Rural Parent's Experiences of Stress and Resilience During the COVID-19 Pandemic and School Closure

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated social and economic disruptions, resulting in cascading effects on the health and well-being of global citizens. However, little research has focused on how COVID-19 has affected rural regions, despite rurality being a critical factor for understanding community impact and response to the pandemic. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of rural Nebraskan parents with young children during the COVID-19 pandemic and school shutdown, and the strategies they used to support their families during that time. We conducted individual and group interviews with 22 white, non-Hispanic mothers living in rural towns, villages, and farms in the Great Plains region of the United States. Thematic analysis was used to generate the following themes related to pandemic challenges: *Impacts on Children's Education and Development*, *Impact on Parent's Work*, and *Social-Emotional Impacts*. Additionally, we generated themes related to the ways that rural parents responded to those challenges: *Successful Parenting Strategies*, *Children's Strategies*, *Using Community Provided Resources*, *Finding Unexpected Benefits*, and *Hope*. This study is meaningful because it documented the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and school shutdown on rural families with young children, and their responses to pandemic-related stressors. Our findings provide further insights into families' experiences of how COVID-19 affected their lives. Limitations and future directions are also discussed.

Keywords: *rural, education, COVID-19, parenting stress, resilience*

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated social and economic disruptions, resulting in cascading effects on the health and well-being of global citizens. Research with large, national samples has documented that the impacts of COVID-19 are modulated by existing structures of inequity, including race, class, gender, disability, and immigration status (Clark et al., 2021; Patel et al., 2020; Van Dorn et al., 2020). However, little research has focused on how COVID-19 has affected rural regions, despite rurality being a critical factor for understanding community impact and response to the pandemic (Van Dorn et al., 2020). While most research samples from urban populations, research with rural and urban samples points to differences in labor market impacts, employment, use of unemployment benefits, mental health, opinions about government relief spending, beliefs about

COVID-19, and adoption of COVID-19 prevention practices (Brooks et al., 2021; Callaghan et al., 2021; Koon et al., 2021; Mueller et al., 2020). More research on the social and economic impact of the pandemic in rural regions is necessary to inform effective policy and programs to support the flourishing of rural communities through the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Rural families face considerable challenges that may make them vulnerable to negative effects of the pandemic, such as higher rates of poverty (Cromartie et al., 2020; Farrigan & Parker, 2012), decreased access to employment opportunities (Farrigan, 2019), strained educational budgets (Showalter et al., 2017), limited resources for gifted programming (Lewis & Boswell, 2020) and for students with disabilities (Running Bear et al., 2021), lack of access to internet and technology (Anderson, 2018), and limited access to affordable health care

(Turrini et al., 2021), and mental health care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; DHHS, 2011). In a conceptual framework based on ecological models of human development, Prime et al., (2020) propose that the COVID-19 pandemic threatens the well-being of children and families via disruptions in the social fabric of families' lives, including loss of income, caregiving burden, school closure, and confinement-related stress. The framework purports that social disruptions caused by the pandemic will impact child adjustment (e.g., emotional problems, behavioral functioning, academic progress, peer relations) directly and indirectly, through caregiver well-being (e.g., psychological distress, parenting stress, mental health symptoms) and family processes (e.g., whole family, parent-child, marital subsystem, sibling subsystem's organization, communication, and beliefs).

The effects of pandemic-related stressors on well-being are mediated by contextual factors, such as economic hardship, racism, health conditions, family relationship functioning, access to resources, and history of trauma and adversity (Prime et al., 2020). Following school closures (March 23, 2020), Americans reported increased rates of anxiety, depressive symptoms, and fear of contracting COVID-19 (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020). In the months following the onset of the pandemic, adults in the United States reported increased depression and loneliness (Killgore et al., 2020), and a meta-analysis of research with children from global populations found that loneliness, anxiety, and depression increased during pandemic-induced social isolation (Loades et al., 2020).

Rural communities may be vulnerable to adverse mental health outcomes in the wake of the pandemic, due to increased social isolation (Monteith et al., 2020), poverty, and limited access to telehealth mental health care (Summers-Gabr, 2020). Rural communities have less access to affordable mental health care (Thomas et al., 2012), and children living in rural areas are more likely to have mental health and behavioral problems than their peers in urban areas (Sheridan et al., 2014). One research study found that around half of adults living in rural communities of the Western United States reported negative impacts of COVID-19 on their mental health and life overall (Mueller et al., 2021). Given the distinct challenges that rural communities contend with, research with rural families is critical for prevention and intervention on the cascading consequences of the pandemic on the well-being of rural families.

Pandemic Impacts on Education

After the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic on March 11th (WHO, 2020), school closures soared, with over 50 million students affected by March 25th, 2020 (Decker et al., 2020).

Of those, approximately 8.9 million (18.7%) were students attending rural schools (Showalter et al., 2017). After schools shut down, communities across the United States were abruptly faced with challenges of remote learning, which presented challenges for many rural communities. A survey of rural families across the U.S., conducted in April of 2020, found that 33% of rural parents reported that with school closure, children would have to do homework on a cellphone, 31% reported having no reliable internet connection at home, and 24% reported that their children would not be able to complete homework because they do not have access to a computer at home (Vogels et al., 2020).

Moreover, rural families' access to resources may be disrupted by school shutdowns, as schools play an integral role in providing access to education, food, technology, and support services that may otherwise be unavailable in rural communities (Berland & Hughes, 2021; Brooks et al., 2021). Approximately 8.9 million students (18.7%) attend rural schools, and the proportion of rural to urban students is higher in Great Plains states, where more than half of schools are classified as rural (Showalter et al., 2017). Thus, it is vital to understand more about how school closures and other pandemic-related stressors affect rural families.

Pandemic Impacts on Work

While the economic impacts of the pandemic continue to coalesce, it is apparent that there were profound impacts on work. In March of 2020, 38% of employed parents with young children said that it had been difficult to handle childcare responsibilities during the pandemic. This proportion had increased to over half (52%) of employed parents by October 2020, with a greater proportion of mothers (57%) reporting difficulty than fathers (47%; Igielnik, 2021). By December of 2020, 71% of Americans were working from home (Igielnik, 2021). Rates of unemployment and going without pay have been higher for workers who are women, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), paid low wages and with lower education levels (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021).

