unstimulating environments at a critical point in their development, with more than 35 million children under the age of five globally sometimes left without adult supervision (UNICEF, 2020).

According to UNICEF, around 40 per cent of children aged between 3 and 5 years old in 54 low- and middle-income countries were not receiving social-emotional and cognitive stimulation from any adult in their household. The UNICEF reports highlighted that lack of childcare and early education options leave many parents, particularly mothers working in the informal sector, with no choice but to bring their young children to work. The report showed that more than 9 in 10 women in Africa and nearly 7 in 10 in Asia and the Pacific work in the informal sector have limited to no access to any form of social protection. Many parents become trapped in this unreliable, poorly

paid employment, contributing to intergenerational cycles of poverty.

Access to Care and Early Learning Programmes for Children under 3 Years, 3-6years, 6-8years

The need for childcare is a 21st century reality for families around the world. Regardless of the childcare setting the hours children are in care provide an opportunity to promote the core elements of nurturing care assuring safety and security, providing access to nutrition and good health, encouraging parent engagement and early learning, and making connections for families to other social supports in the community (Lombardi, 2020). The pandemic is having a devastating impact on child care exacerbating the childcare crisis which existed before COVID-19 pandemic where by in 76 low and middle income countries, just over one in five children under age five lacked adult supervision for at least an hour in a given week (UNICEF 2017). Moreover, too often, older siblings particularly girls are forced to drop out of school due to the demands of caring for younger siblings. In 2018, global female labor force participation stood at 48 percent, compared with 75 percent for men. Yet there is mounting evidence that access to childcare can help support greater employment opportunities for women, which in turn is good for the economy (World Bank 2019).

According to the UNICEF, the COVID-19 crisis presents new challenges for childcare and for parents globally both in the short- and longer term. Many countries have introduced restrictions on movement which has led to closure of childcare centers and other childcare options such as grandparents who may no longer be available to care for their grandchildren. This situation leaves working parents of younger children in a predicament in terms of balancing family and work life, which can increase gender earning gaps as women cut back on paid work to care for children (Gromada, Richardson, Rees, 2020).

While many schools have closed around the world due to COVID-19, measures impacting early learning and care programs have varied. In some

countries and territories for instance, in Japan, the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe closed all schools throughout the country however; children's daycare facilities were excluded (Hayes, 2020). Similarly, the United States, the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families encouraged child care and early learning centers to stay open while some school districts offered alternative child care options, prioritizing the children of first responders and healthcare workers. The governor of Maryland mandated that specific child care services remain open for the children of emergency personnel while Washington State and California left it to the discretion of care providers as observed; *"We need our child care facilities, our daycare centers, to operate to absorb the impact of these school closures."* (Sethi, Staub & Robbins, 2020)

In California, the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) conducted a brief survey of licensed child care centers and licensed family child care programs in the state. More than 2,000 programs responded to this survey from April 13-30, 2020: 34 percent of survey respondents are centers, and 66 percent are family child care programs. Many of these programs remain open: 34 percent of centers indicated that they are open, and 72 percent of family child care programs are open (CSCCE, 2020). The Survey results confirmed the precarious nature of the child care industry, where programs operate on thin margins and staffs earn poverty wages as observed:

"We are stuck in a limbo between staying open for essential workers and risking our own health and safety because we are needed, and [we] can't afford to close because we are independent contractors."

"Those of us who closed did so in the best interests of the community and the families we work with. We want to reopen when it's safe to do so, but... we need help from the city and state and should be able to get financial assistance."

"We feel very beat up. It has been shocking to see the low priority given to sustaining our programs. Schools and colleges have been closed and protected. Their staff paid. We are being thrown into the general pool of small businesses to scrap for loans – and we don't have the reserves to survive the long wait for help. We also don't bring in the income to ensure loan and rent repayments. We need help – and we need it fast." (CSCCE, 2020)

According to CSCCE report, 63% of open programs would not survive a closure of one month or longer. 23% of open programs would not survive a closure of any length of time. 14% of already-closed programs report that their program will not survive the closure past May 30. 78% of all programs have made staffing changes (e.g., laid off staff, cut benefits). 57% of all programs have either laid off or furloughed staff as observed;

"We have applied [for stimulus funding] but have not heard from the bank, and we cannot continue salaries as April tuition was not paid by parents."

"My teachers have not been able to obtain any funds through unemployment insurance and are getting very worried. We need separate financial assistance that does not require accessing the overburden[ed] bureaucracy." (CSCCE, 2020)

Many childcare programs reported having difficulty getting essential supplies. 62% of open programs are having difficulty obtaining either cleaning or sanitizing supplies or personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff. 69% of open programs indicate that they would like mini-grants for cleaning supplies and/or sanitizing services and 21% of open programs say they are having difficulty obtaining food for their program as observed;

"Child care centers are much like hospitals and elderly care facilities, but child care centers are not being provided any priority in getting supplies or PPE."

"Make us a priority to shop at the grocery stores. By the time the kids are gone and we get to go to the

store, most of the basic foods are gone." (CSCCE, 2020)

CSCCE established that some programs and educators have not received clear guidance on regulatory changes from the state. 37% of all programs would like clear guidance on regulatory changes (e.g., closures, social distancing, ratios). 28% of open programs are still serving children who are not from families of essential workers and not from an at-risk population. 6% of open programs are exclusively serving children who are neither from families of essential workers nor from an at-risk population as observed;

"The social distancing guideline is difficult to understand in the child care setting. How are we expected to keep young children separated? I would like to reopen ASAP, but the new guidelines are difficult to uphold."

"We have not been given clear direction on whether we should close [or] stay open [or about] benefits/assistance from the government during these times. Some parents need child care, others are uncertain about whether they should be coming or not."

"[The guidance] set forth by CCL [Community Care Licensing] is impossible I believe, not realistic, to keep safe social distance and rigorous cleaning efforts. Toddlers and preschool children do not know how to do social distancing!"

According to Spaul (2020) reopening the economy while early crèches and day-care centers remain closed increases the risk of children being left home alone. If all employed workers returned to work, more than 2 million children aged 0-15 years would be left without an older sibling or an adult caregiver. Of greatest concern is that almost one million children (974,000) below age six have no other adult caregiver except a working parent. Thousands of these children could be left home alone if their employed caregiver was forced to return to work to sustain the family.

Despite the key role child care providers are playing in support of other essential industries during the COVID-19 crisis, the child care system as a whole is at risk of collapse due to the economic impact. Many providers are closing their programs, unable to sustain operations with diminishing enrollment. Others are staying open despite the physical risk, to support the needs of working families in their community (Zero to Three, 2020). Excerpts from Zero to Three survey reflect implications of COVID-19 on the general condition of childcare across the world.

"We know that we are putting both our team and families in harm's way by being open, but we have not closed. The few families we are serving are essential workers, or families who are trying to work from home whose employers do not understand that working from home with a small child is hard! They bring us their children because they worry about surviving through their own businesses cuts."

"As a small private child care provider serving few essential workers, we made the difficult decision to close for the protection and safety of our children, families, and staff. Our future is uncertain, and we need fiscal relief for our employees and our ability to sustain this circumstance." Zero to three (2020)

"I am a toddler teacher, and I cannot afford health insurance. My son died [in January, before the pandemic] because I was too scared of the emergency room bill, so I took him to a careless clinic where he received very little care. I walked out thinking he only had a little bug, he died less than three days later. Are we going to wait for the next pandemic to move to a system of nationalized health care?" -Leticia, child care provider from Englewood

"If the children I serve are still hungry after the recommended portion for their age, there is no second serving now. Stores have limited supplies and limits on amounts purchased in our area, and they are raising prices. My own children will not be getting a second serving of food or more milk,

because child care children also need these items. I had to witness my daughter cry this week, because I had to tell her she can't have more food or milk." - Justine, child care provider from Los Angeles

"Why is early childhood educators' work viewed so minimal compared to others? During this crisis, we're expected to be front-liners - now others see our value in society. How important we are!" - Anita, child care provider from Greensboro

"I am a small group home child care provider with 5 children in my care full time. I depend on the full time care I give to support my family. I have lost families due to the loss of jobs and that impacts how I can support my own family during this time. I have fears every day of how to keep my family safe from the outside virus coming into my home, but I need to continue so that I can still pay my bills and feed my own family." – Angela, child care provider from Glendale

"We are considered essential work force but we have no benefits. I am a family child care provider. Parents have stopped bringing their children and don't want to pay. We cannot fill the spots. It is very difficult to care for my own children without steady income and not knowing what will happen tomorrow." – Elizabeth, child care provider from Arlington