In particular, the pandemic affected the workforce participation of mothers. Nationally, the number of mothers who stated that not working for pay was the best arrangement for them increased from the summer of 2019 to October 2020 (Minkin, 2021), and employment among mothers dropped by 5.6% in the first six months of the pandemic (Kocchar, 2020). A recent qualitative study found that Irish working mothers were forced to adopt an additional and disproportionate (relative to fathers) childcare burden, as they took on the responsibilities of schooling, while working from home (Clark et al., 2020). This caused strain on working mother's psychological

welfare, work performance, and increased concerns about children's educational progress (Clark et al., 2020). Similarly, a telephone survey study conducted in May of 2020 found that both rural and urban farmworker and non-farmworker Latinx mothers reported working fewer hours than before the pandemic, increased economic and food insecurity, and concerns about children falling behind academically (Quandt et al., 2021).

Historically, rural communities in the United States have been adversely affected by rapid economic transitions, resulting in loss of work opportunities, disenfranchisement from land ownership, and migration out of rural areas to urban centers (Conger & Conger, 2002). However, research on the immediate effects of the pandemic on rural workers paints a more complex picture, pointing to both vulnerabilities and resiliencies of rural communities. Rural-urban comparisons suggest that rural workers were less likely to lose employment during the pandemic, go unpaid for missed hours, or be unable to look for work, but rural workers were less likely to work from home (Brooks et al., 2021). Unemployment rates rose to 13% in rural regions across the U.S. in April 2020, but rural communities in the Great Plains had some of the smallest decreases in employment during April and May of 2020, likely in part due to higher concentrations of essential workers in the region (Chinni, 2020; Cho et al., 2020). National survey data collected in Spring of 2021 indicated that rural denizens were more likely to be late paying rent, mortgage, or other bills, be unable to afford groceries, or borrow money from family or friends (Monnat, 2021). In the same study, rural respondents were less likely than urban respondents to report losing a job, reduction in pay, or remote work, but those differences were non-significant after controlling for a variety of covariates, including race, gender, household income, and educational attainment (Monnat, 2021). While the pandemic exacerbated existing vulnerabilities in rural communities, there may be social and economic benefits related to living rurally.

Pandemic Impacts on Child and Family Adjustment

In the immediate turmoil of the COVID-19 pandemic, adults across the United States struggled to cope with pandemic-related stressors. In a survey taken in April-May of 2020, 67% of adults said that stress had increased over the pandemic, with nearly half reporting that their level of pandemic-related stress was high (APA, 2020). Common sources of stress were fear of getting the virus, government response to the virus, disrupted routines, children's remote learning, meeting basic needs, self-isolation, access to healthcare, and missing major milestones (APA, 2020). Parents reported higher levels of stress than non-parents, with 70% of parents reporting

family responsibilities as a significant source of stress and 63% of parents reporting that the pandemic made the school year extremely stressful (APA, 2020).

Transition to remote learning and work-from-home increased demands on parents' time and energy, and parenting during a pandemic added stressors for both parents and children (Brown et al., 2020). A national survey found that most parents reported an increase in parenting-specific stress from pre-pandemic levels by May of 2020 (Adams et al., 2021). Common stressors included changes in children's routines, worry about COVID-19, and demands of online schooling (Adams et al., 2021). Parent stress was still elevated when measured again in September of 2020, but parents reported the use of strategies to manage parenting difficulties, like doing family activities, using virtual communication to socialize, and keeping a daily routine (Adams et al., 2021). Another national survey study found that four months into the pandemic, 26.9% of parents reported worsening mental health, and 14.3% reported worsening in their children's behavioral health, and that women, solo-parents, and families with younger children reported greater proportions of worsening mental and behavioral health (Patrick et al., 2020).

Similarly, another national study with parents found that more than one-third reported that their child's behavior had changed during the pandemic, including being sad, depressed, and lonely (Lee et al., 2021). Parents' social and emotional adjustment to the pandemic affected their ability to support children's transition to remote learning; parents' self-reported depression and parenting stress were negatively associated with their perceived preparation to educate at home (Lee et al., 2021). Pandemic stress increased chaos at home for some families, which was found to be associated with increases in parent-child conflict and sibling conflict (Cassinat et al., 2021). While few studies have examined adjustment in rural American families, one study with children in rural Appalachia with neurodevelopmental disorders found that children who reported greater emotional dysregulation had more difficulty with the transition to remote learning, engaged in less direct instruction, and received less instruction per day (McFayden et al., 2021). While preliminary data point to educational setbacks due to school closures nationally (Garcia & Weiss, 2020), there are few published studies examining how pandemic-related stressors and school closures have affected the social and emotional well-being of parents and children in rural America.

Resilience in Rural Families

Often described as "ordinary magic," resilience refers to an individual or system's ability to respond adaptively to adversity (Masten, 2001; Masten, 2021). There is

a rapidly accumulating body of research documenting the resilience of families in response to the "sledgehammer" of the COVID-19 pandemic (Eales et al., 2021). Parents and children report using strategies like spending more time outside, finding new hobbies, developing bonds with siblings and neighbors, and improving behavior and social-emotional skills (Eales et al., 2021). However, little research has examined how pandemic-related challenges and resilience are shaped by rural context.

Pre-pandemic research points to strong familial bonds as a vital source of support for rural families. For example, rural mothers are more likely to receive childcare support from nonresident grandparents (Yancura et al., 2020), and rural youth enjoy more frequent contact and lower levels of conflict with grandparents (King et al., 2003). A survey of adults and elders in the rural Great Plains region found that residents reported satisfaction with home and neighborhood, health, safety, sense of community, and social network support (Cantarero & Potter, 2014). A longitudinal study examining Iowa farming families' responses to economic hardship found that parents demonstrated resilience by offering emotional support, using effective problem-solving skills, and possessing a sense of mastery and self-confidence (Conger & Conger, 2002). These strategies increased positive marital and parent-child relationships, reduced parent emotional distress, and promoted youth resilience to economic hardship (Conger & Conger, 2002). As communities continue to respond to the impacts of the pandemic on children and families, more research is needed on the unique challenges and resiliencies of living rurally during the pandemic.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of rural Nebraskan parents with young children during the COVID-19 pandemic and school shutdown, and the strategies they used to support their families during that time. Specifically, our research questions were:

1. How did rural families with young children respond to the COVID-19 pandemic school shutdown (March 2020-May 2020) and into the summer and fall of 2020?
2. What parenting strategies did these families use during the COVID-19 pandemic school shutdown?

METHODS

We used a phenomenological approach to examine rural parents' experiences of a global pandemic resulting in school closures. Phenomenological research draws from rich descriptions of individuals' lived experiences to explore a shared experience or phenomenon (Creswell &

Poth, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the purpose of phenomenology is to "reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (p. 121). We conducted individual and group interviews with rural Nebraskan mothers, who acted as informants on their families' experiences of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and school closure. We then used thematic analysis to generate structural and textural descriptions of the significant and essential aspects of rural parents' experience of the pandemic and shutdown (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological analysis has been used extensively with rural populations, to study phenomena such as educators' and students' experiences of school consolidation (Nitta et al., 2010), rural school counselors' experiences with social justice advocacy (Grimes et al., 2013), and the advocacy efforts of African American mothers of children with disabilities in the rural southern United States (Stanley, 2015).

Participants and Setting

Our sample consisted of 22 parents living in rural towns, villages, and farms in the Great Plains region of the United States. Of the 22 participants, 13 (59%) were classified as Rural-Distant, five (23%) were classified as Rural-Remote, and four (18%) were classified as Rural-Fringe[1]. The mothers ranged in age from 29-44 ($M = 35$, $SD = 4.0$), and had between one and four children ($Mdn = 3$). Eight mothers (36.4%) reported that at least one of their children had been diagnosed with a disability or serious health concern. Most of the mothers were married (91%), and all were non-Hispanic white (100%) and had completed some college or vocational school (100%). With regards to socio-economic status, household income ranged from \$15,000 per year to \$95,000 or higher per year ($Mdn = \$60,000$), and 32% reported that their children were eligible for free and reduced lunch. Regarding current occupational status, nine (41%) mothers described themselves as stay-at-home parents who were not currently working, two worked part-time (9%), and the remaining 11 worked full time (50%). Individual participant descriptive data are reported in Table 1.

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[1] Rural-Distant refers to census-defined rural territory that is more than five miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from and Urbanized Area, or more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an Urban Cluster. Rural-Remote refers to census-defines rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an Urbanized Area and more than 10 miles from an Urban Cluster. Rural-Fringe refers to a census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to five miles from an Urbanized Area, and less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an Urban Cluster (Geverdt, 2015).

Data Collection

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at a public university in the Great Plains. The sample was derived from a broader sample of parents, teachers, and students from National Center for Educational Statistics designated rural schools in the Great Plains region (Geverdt, 2015), as part of INSIGHTS in Nebraska, a social and emotional learning intervention study (Rudasill et al., 2020). Participants in the broader study were recruited by contacting rural schools in the fall semesters of 2018 and 2019. Schools were then randomly assigned to a treatment or control condition. In the spring of 2021, parents were sent an email with a Qualtrics survey to gauge interest in participating in an interview, consent to participate in a COVID-related study, and to collect descriptive data. Interested parents were then contacted via email and scheduled for interviews. Demographic data were collected from participants through online surveys. Our study sought to examine the experiences of parents of young children living in the rural Great Plains. Although we sought to recruit parents of any gender, only mothers elected to participate in our study. Participants from both treatment and control schools were included in this study, however their group assignment was not a variable of analysis in this study. All participants asked the same interview questions, and their interview data were merged together after initial coding of the transcripts.

Interviews were 30-60 minutes in duration and were conducted and initially transcribed via Zoom. Due to participant scheduling needs, interviews were conducted either individually or in groups. Transcripts were then edited for errors, and all names were replaced with pseudonyms. Interviews consisted of a brief, semi-structured protocol. Example questions include: *What stressors did your family face during the shutdown? What parenting strategies did you use?* and *What resources did you have or wish you had during this time?* (See appendix for complete interview protocol.) When reporting from the interviews, we edited for readability, anonymity, and concision; removed linguistic fillers, repeated words, excess elaboration, and non-relevant, or incomplete speech. We signaled all major deletions (non-filler or repeated words) with ellipses, and the meaning of the sentences were never changed (Lingard, 2019).

Coding and Analysis

Thematic analysis is a theoretically flexible approach to data analysis, which aims to identify, analyze, and present themes across data as they relate to the study's research questions (Braun & Clark, 2006). Our thematic analysis used the inductive analysis approach, allowing findings to be data driven. Data were coded by a research team of five graduate students and research staff with training in qualitative research. First, the team read through each interview transcript multiple times to immerse themselves in the data and developed initial coding categories. Then, using Dedoose (Socio-Cultural Research Consultants, 2021), a qualitative coding software, we used structural coding (Saldaña, 2013) to organize the data into broad categories related to the research questions. Next, focused coding (Saldaña, 2018) was used to identify themes within the structural code categories. After creating the code system, we created a test of inter-rater reliability in Dedoose, and all coders were required to reach 85% agreement. Discrepancies in codes were then verified through discussion, until 100% agreement was reached. Data were then audited by another member of the research team, and discrepancies between auditors and coders were resolved through discussion until 100% agreement was achieved. Finally, the coding team met as a group to consolidate themes into superordinate themes and subthemes that meaningfully reflected the essence of the phenomenon, while preserving unique individual variation in experience.

Validation

Validation in qualitative research is the process for assessing the extent to which the findings accurately describe the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, we used multiple validation strategies. First, from a researcher's standpoint, we engaged in conversations with each other about how our own biases and experiences might influence our interpretation of data and presentation of findings. All research team members shared the experience of enduring the COVID-19 pandemic, and some research team members are parents affected by school closures. Thus, we are aware that these perspectives have shaped our engagement in the research process. Second, our research questions and focus group interviews were conducted by research team members who have a strong rapport with rural parents, and who had been immersed in the field prior to data collection. These members of our research team were former educators and members of rural Great Plains communities. They were involved in developing research and interview questions, and often served as consultants to the data analysis process, drawing on experiential knowledge of K-12 public education, and cultural knowledge of rural community life. Indeed, researcher experience in rural schools informed the conceptualization and execution of every step of this study. With regards to data analysis, we required that coders achieve a standard of 85% agreement on codes, and then resolved any disagreements through dialogue until coders reached 100% agreement. Finally, the group met consistently for discussion about

coding to ensure the consistency of our coding process and to reduce the influence of individual bias.

RESULTS

Challenges

We identified three themes related to the domains of life in which parents described challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, school shutdown, and related stressors: *Impacts on Children's Education and Development*, *Impact on Parent's Work*, and *Social-Emotional Impact*. In the next section we will describe each of these themes along with quotes from our participants that illustrate the themes.