"We need financial support. We have lost income from families that have disenrolled. With the reduction of income it has meant reducing team hours and losing some teachers. We fear those taking unemployment will find a supplementary income and will not come back to the child care after this is done because of the low wages." - Renee, child care provider from Appleton,

"We are facing having to close our licensed family child care that has been serving our community for the past 13 years. My enrollment has decreased from 21 children enrolled total, 14 each day, to serving 4 children each day. We need emergency help to pay employees and make up for lost wages." - Amy, child care provider from Aptos

"Many families that qualify for daycare assistance are now out of work and staying home. Subsidies are no longer being paid to centers for the absent children. This a huge loss of income for child care centers." - Julie, child care provider from Livonia,

"I'm a childcare/preschool/child development center. I have gone from 81 kids a day to 2. I can't stay open with 2. We are considered essential but how can I stay open without the help needed. I love my kids, staff and families but to ask me to go under because all of a sudden I'm essential? Really?" – Teri, child care provider from Eagle River, (Zero to Three, 2020)

Number of Children Under 8 Years Affected by Closure of Childcare Facilities

The COVID-19 crisis challenges children's education, care and well-being. Many parents struggle to balance their responsibilities for childcare and paid employment, with a disproportionate burden placed on women (UNICEF, 2020). The unprecedented nature of the pandemic made parents, first-line responders responsible for their children's learning, health, well-being and care, often without the support and services that may otherwise have been available. The disconnection of social support networks and childcare support, often provided by grandparents or other relatives, has exacerbated the situation (Bateman, 2020).

According to UNESCO data base, 1.1 billion children are out of school worldwide due to school closures linked to the coronavirus pandemic while 702 million learners from pre-primary through secondary are out of school due to nationwide school closures. This implies that many parents are impacted by this crisis as they may have to absorb the day-to-day demands of working from home while also juggling increased amounts of unpaid care and household work in. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation of families had been described as a global childcare crisis. It is estimated that over 35 million children under five years old are sometimes left without adult supervision, a factor often linked to economic pressures on parents to work (UNICEF, 2018). Now,

it is estimated that the COVID-19 crisis has already disrupted childcare and education services for at least **40 million** children about to start school (Gromada; Richardson & Rees, 2020). An indication that the magnitude of this child crisis is evolving, hence, global solidarity and urgent sustained international collective action and cooperation to address the childcare crisis and its impact on young children and their caregivers is critical.

Number of Working Mothers and Subsequently the Demand For Childcare Options

Globally, the work of childcare is done predominantly by women. This includes mothers and also other female caregivers such as grandmothers, siblings and workers in the childcare sector. In 2018, 606 million working-age women considered themselves to be unavailable for employment or not seeking a job because of unpaid care work, compared to only 41 million men (UNICEF, 2018). This imbalance has major implications for women's employment and income opportunities and for children's development and well-being (Gromada, Richardson & Rees (2020).

In the United States, more than 41 million workers ages 18 to 64 were caring for at least one child under the age of 18. Of these, nearly 34 million have at least one child under the age of 14, and are more likely to rely on school and child care than parents of high school-aged children (Nicole Bateman, 2020). Thirty percent of parents with young children have a caregiver at home a family adult who is either out of the labor force or working less than half time. The other 70% or 23.5 million working parents do not have any potential caregivers, and their return to work will likely be dependent on the reopening of child care programs and schools (Bateman, 2020). Parents with minor children comprise almost one-third of the country's workforce; any economic recovery will rely on their continued participation or reentry into the labor force. The status of schools and child care programs in the fall will dictate the ability of working parents to fully return to work, and therefore will also

largely dictate the speed and robustness of economic recovery (Bateman, 2020).

The Education Trust-West surveyed 600 California parents of children ages 0-5 about the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. Findings indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly changed parents' childcare arrangements and other parenting supports. Before coronavirus, over a fifth (22%) of families relied on home or center-based child care and 38% had at least one parent staying home to care for their child. Now, just 7% say their child care/daycare program is still open and they are still attending, and 83% have at least one parent at home. In addition to the added burden of balancing working remotely with tending to their children (63% of parents say they are now working from home), parents are also disconnected from their usual support system. Almost two thirds (61%) of parents typically rely on friends and family to help care for their child, which is unworkable for many parents while social distancing restrictions remain in place (The Education Trust-West, 2020)

According to a survey by the Education Trust-West it was found out that among employed parents, more than a third (37%) have had their hours or pay reduced or have taken time off work to care for their child or children as a result of the crisis, and seven in ten (71%) say they worry about losing their jobs or having their hours reduced in the future. More than half (53%) of parents overall say they feel uneasy about their own personal finances, and more than a third (39%) aren't confident they'll be able to pay for basic expenses like food, housing, and healthcare if the crisis isn't resolved in the next two months (The Education Trust-West, 2020).