Impacts on Children's Education and Development
During the school shutdown in the Spring of 2020, novel educational circumstances impacted students and their parents. Each of the participants reported that their children had to learn from home with parent facilitation of their remote learning. Parents had difficulty getting their children to maintain focus to complete schoolwork: "We had three little ones on Zoom at the table, every day, and it got to be a lot for the kids" (*Leslie, age 30, mother of four*). Coordinating Zoom schedules and finding space in the home for children to work were major challenges for many parents:

> I think one of the bigger stressors was dealing with three kids on Zoom calls. We live in a small house, and so trying to find areas for each child to work and not distract the other ones, that was really hard. And then finding the schedules to coordinate everything and remember who was Zooming when. (*Bethany, 38, mother of three*)

Supporting children with different educational needs also became a major struggle for many parents: "Because I have ... a 10-year-old, an eight-year-old and a six-year-old ... That's a lot of different education levels" (*Bethany, age 38, mother of three*). Some children also needed more supervision, so they had to sit next to the children and work while the children did their schoolwork. Olivia, who is the mother of two children with learning disabilities, stated that her children's schedules: "are both very different, [my son] had resource and speech Zoom sessions, as well as classroom Zoom sessions once a week and then I also added an additional one for him with this teacher" (*Olivia, age 34, mother of two*).

In the wake of the school shutdown and shelter-in-place orders, parents found themselves juggling children's schoolwork, school schedules, and working from home. "I basically felt like I had to become a kindergarten teacher overnight," said Emily, 32, a mother of two children. Many parents found the dual role of teacher and parent frustrating, and struggled with teaching their children at home, learning the material themselves, and worrying about children's educational development. When schools closed, demands for parents' time and energy increased dramatically:

> Finding the time to get everything done, I mean there were nights we were up till 10:30 ... we pretty much did stuff every Saturday and Sunday just to stay caught up. And then learning the new methods of math I mean way beyond what I learned years ago, so I mean it was it was very difficult, and we really didn't have any other time, other than getting away just to go to work. (*Payton, age 44, mother of one*)

Parents had to juggle the multiple demands of school-at-home, work-from-home, and day-to-day parenting. Parents expressed feeling overwhelmed, at times feeling inadequate as a teacher and parent, or feeling like they were failing at parenting, work, and schooling kids. Parents found it difficult to juggle their children's diverse virtual learning schedules and monitor their children's behavior. Many parents decided to reduce the amount of schoolwork children were expected to complete:

> I was just like okay, we are going to do the worksheets that she sends us once a week and hopefully we'll catch up this fall ... we also butt heads [my son] and I do, and so I had to take a step back and be like this is a huge change for everybody, I am stressed, he knows that I'm stressed, so that pushes him up. And it was super stressful until I stepped back and was like, okay bare minimum, we're going to read for half an hour and we're going to do your math, end of story that's all we're going to do. (*Emerson, age 30, mother of two*)

Impacts on Parent's Work
Parents faced sudden transitions in work and home life. Parents who had to move from working in an office to working at home described challenges related to managing the demands of their jobs, schooling children, childcare, and increasing household duties simultaneously. One parent reported that the increased amount of housework from having everyone home all day seemed unmanageable given everything else she was trying to do. "The overwhelming thing for me was trying to do my full-time job while doing all of the other things. I'm not used to cooking breakfast, lunch, dinner and two snacks during the day and cleaning up after them" (*Anna, age 36, mother of three*).

Another parent, June (*age 35, mother of three*), felt tremendous pressure to maintain professional standards while at home, which was impossible:

Just the constant pressure to maintain professionalism in an environment that doesn't really allow you to ... your personal life and your professional life just start colliding. And it was really, really challenging, to keep those two things, to have the integrity of both things. I felt like I was just massively failing at everything.

Another parent, Anna (*age 36, mother of three*), reported similar feelings about having her kids around while she was trying to participate in work video meetings: "At the beginning, having a Zoom meeting and my kids screaming right next to my chair, like that was rough, like I felt really bad." Later, Anna explained that she had adjusted her expectations for her performance at work, given the context of the pandemic:

Once I let go of the stigma of, I'm not going to get everything done for work ... and just gave up that perfection that I had envisioned, doing everything in the same amount of time ... it was so much better, and we went outside.

Several of our participants were employed as teachers and had to teach remote learning classes, while also trying to supervise their own children's online schooling. This was particularly difficult when teachers lacked direction and support from administrators:

I'm a high school teacher and so when we went into lockdown ... I was trying to teach my students online and trying to figure that out, every day was something new and interesting. I always kind of described it like we didn't have much direction from our school, and from our administration on how to do things ... I felt like it was always like a ship without a compass, like I had no direction, but just keep going. (*June, 38, mother of three*)

In response to the increased demands on their time and energy, parents identified that in many instances, they had to choose between prioritizing their job performance and their parental responsibilities. Some parents chose to de-prioritize work, to focus on family well-being and children's education needs. Other parents felt pressure to continue maintaining pre-pandemic levels of productivity at work, and adjusted their expectations for themselves in other domains of family life:

Really, I focused on doing my job, I focused on the thing that was most important, which was my job, because I was getting paid for that, so I needed to be doing that. And as far as the kids' education, I told myself they're learning everyday things are going to be fine and I just let it go it wasn't worth the stress that it was causing anybody. I knew enough to know that I could teach my kids things without

actually making them sit down and like to do paper or computer ... I said to myself, that was okay, and I've lowered the bar of expectation of what it should look like in my house to the ground. So, I couldn't even be disappointed because I wasn't meeting some unrealistic expectation of myself. I just like 'it is what it is.' We just rolled with it. (*Grayson, 38, mother of three*)

Social-Emotional Impact

This theme reflects parents' descriptions of the effects of the stressors of the pandemic and school shutdown on their family's well-being and children's social-emotional development. In the early months of the pandemic, families were immersed in worries about COVID-19 transmission. Parents were anxious about family members contracting COVID-19, which left them without childcare or opportunities for children to socialize outside the home. These concerns resulted in a host of other worries: parents struggled to communicate with children about the virus without causing them excessive distress, and worried about the effects of anxiety on their children. Socially, parents were concerned about the impact of lack of socialization opportunities on their children's well-being and development. Anne, a 38-year-old mother of three, expressed: "As a parent, you just want your kids to have those social skills that they learn at school that they were robbed of." Many parents expressed concern about their children's adjustment to school when the shutdown ended, especially for young children who had never attended school prior to the pandemic.

Due to pandemic-related stressors, parents noted increases in anxiety in themselves and their children, upticks in some children's negative behaviors, and strain on family relationships. Some children responded to the stress of the pandemic by becoming more attached to at-home parents, and parents were worried that their children wouldn't want to leave home to go to school. One parent remarked: "My children don't want to leave me and it's stressing me out. All they want to do is stay home ... they just want to be outside and play ... they don't want to go to school" (*Leslie, age 30, mother of four*).

Parents also noted changes in their children's behavior, resulting in more conflict among family members. Parents described how the stressors of the pandemic, school-at-home, work-at-home, and managing multiple roles at home caused strain on family relationships. After the school shutdown, parents were thrown into the roles of "teacher and mom." Parents experienced strain on relationships with children when they had to structure children's learning and step into a disciplinary "teacher" role:

Things that she wouldn't necessarily argue about doing in class ... she'd be arguing with me about.

[We had] a fight every day, and [that would] take half my day. At the time, thankfully, I wasn't working full time. I don't know how people who have jobs full time are doing this. I have no idea. (*Emily, 32, mother of two*)

Many parents acknowledged that they were unable to keep up with the demands of school at home while juggling educational needs for multiple children, work responsibilities, and their own self-care. Parents described struggles with having to emotionally support kids in their frustration with school at home, and worries about the pandemic, while also ensuring that kids kept up with schoolwork. Parents described struggling to find a balance between children's educational needs and family emotional well-being. The parents in this study dealt with these stressors by prioritizing emotional well-being and the parent-child relationship over the completion of schoolwork. They often found creative ways to support children's education that went beyond formal instruction and schoolwork.

Educationally my children suffered ... It was like pulling teeth ... [to] get her to do some of the assignments ... and one day I just like threw my hands up and I'm like, we're done ... you're learning everyday living things ... we'll go outside ... I'm done trying to get her on the computer to do her activities and whatnot. It was causing her stress and it was causing me stress, I was becoming the mean mom because I was fighting to try and get her to do her work. ... It wasn't worth it anymore, so we just kind of stopped ... [I] tried to read books with her, do some educational activities that she wouldn't know they were educational and just kind of hope for the best. (*Grayson, age 38, mother of three*)

Parents expressed worries about how their children would transition back to school when the shutdown ended, and whether they would struggle socially. Many parents were concerned about how school shutdown would affect their children's social and educational development:

[My son's] class completely was going back at basically kindergarten as first graders and even though a lot of us parents tried to do that, there was just pieces they missed, social pieces they missed, educational pieces that were missed. (*Olivia, 34, mother of two*)

The parents in our study were unsure of the long-term impacts of the pandemic and school shutdown. Moreover, they worried about how their children and families would adjust to transitions back into school and work. Like many individuals living through the pandemic, these parents were uncertain about how to envision their families' future.

Responding to Challenges

We identified five themes related to families' responses to pandemic-related stressors: *Successful Parenting Strategies*, *Children's Strategies*, *Using Community Provided Resources*, *Finding Unexpected Benefits*, and *Hope*.

Successful Parenting Strategies

Parents described a variety of strategies that they used to respond to pandemic-related stressors, and their impacts on family well-being, children's education, and parents' work. In response to the rapid increase in novel challenges due to the pandemic and school shutdown, parents used adaptive strategies to mitigate the effects of pandemic-related stressors. For example, parents were able to use social-emotional skills to help their children with their anxiety and frustration. One parent, Bethany (*age 38, mother of three*), reported:

One of the biggest things that I learned was affirming my child's feelings as we're going through things. My kid, his feelings got a lot bigger with the pandemic and so just recognizing that and acknowledging that with him really seemed to make a big difference and how he responded to life in general.

Parents also implemented creative parenting strategies to deal with novel challenges. One parent explained how they used their backyard to deal with stress. One parent, Olivia (*age 34, mother of two*) shared:

I always garden, but this last year, I made the garden bigger, and the children helped with you know the dimensions of the garden, getting the earth ready, digging up the trenches for the potatoes, they spent more time in the garden so with every stress, we had to find a positive to survive.

Outdoor spaces were vital to parents finding ways for children to socialize with lower risk of COVID transmission. Parents used various strategies to find ways for their children to socialize without the risk of COVID transmission, including online socializing, spending time outside, and getting new pets. Many parents used Zoom calls for socializing safely. One parent, Andrea (*32, mother of one*), shared: "[My daughter] had a friend that she showed her entire backyard [on Zoom], and she's like took my phone and they played baseball over Zoom in the backyard." Parents also reported they let neighborhood kids play out in their yards. One parent, Emerson (*30, mother of two*), explained how she managed her children's needs for socialization with her concerns about COVID transmission:

I just felt so bad telling these five-, six- and seven-year old's, every single day, four or five times a day, that we can't play. So, I was like fine, just don't

touch each other and they played out in our yard, and I was like, no touching.

Outdoor space was readily available to families, due to their living in rural communities. Inside the house, however, parents faced the challenge of having enough space to accommodate children doing school at home. Some parents described demarcating separate spaces for their children to work in, so that they wouldn't distract one another from schoolwork. Parents reported how they managed new demands on space for school, work, and play in the home. One parent, George (*29, mother of four*), shared:

> We had defined learning spaces in our house, so each kid had a specific place where they did their work. And that's how I really made sure that they were focused ... I thought oh we'll just do it at the kitchen table all together and be happy family. That was not gonna happen ... So, once we defined separate spaces on opposite sides of the house that worked much better.

Faced with juggling work and school from home, with limitations on space and technological resources, parents responded strategically to the multiple demands on their time and resources. Parents described the importance of making a schedule for children's schoolwork and activities, as well as for their own work time. Many parents emphasized the importance of keeping routines such as a regular bedtime and a regular mealtime. One parent, Anne (*38, mother of three*), reported:

> We still kept our morning and evening routines; the kids went to bed at the same time, you know got up. Once in a while I was like sure you can have a pajama day but I'm like you still need to do the same, you know, get up, eat, so that you're ready and then you know start your schoolwork we always try to get it done in the morning, just trying to have some consistency and a routine.

Parents talked about having scheduled time for electronic devices and enforcing that schedule so that kids didn't spend too much time on electronics. One parent, Elaine (*37, mother of three*), explained:

> What I found works best for us was, I have a time structure as in, we start school at 10a.m., period end of discussion and everybody gets involved so everything electronic that is not for school is shut off for the day ... We don't allow electronics at all, TV, or anything until after dinner ... I try to keep that big eight-hour chunk in the day somewhere is just completely quiet, except for their school.