The Education Trust-West's report highlighted that the current crisis has introduced a lot of uncertainty about childcare for many parents of young children in California. Just 64% of parents plan to return to the child care arrangements they had prior to the coronavirus crisis 12% reported that they do not plan to return and 24% are unsure what they will do when the crisis is over. The uncertainty of child care cuts across all types of pre-pandemic

arrangements, and this was particularly true for families located in small towns/rural areas of the state (47% unsure/won't return) and families with a household income lower than \$50,000/year (46%) are potentially unable to afford their existing care if their financial situation worsens (The Education Trust-West, 2020).

The Education Trust-West also reported that essential workers in California were unsure of their ability to access child care. Among essential workers who make up 26% of parents of young children polled in the state were uncertain about what they can access: 42% were unsure whether they were eligible for childcare for essential workers or were not aware this was available. Just 7% of essential workers said their child was receiving child care and 20% indicated that they were eligible but do not wish to use child care for the time being (The Education Trust-West, 2020).

The Status of Care and Early Learning Workforce for Children under 3 Years, 3-6years, 6-8years during the Pandemic

Since March 2020 when COVID-19, was declared a pandemic, learners, teachers, parents, and the entire education community have been gravely affected. According to UNESCO data base, 1.1 billion children are out of school worldwide due to school closures linked to the coronavirus pandemic while 702 million learners from pre-primary through secondary are out of school due to nationwide school closures in developing countries (UNESCO, 2020). Based on UNESCO data, more than 8 million teachers are affected by school closures in various countries as of September 2020 while in Sub-Saharan Africa, over 18.6 million pre-primary school teachers have been affected by the pandemic (UNESCO, 2020).

Worldwide, the pre-primary education providers are facing unprecedented challenges such as health and safety concerns, stress, and tenuous employment status. Teachers and centre directors face questions of how to provide continuous education and care amidst the closure of their centres, often without having had any prior training

on how to employ distance education solutions or the use of information technology. These concerns are further exacerbated by the vulnerable status of

pre-primary providers and educators within the overall education personnel structure (UNESCO, 2020).



Figure 2: School closure had large impact on education workforce remuneration and employment (percentage)

Source: (United Nations, 2020)

Figure 2 above shows that ECE workers were among the highest impacted education workforce in regards to remuneration and employment during the pandemic.

In the United States, Child care providers, who operate on razor-thin margins already, are struggling to stay in business (News America, 2020). A survey report that was conducted in June reported that more than 5,000 child care providers demonstrated that without additional federal support 2 out of 5 providers will close permanently half of which are providers of color. In some states, providers serving families and communities with low incomes may have been less able to afford to close their doors, essentially putting themselves in harm's way in order to put food on the table (Sethi, Staub & Robbins, 2020). According to News America (2020) many early childhood educators, working with children birth-to-five, who, on average, earn poverty wages in the best of times, are out of work. And, others, including those teaching children in preK-3rd grade are working to

find creative ways to educate young children at home.

In California, a survey conducted in June involved 953 programs 40% of respondents were center-based administrators, and 60 percent were home-based family child care (FCC) providers. From the findings, health and safety continued to be major concerns for all programs, whether they were open or closed but considering reopening. 38% of providers are worried that they will be exposed to COVID-19 by the children/families they serve. 38% of providers are worried that they will expose their own families to COVID-19 by having their program open. 36% of providers are worried that their staff will be exposed to COVID-19 by the children/families they serve and 29% of providers are worried that children will be exposed to COVID-19 while attending their program.

"The pressure from the community to open is extreme, and there seems to be very little concern on the part of the parents for the health of the staff and/or the older members of their own families."

"Now that my child care is open again, it is nerve-wracking knowing that I can get infected and potentially cause harm to the kids in my program or my family."

(Doocy, Kim & Montoya, 2020)

The survey also reported that open programs were operating with decreased capacity and reduced attendance, resulting in loss of income. 77% of open programs have experienced loss of income from families. 99% of open centers programs had fewer children attending than before the pandemic. In addition, 37% of open programs do not have enough funds to pay for the PPE or cleaning/sanitizing supplies they need and 20% of open programs do not have enough funds to pay for the food they need as observed:

"There is no way we will survive financially with the limited group size. We had 150+ students. Now the most we can have is 48. Parents can't possibly pay enough to cover our costs. Without government subsidies, we won't survive."

"The guidelines are not in line with a sustainable business. We were already barely financially stable, and now we are absolutely not. Our rates would have to double or triple."

"The cleaning guidelines and requirements for supplies will be taxing for our school.... Our overhead will certainly go up while our income will go down." (Doocy, Kim & Montoya, 2020)

Further, the survey highlighted that the pandemic has worsened an already widespread teacher shortage. Programs have fewer paid teachers on staff, due to layoffs, furloughs, and/or staffing shortages. 78% of open centers and 61% of open programs have fewer paid teachers now than before the pandemic (January 2020). 62% of open centers have staff who are not working due to concerns about the health risks. 48% of open centers have staff who are unable to work because they are taking care of their own children. 35% of open centers have staff who are taking a leave of absence as observed.

"We do not want to be frontline workers! Our staff is frightened, and half do not want to return until there is a vaccine."

"I had to permanently close, none of my staff wanted to return, only one parent wanted to return, my landlord was completely unsympathetic, [and I] can't meet financial minimums with allowable group sizes." (Doocy, Kim & Montoya, 2020)

In Asia-Pacific region, over 93 million pre-primary learners in 34 countries and 4.4 million pre-primary teachers (85 percent of whom are women) in 24 countries are affected by COVID-19 (UNESCO, 2020). A survey conducted by the UNESCO Bangkok with UNICEF, Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC), the Early Childhood Workforce Initiative (ECWI) and International Step by Step Association (ISSA) delved to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the early childhood education (ECE) workforce in the region. The survey report indicated that while all levels and types of education are facing serious challenges, Early Childhood Education (ECE) sector is one of the most vulnerable sectors and prone to have bigger impact given that the large percentage of ECE sectors are privately funded and operated. The survey revealed that the school closure has affected the working condition of ECE staff. 6.7 percent of respondents were approached by their employer to consider leaving or terminating their contracts. Even if they can continue their work without any changes in their contract, 49.3 percent of respondents indicated that their salaries were not secured under social security schemes and had to rely on other income sources to sustain their living (UNESCO, 2020).

Further, the survey report highlighted that many governments in Asia and the Pacific region are actively providing both financial and technical supports for ECE centre/ preschool, ECE staff and parents /caregivers in order to ensure the continuity of children's learning. For example, New Zealand⁷ is providing the COVID-19 wage subsidy to early learning services a flat rate of NZ\$585.80 per week for every full time employee, and NZ\$350 per

week for every part time worker (before tax), paid upfront in one lump sum to cover twelve weeks. However the survey revealed that privately-financed ECE institutions are less likely to receive support through government measures compared to publicly-financed ECE institutions. Australia, Republic of Korea, Singapore and New Zealand provided management guidelines and financial support/relief package for families and early childhood education and care services to help them keep their doors open and employees in their jobs (UNESCO, 2020).

In addition, it was reported that many ECE teachers experienced pandemic-induced stress, frustrated with the unpredictable situation, worried about their income and job security and anxious and overwhelmed about delivering distance learning. Many countries in the region adopted remote learning practices to reduce the learning disruption and many ECCE teachers had to deliver distance learning without any prior training or clear guidance. The report indicated that only 20 per cent of respondents had prior training on delivering distance learning and 1.28 percent on crisis and disaster management. Given the various challenges experienced by ECCE workforce, 35.2 percent of respondents reported to receive psycho-social support such as stress management advices from the government (UNESCO, 2020).

In New Zealand, only the children of essential workers and those who cannot stay home are allowed in Childcare facilities. It was reported that care centres feared financial disaster and widespread layoffs if the city's lockdown extends. Centre owners said they could not survive without parents' fees and they would need government support if attendance was banned for an extended period as observed;

"If it goes beyond the three days, then we're in a situation of difficulty. We've already had to reduce our staffing by one. If we don't get the coverage again by some sort of subsidy against a wage then there will be more lay-offs of teachers probably across all services."