Many parents remarked that while initially they had set a strict schedule, they soon learned that it was unrealistic to hold themselves and their kids to that schedule.

Parents described being responsive to kids' emotional needs by offering them fun times when they finished their schoolwork. One parent, Lindsay (*35, mother of two*), explained:

> We did a schedule, too, and we tried to get all of our stuff done in the morning, if we could, so that we could do fun activities in the afternoon like baking or going for a walk or you know, having a bike ride.

Parents' flexibility with scheduling activities for the day helped them adapt to children's emotional needs and their own work schedules and needs for rest.

Children's Strategies

Parents talked about how their children regulated their negative emotions and used strategies to solve daily difficulties (e.g., stop, think, breath, sit down and work through a dilemma). Parents reported they observed their children using emotion regulation strategies such as re-focusing, taking time by themselves, stopping to think about how to react, and using their words. One parent, Andrea (*32, mother of one*), shared: "I really remember her really sitting down and like working through a dilemma of like every possible choice, she could make." Parents also talked about children '*using their words*' to verbalize how they were feeling, to give apologies, and to resolve social dilemmas. One parent, Linday (*35, mother of two*), explained:

> I've noticed my son started to label emotions. He'll say this is making me mad or this is making me frustrated, what you're saying to me, makes me sad. And so, then it provided an opportunity for us to talk about what you can do to make that better.

Finding Unexpected Benefits

Despite many challenges from the school shutdown during the pandemic, parents identified positive changes that had come from the pandemic shutdown. In the description of the experiences during school shut down, parents described that they were able to give themselves time to rest, spend more time with family members together at home, and strengthen family relationships. Many parents talked about their families spending more time together during the shutdown. Despite the demands of school and work from home, parents were able to have more time to play with and talk to their children. One parent, Anna (*36, mother of three*) expressed:

> I think honestly my family has gotten better because of the shutdown; so much more time together. We used to go to–we have family that lives out of town in both directions–and so all of our weekends were always traveling and even shutting down sports a little bit ... it was really good I feel like our whole family got a reset and now it's like we ... it sounds

terrible but we play with our kids more than we ever did because we broke the cycle of all the things that we've had to get done.

In addition, many parents noted that their children had responded positively to the shutdown by building stronger relationships with their siblings and developing a deeper understanding of the world, themselves, and each other. Parents noted progression in children's social-emotional development, and one parent remarked that her child had become more curious and engaged in asking questions. June (*38, mother of three*) described her first-grade son: "He's had a wonderful year. He's way more able to focus, and he seems to just really treasure being with his friends and being at school ... I think also like he's had a lot of growth, too." Many parents also noted the advantages of living rurally. They stated that their lives were not as affected by the pandemic because it was easier to keep social distance, while still spending time outside. Parents said that living rurally markedly decreased their worries about COVID-19 transmission. Moreover, parents were not as concerned about household necessity shortages because many were used to buying in bulk and living off their stores. Additionally, parents described unique ways of coping that were available to them in rural and farming communities, such as growing a garden, raising farm animals, and spending days outside.

Using Community Provided Resources

Many families used community-provided resources to bolster their resilience during the pandemic. Parents received various forms of support, primarily from schools, but also from community organizations, faith organizations, and individuals in their community. Material support offered to families by their schools included devices and hotspots, schoolwork packets, workbooks, prepared lunches, and pantry food. When access to technological resources became essential during the pandemic and school shutdown, many parents found themselves in need of devices, Wi-Fi, or hotspots. These technological resources were typically made available by school. In addition, parents used a variety of learning websites to supplement children's homeschooling.

Families also received various forms of social support from teachers and community members during the shutdown, including Zoom meetings with teachers, guidance counselors, and therapists, as well as "social Zooms" with friends, other parents from their children's school, and faith communities. Additionally, parents received support for homeschooling from other parents and childcare from extended family members:

> I immediately reached out to a friend of mine who is a stay-at-home mom. She just welcomed her 10th baby. ... she chooses to homeschool, she gardens,

she sews, and her curriculum is faith based, and I wanted to reach out to her to say, 'okay, you have multiple ages, what does your day look like.' (*Olivia, age 34, mother of two*)

Hopes Beyond COVID-19

Parents described their hope for going back to normal, as vaccines were soon becoming available. They expressed hopes that most people in their community could get vaccinated, so their children could go back to school, play with friends, and have more outdoor activities without concern about COVID-19. Additionally, many parents made meaning from their struggles during the pandemic by recognizing how they had responded adaptively, with novel problem-solving strategies and openness to change. One parent, a teacher working from home, explained that the pandemic had required her to learn new teaching techniques, and to gain a higher level of technological literacy. Another parent remarked on how pandemic-related constraints and stressors had fostered new ways of doing things that were valuable for everyday life:

> I think, in a positive outlook on life, like all tough times usually for us to adapt in some way ... I think it kind of gave us like this kind of push to new ways to handle things that make everyday life easier too. (*Emily, 32, mother of two*)

DISCUSSION

This study explored the experiences of rural Nebraskan parents of young children during the COVID-19 pandemic and school shutdown. Thematic analysis was used to generate the following themes related to pandemic challenges: *Impacts on Children's Education and Development*, *Impact on Parent's Work*, and *Social-Emotional Impacts*. Additionally, we generated themes related to the ways that rural parents responded to those challenges: *Successful Parenting Strategies*, *Children's Strategies*, *Using Community Provided Resources*, *Finding Unexpected Benefits*, and *Hope*. In the following discussion, we synthesize these themes, contextualize them in literature, and discuss the limitations and implications of this study.

The Demands of a Young Family, At-Home Learning, and a Career were Overwhelming

Overwhelmingly, parents were concerned that the school shutdown impacted children's social, emotional, and academic difficulties. A critical challenge that parents faced during school closure was providing instructional and emotional support for children's remote learning. Parents were expected to support the coordination of children's virtual learning schedules, monitor children's

behavior during virtual learning, and help them with schoolwork.

Additionally, parents described that their children experienced social (e.g., lack of socialization, loneliness, conflict relationships, aggression), emotional (e.g., stress, anxiety), and academic difficulties (e.g., lack of learning, lack of focus) due to the school shutdown, and parents were anxious about managing those difficulties. These findings align with many recent studies that the COVID-19 pandemic and school shutdown negatively impacted family's well-being and children's education and social-emotional development (Adams et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2020; Cox & Abrams, 2020; Kerr et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021; Minkin, 2021; Roos et al., 2021).