"It's going to be financially tough because half of our income comes from parent fees and without those parent fees, which obviously we can't charge when the service is closed, I'm not sure how we are going to pay our wages and keep our buildings up to speed."

"If I don't get a wage subsidy ... we won't get through this next lockdown."

"It's not an easy sector to be in, we've had so many cuts over the past 10, 12 years where we've just really been ground down."

"There was no support there for the mental wellbeing of what business owners were going through."

"It was so stressful having the pressure on your shoulders to try and see how you were going to navigate your way through such an unknown period, we didn't even know when we were going to come out of lockdown."

"But trying to navigate your way through to ensure that you still had a job available for your team members when you came out of lockdown and you just felt responsible for all of your team and trying to navigate that, trying to ensure their livelihoods, their jobs were still there was very, very stressful." (Collins, 2020)

In Uganda, media reports indicate that many private early childhood school owners are looking to sell their properties or have turned them into rental units to keep up with loan payments as observed; *"The teachers are so discouraged at the moment. They feel left out,"*

(Muhumuza & Devecioglu, 2020)

In South Africa, ECD operators were instructed by the Department of Social Development (DSD) to close on the 18th of March in order to prevent the spread and acceleration of COVID-19 infections (Mamacos, 2020). A survey of 3 952 ECD operators conducted in April 2020 established that most ECD programmes operate in a semi-informal manner. The report found only 45 per cent were registered with SARS, 13 per cent of which were registered as

companies and only 35 per cent of their workforce was registered for Unemployment Insurance Fund with most salaries below minimum wage. As a result of straddling the informal economy, ECD operators and their workforce thus find themselves unable to access many of the relief schemes currently on offer (Mamacos, 2020). The survey estimated that 20 000 - 30 000 ECD operators run the risk of closure and 118 000-175 000 people employed in the ECD sector could stand to lose their job and 1.5 million children without early learning services or a safe place for day care (Mamacos, 2020).

According to Mamacos (2020) 99% of operators in South Africa reported that caregivers had stopped paying fees owing to the lockdown. 83% of operators had not been able to pay the full salaries of staff over the lockdown period. 96% of them reported that their income was not enough to pay their operating costs. 68% were worried that they would not be able to reopen. 72% of operators were reliant of fee income. 93% of the operators were not sure if fee payment will resume after lockdown and 64% were worried they will not reopen. The survey analysis suggested that the after-effects of the lockdown will see a 75% reduction in income in the informal sector (Mamacos, 2020). For ECD operators in South Africa, this means they can expect a 75% reduction in fee income after services reopen.

According to Mamacos (2020), where ECD operators are not able to survive the economic stresses of the lockdown, caregivers who previously made use of those services will be without a place to send their children when they return to work or seek work. This effect will be most felt by women, who are most commonly burdened with the responsibilities of childcare. Importantly, if children are unable to return to ECD programmes after the lockdown (whether because of an inability to pay fees, or because the ECD operator was unable to survive), children miss out on early learning and stimulation and food which will impact their wellbeing.

Childcare Support in Response to COVID-19

In the most recent update of the Social Protection and Jobs Responses to COVID-19, UNICEF reported that nine of 195 countries reported implementing childcare support in response to COVID-19. Examples of reforms include: the simplification of eligibility and access to child support and childcare benefits, including waiving health examination conditionalities (Austria) and simplified income reporting requirements (Germany); the continuation of support under special conditions, such as the provision of childcare services for essential workers during lockdown (Costa Rica); the adaption of support to facilitate a move from day-care to home care during lockdown (Republic of Korea); the expansion of existing support, in terms of either leave or time available, coverage or amount paid (Poland, The Russian Federation); and the introduction of new support in the form of cash or vouchers, although eligibility rules may apply (Italy, Malta and Spain) (Gromada, Richardson & Rees, 2020). As much as these childcare provisions were said to be temporal, each provided an opportunity for the expansion or development of flexible and equitable childcare support for all families.