Parents also described pressure to maintain working performance as professionals, and at the same time, fulfill their responsibilities as parents. Although most parents in our study did not report loss of employment as a concern, this meant that many parents were working full time during the school shutdown. They reported that the most salient challenges during school closure were juggling the multiple demands of school-at-home, work-from-home, and household duties simultaneously. These multiple demands made them frustrated as they had to manage their working schedule and young children's school schedule, support children's mental health and take care of themselves, which increased conflict among family members and disrupted the families' overall well-being. After school closure, childcare and domestic responsibilities increased, and so did emotional labor of caregiving. Parents reported that in combination with pandemic stress and work-from-home challenges, these demands superseded what they were able to provide. Preliminary research on the impact of the pandemic on women has indicated that domestic and childcare responsibilities were disproportionately placed on women during shutdowns, and that more women left the workforce during the pandemic than men (Clark et al., 2021; Igielnik, 2021).

Something Had to Give: Reprioritizing, Resilience and Finding a Brightside

The demands for school at home exceeded what parents and children were able to accomplish, resulting in reductions in time and energy spent on formal schooling. Parents shifted priority from maintaining pre-pandemic educational progress and work performance toward maintaining social and emotional well-being and strengthening family bonds. Parents sought to reduce stress by reducing the amount of schoolwork they expected children to complete and adjusting their expectations for what they could accomplish at work. In addition to reducing the expectations surrounding school and work, they also employed strategies to help minimize the stress of mul-

tiple schedules and their children's needs. For example, parents set schedules for their work and children's schoolwork, while remaining flexible with how time was spent so that they could be responsive to children and family needs. A previous study also found that as pandemic stress increased, parents implemented family routines as a strategy to support familial coping with COVID-19 related disruptions (Adams et al., 2021).

Additionally, families in this study used community-provided resources to cope with challenges during the pandemic. Their communities and schools provided technological resources (e.g., technological devices, Wi-Fi, hotspots), schoolwork packets, and workbooks to support children's homeschooling, but also offered social support (e.g., Zoom meetings with teachers, guidance counselors, therapists, virtual social calls with friends or other parents). These community-provided resources helped parents mitigate some concerns about children's social-emotional development by allowing their children to virtually communicate with their schoolmates, friends, and teachers.

In addition to virtual socializing, to support their children's social-emotional development, parents ensured that kids had playtime outside, helped children identify and express emotions, and found creative ways for children to socialize safely in person, like creating small pods of friends that they could play with regularly. Children also used strategies to respond to pandemic-related stressors; some parents observed that their children tried regulating their emotions and managing stress, using self-timeout, or talking about their feelings. The findings from this study point to parents' and children's use of social-emotional knowledge to support emotional and behavioral regulation during the pandemic and school closure. These findings reflect those from recent studies, which found that parent's and children's social-emotional resources predicted better adjustment to remote learning (Lee et al., 2021), and that parents supported child adjustment during the pandemic by doing family activities together, spending more time outside, finding new hobbies, improving social-emotional skills, and developing bonds with neighbors (Adams et al., 2021; Eales et al., 2021).

In this study, parents made meaning from their struggles by recognizing how they had responded adaptively with novel problem-solving strategies and openness to change. Parents expressed that pandemic-related constraints and stressors had fostered new ways of doing things that were valuable for everyday life. Interestingly, parents in this study identified the pandemic shutdown as an opportunity to rest, to spend more time with family home, and to strengthen family relationships. This finding is consistent recent studies, which have found that parents experienced more time spent with their children (Brown et al., 2020; Calvano et al., 2021), felt closer to

their children (Kerr et al., 2021; Prime et al., 2020), increased gratitude to parenting (Kerr et al., 2021), and slower pace of life (Calvano et al., 2021) because of the stay-at-home restrictions.

Moreover, the parents in this study were residents of rural communities in the Great Plains region, which affected how they responded to pandemic challenges. They derived benefits from living rurally, such as keeping social distance easily, worrying less about COVID-19 transmission, availability of food from farms and land for growing produce, and easy access to outside so that their families were able to spend time together with outdoor activities. More research is needed on how the differences of locale influenced COVID-19 responses in families of young children.

Despite many challenges from the school shutdown during the pandemic, many parents expressed adaptive changes. During a time of intense stress, fear, and uncertainty, many parents were able to experience positive changes, and the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown strengthened family members' relations and promoted adaptation and resilience (Ahmen et al., 2020; Prime et al., 2020). However, other research found that increased family chaos during the school shutdown due to COVID-19 was related to increases in sibling conflict and parent-child conflict (Cassinat et al., 2021). These findings suggest that family relationship quality may buffer negative experiences during COVID-19. More research is needed to better understand how protective factors, family dynamics, and resilience processes that may mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 related stressors.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. The sample was small, and only parents involved with a broader research study of the INSIGHTS curriculum (McClowry, 2014) were invited to participate. Although the sample was comprised of parents of differing rural statuses (e.g., remote, rural fringe) and class backgrounds, this study did not analyze these varying statuses or their effects on our results. Additionally, the convenience sample only included White mothers, although we sought participation from a more diverse sample of mothers and fathers. Estimates from the 2020 U.S. Census indicate that about 78% of residents in the state of Nebraska are White, with even higher percentages in rural counties. This presented serious challenges to recruiting BIPOC participants. Other barriers to recruitment included English-language requirements for study participation, and the non-inclusion of rural tribal schools in our study. Critical scholars have argued that current research in social science tends to use predominantly White convenience samples, thereby reinforcing Whiteness as a normative default and situating BIPOC experiences as atypical or less valuable in research (Buchanan et al., 2021). The absence of BIPOC participants in our sample is a considerable limitation. Thus, the results from our study cannot be generalized to BIPOC residents of rural communities. Despite the long history of systemic racism in the social sciences (Buchanan et al., 2021), there are exemplary studies that center the experiences of BIPOC rural communities, such as the Running Bear et al. (2021) study of rural Native American students with disabilities, and Stanley's (2015) study of advocacy efforts of rural southern African American mothers of children with disabilities. Future research must prioritize the experiences of BIPOC participants in social science, particularly in the field of rurality studies.

Previous research has shown that there were gender disparities with how parents respond to COVID-19 (Cox & Abram, 2020; Kerr et al., 2021). Therefore, our findings cannot be broadly generalized to rural parents. The findings need to be interpreted cautiously in that there are many potential factors (e.g., SES, relationships among family members, family dynamics, individual parent characteristics such as mental health, individual child characteristics such as developmental concerns) that may have resulted in different impacts of COVID-19. Importantly, findings from phenomenological research should not be considered generalizable to populations; they offer a closer look at a particular phenomenon that emerges from a shared experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While these findings can be used to inform understanding of rural parenting and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, they cannot be generalized to characterize the experiences of a broader rural population.

Implications for Education, Well-being, and Rural Communities

This study is meaningful because it documented the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and school shutdown on rural families with young children, and their responses to pandemic-related stressors. Our findings provide further insights into families' experiences of how COVID-19 affected their lives. However, this study did not explore causal relationships between pandemic stressors, family adjustment, and child development. Future research could explore the following questions: What are the protective factors that mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19? What services and supports help parents feel empowered to respond to pandemic-related stressors? What are the mechanisms for sustainable effects of those services and supports? Additionally, future studies should examine the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on rural family well-being, rural children's education, and development, and examine how rural families, schools, and communities responded to cascading consequences

of the pandemic.

An accumulation of stressors due to COVID-19 can be a key risk factor for children's maladjustment. Our findings highlight the need to address the challenges that rural parents are experiencing, such as strategies for balancing demands of remote learning, work, and childcare, and access to resources like technology and childcare. Our findings identified some strategies that parents used to manage pandemic-related stress, which can inform program and policy to support rural families. Findings from a previous study conducted in the months following school closure indicated that parents' perceived stress was associated with the level of support they received, which in turn predicted fewer negative parenting behaviors (Brown et al., 2020). Therefore, dedicated support systems for families are needed. Enhanced and sustained emotional, social, educational, and financial support are necessary to mitigate the deleterious impact of COVID-19.

Our findings elucidate the challenges of rural families during the COVID-19 pandemic and school shutdown and their responses to pandemic-related stressors. In rural regions, schools can function as a hub where community activity is nurtured and organized, local identity and commonly held purpose are strengthened, and material and social resources are distributed (Harmon & Schafft, 2009). However, collaboration between rural communities and schools is complicated by a variety of factors, including economic issues, outmigration of young talent and leadership, state and federal policies that measure school success based solely on standardized testing, differences in social and class statuses, and educational leaders' beliefs about rurality, rural parents, and academic achievement (Budge, 2006; Blitz et al., 2013; Sherman & Sage, 2011; Harmon & Schafft, 2009).

In our study, parents stated that their families' needs, values, and priorities were often different from the schoolwork requirements and educational benchmarks set by the school. Of note, several of the parents in our sample were also teachers, and described challenges related to keeping up with the work of facilitating a remote-learning classroom, while struggling to ensure their own children participated in remote learning. While educators and parents generally share goals of supporting children's educational progress and social-emotional development, pressures of meeting benchmarks for student achievement may contribute to divergent ideas about how progress toward these goals is defined and assessed (Schafft, 2016). As Schafft (2016) has argued, over-reliance on standardized procedures for managing educational practices only increases schools' accountability to state assessment goals, while decreasing their accountability to the communities they serve, and this concern has become increasingly relevant with pandemic-related disruptions in children's participation in standardized education.

Responding to the widespread and ongoing disruptions caused by the pandemic requires meaningful collaboration between rural communities and schools. Harmon and Schafft (2009) posit that ensuring the academic success of students and fostering the social and economic vitality of rural communities are not mutually exclusive, but inextricably connected, and that collaboration toward both goals is essential for responding to challenges facing rural communities. Understanding the inextricable connections between family well-being, social and economic vitality, and children's academic success, and finding points of convergence at which to develop shared goals, will be essential for building collaborative school-community relationships as rural communities face the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results from this study suggest that during school closure, families shifted priority from maintaining pre-pandemic educational progress, toward a more holistic focus that includes social and emotional well-being. As the pandemic continues to affect education, practices, and policies, balancing educational requirements with family well-being is needed. Educational practices should build on family strengths and resources, foster social and emotional learning, support healthy family relationships, and be adaptable to the dynamic global context of the COVID-19 pandemic. More research is needed to identify the ongoing impact of these stressors on families. Future research should explore the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on families' well-being and children's education and development. Understanding specific factors linked to resilience in the unforeseen context of a modern global pandemic is critical for guiding efforts to mitigate long-term risks on children.

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APPENDIX A

<div align="center">**Table 1.** Description of Participants with Pseudonym</div>

Name	Age	Number of Children in Household	Occupational Status	Highest level of Education
Andrea	32	one	Went to jobsite, then worked from home part time	College or Vocational/Trade School
Anna	36	three	Working from home part-time	Post college
Anne	38	three	Stay at home mom, not currently working	College or Vocational/Trade School
Bethany	38	three	Stay at home mom, not currently working	College or Vocational/Trade School
Dolly	33	four	Working from home, full time	Post college
Donna	31	four	Stay at home mom, not currently working	College or Vocational/Trade School
Elaine	37	three	Went to jobsite, work hiatus due to COVID	College or Vocational/Trade School
Emerson	30	two	Stay at home mom, not currently working	College or Vocational/Trade School
Emily	32	two	Stay at home mom, not currently working	Post college
George	29	four	Working from home full time	Post college
Grayson	38	three	Working from home, full time	Post college
Jane	35	three	Stay at home mom, not currently working	Post college
June	38	three	Working from home full time	Post college
Laura	34	three	Went to jobsite, working full time	College or Vocational/Trade School
Leslie	30	four	Went to jobsite, working full time	Post college
Lilly	37	two	Working from home full time	Post college
Lindsay	35	two	Working from home full time	Post college
Luna	32	two	Working from home full time	College or Vocational/Trade School
Molly	43	two	Stay at home mom, not currently working	College or Vocational/Trade School
Olivia	34	two	Stay at home mom, not currently working	College or Vocational/Trade School
Payton	44	one	Went to jobsite, working full time	College or Vocational/Trade School
Rachel	32	four	Stay at home mom, not currently working	College or Vocational/Trade School

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

1. Reflecting upon the abrupt shutdown of school last spring, please describe the stressors faced and ways that your family has dealt with the stress of Covid 19.
2. Please share any parenting tips/strategies that you have successfully used (with your child) during the pandemic.
3. What resources and support did you have, or wish you had since the start of the pandemic?
4. What are you most concerned about as the pandemic continues?
5. When your child began his/her schooling at home, how did you accommodate/facilitate their learning? Was your child's temperament considered in how you managed his/her at home schooling and their new routines?
6. Have you noticed your children using any types of problem-solving or self-regulating strategies to handle their distress?