In the United States, the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) offered child care providers two kinds of assistance: \$3.5 billion dollars for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), and \$750 million in additional Head Start funds. While these were important supports, the sector reported that the amount was a small fraction of the estimated \$9.6 billion the sector needs each month to serve the children of essential workers and keep child care afloat during the pandemic and though many centers remain closed or are facing additional operating costs (Grunewald, 2020). Additional support for child care was included in Congress's third COVID-19 stimulus package \$3.5 billion for states through the federal Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Program, which distributes funding to states to provide child care subsidies to

low-income families. Stimulus funding levels included the following: \$48.1 million for Minnesota; \$10.1 million for Montana; \$6.0 million for North Dakota; \$9.0 million for South Dakota; and \$51.6 million for Wisconsin. The stimulus funding was designed to support providers that serve children of essential workers in various states (Grunewald, 2020)

CONCLUSION

The outbreak of the novel Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) that was first recorded in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in December 2019 spread from a single case to an preceded global health pandemic with over 34 986 502 reported cases of COVID-19, including 1 034 240 as of 04 October 2020 when this literature survey was conducted. The global pandemic has had far reaching social and economic ramifications. The pandemic has greatly affected global and national economies, healthcare systems, and education systems. Of particular significance is the wellbeing of the child including physiological, psychological, and as well as educational wellbeing. This literature survey has focused on the implications of the global pandemic on the wellbeing of the child. Fundamentally, the COVID-19 poses a serious health risk for every single individual human being currently living on the global stage since anyone can get it. This is made worse by the rate at which it spreads. That means every child is highly susceptible to contracting the pandemic. As a corollary, and equally significantly, the containment measures aimed limiting the spread of infections have effects on economies, social wellbeing and more particularly the wellbeing of the child as this survey reveals.

In order to maintain social distance, learning intuitions across the world were closed. This brought learning to a halt. This survey reveals that many countries resorted to online learning as a mitigation measure. Resorting to online learning was an opportunity but also exposed disparities in terms of access to ICT resources and infrastructure between countries and within countries. In this regard children in the Sub-Saharan Africa are

particularly affected by this disparity. It emerged that ECE institutions in urban areas benefitted from use of web based online platforms, while those in rural areas were more likely to use traditional media for learning, including TV and radio. Some did not engage in any form of learning at all. Apart from the challenge of disparities in access to online learning resources, resorting to online education as a mitigating means brought about further challenges. In particular, there is the problem of exposure to predatory sites which pose emotional and moral danger to children. The closer of institutions also meant that children who relied on school feeding programmes could no longer access adequate and reliable feeding.

A further implication of closure of education institutions affected the wider industry associated with early childcare. This means early childcare facilities were closed and caregivers and educators either lost their jobs or had their salaries reduced. Some parents would have to balance between being caregivers and income generating activities to keep their families financially afloat. Moreover, loss of income as many people were laid off, meant that children would not get adequate requirements for their wellbeing and some parents could not afford early childcare facilities or providers where applicable. The survey further reveals that, in some instances children were exposed to emotional distressed having to remain at home for a long time, and exposure to stressful situations arising from domestic violence or other forms of distress within families.

Recommendations

To support children during crisis, various government partners and institutions have put forward the following recommendations:

Governments' support on ECCE service providers, teachers and families are essential to overcome challenging periods

The unprecedented school closure and economic downturn during pandemics perpetuates the vicious cycle of learning poverty. In order to ensure the continuity of children's learning, governments

should actively providing both financial and technical supports for ECE centres, ECE staff and parents /caregivers (UNESCO, 2020).

Governments to ensure adequate paid parental leave entitlement and related support for working mothers and fathers in the first year of a child's life

To ensure that parents can spend time caring for and bonding with their children, childcare support should immediately follow the end of parental leave entitlement (International Finance Corporation (IFC), 2020). In the face of a pandemic, many employers adopt home based working. However, working from home is not synonymous with flexible work. Employers should consult staff regularly to learn about their needs in times of restricted childcare options. Solutions might include flexible hours, compressed time, reduced overall time and staggered time (Gromadai, Richardsons & Reesi, 2020)

Provide job security and timely, adequate compensation to ensure teacher motivation and retention during times of crisis

Surveys conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that the school closure has affected the working condition of ECE staff (UNESCO, 2020). Teachers were approached by their employers to consider leaving or terminating their contracts. Therefore, it is critical to ensure measures to provide job security, and adequate and timely compensation so that teacher motivation can be maintained and retain the teachers during times of crisis.

Through government measures, improve levels of accessible, affordable and high-quality nonfamily childcare, especially for disadvantaged families.

Countries to invest in government measures to support nonfamily childcare through, for example, public provision of childcare, subsidies, tax incentives and legal requirements for employers to provide or support childcare (Gromadai, Richardsons & Reesi, 2020).

Invest in pre- and in-service teacher training on adapting to new technologies, social-emotional skills as well as preventing, preparing for and responding to crises

As many countries are adopted remote learning practices to reduce the learning disruption, many ECCE teachers had to deliver distance learning without any prior training or clear guidance (UNESCO, 2020). Investing in the training and professional development of ECCE teachers should be the priority among governments and learning institutions to equip ECCE teachers with relevant information and increase their resilience.

Support teachers' health and social-emotional wellbeing and resilience before, during and after crisis

Many ECE teachers experienced pandemic-induced stress, frustrated with the unpredictable situation, worried about their income and job security and anxious and overwhelmed about delivering distance learning (UNESCO, 2020). Teachers are key agents in providing social and emotional support to students and their families, but before that, they themselves require support and it is important that they receive this support from peers or specialized professionals to continue teaching and learning amid the crisis.

Deliver and align childcare services with other key family care policies

There is need to provide equivalence of childcare providers with other professionals working with children, and encourage the highest possible standards in both applicants and practice (Gromadai, Richardsons & Reesi, 2020). Governments should align childcare services with other key family care policies such as universal child benefits, to strengthen the childcare portfolio, and reduce the risk of children's existing inequalities being replicated in public childcare settings (Gromadai, Richardsons & Reesi, 2020).

Development of a remote education policy

The shift from face-to-face to remote teaching and learning did not come without challenges. The main ones being access to technical infrastructure, lack

of enough educator competencies, and pedagogies for remote learning and requirements in specific fields of study and appropriate assessment tools aligned with remote learning delivery model (ADEA, 2020). Countries need to set up an IT and multimedia structure for the digitalization of teaching, integrate ICT in schools, train teachers on techno-pedagogies and capacity building of actors to use and produce digital educational resources (ADEA, 2020)

Ensure inclusion, equity and fairness in providing distance learning

It was evident that there is urban/rural disparity in accessing IT infrastructure and internet for distance learning. While the respondents from urban area identified the difficulty of monitoring children's learning progress as the major challenge, the respondents from rural area identified the lack of access to distance learning equipment as the major challenge (UNESCO, 2020). In addition, ECE institutions in urban area tend to use web based online platforms, while that in rural areas are more likely to use traditional media for learning, including TV and radio (UNESCO, 2020). It is important to explore innovative ways to ensure inclusion, equity and fairness in providing distance learning.

Provide clear guidance for and maintain regular communication with parents/caretakers

Parents and caregivers play critical roles for home-based learning and providing physical, emotional, social, and cognitive developmental needs of children. It is important to have a continuous communication with parents and caregivers to track/monitor children's development/progress (UNESCO, 2020).

Support the continuity of quality ECCE through inter-sectoral approaches

The impact of COVID-19 on young children goes beyond education sector (UNESCO, 2020). Millions of children in the region rely on school for daily nutrition, security and safety. In order to provide comprehensive quality ECCE services, it is essential to have an integrated approach that works across government agencies and community organizations

to ensure holistic development of children (UNESCO, 2020)

Incorporating critical aspects of the COVID-19 experience related to remote education in Education Management Information System (EMIS) are necessary to inform education sector

Investing in and strengthening the resilience of education systems is key to mitigating the unfavorable impacts of all types of crises, hence the need to learn from past experiences (ADEA, 2020). Furthermore, well-coordinated national responses and systems are needed to 'build back better', creating safer and more equitable education systems in all situations. It is vital to promote an understanding of EMIS that is holistic and sector-wide, and goes beyond the infrastructure utilized for the collection, management, analysis, and utilization of data (ADEA, 2020).

Partnerships and collaborations with education sector actors

In order to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all, with the concept of "leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest first" governments, civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, private sector players, learners, and teachers need to collaborate especially in times of crisis (ADEA, 2020). Remote learning has reminded everyone to strengthen collaboration and to realize that powerful learning can only happen when all are engaged, energetic, and focused to provide support to one another (ADEA, 2020).

Monitoring of psychological and psychosocial support for the well-being of teachers and learners, particularly those affected by a pandemic

Countries should deploy several ways to monitor psychological and psychosocial support to learners and teachers that include collaboration with other ministries, training and focus group discussions, social support, use of human resources in the learning institutions, and deployment of multimedia in community engagement. These efforts need to be intensified, considering the reports of increased alcohol and drug abuse,

suicide, pregnancies among teenagers, and 2020).
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