

C -SPACE study

COVID-19: Supporting Parents, Adolescents and Children during Epidemics

Co-SPACE IRELAND

Report 01: Findings from the first 500 participants on parent/carer stress and reported child activity

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The Co-SPACE Study

Background

COVID-19 has caused major disruptions to families' lives, through social distancing, school closures and lock-down. This is also a rapidly changing situation where different pressures will arise for children, young people and their families over time. While research has provided valuable information about how parents can support their children's mental health in general, we know little about what is most effective in the current, changing context.

The Co-SPACE project is tracking the mental health of school-aged children and young people aged 4-18 years throughout the COVID-19 crisis. An online survey is sent out and completed on a monthly basis by parents/carers and young people (if aged 11-18 years) throughout the pandemic. The study has full ethical and data protection approval (ethical approval ref: 2020_04_22_EHS) and is fully GDPR compliant. The findings will help identify what protects children and young people from deteriorating mental health over time, and at particular stress points. Findings will be shared directly with health and education services to inform the development and provision of effective support for children and families.

Co-SPACE Ireland is led by Dr Jennifer McMahon, Lecturer at the University of Limerick. The study is linked to research of the same name led by Professor Cathy Creswell and Dr Polly Waite in the UK. **The Irish research team includes: Jennifer McMahon, Orla Muldoon, Elaine Gallagher, Clíodhna O Connor, Sharon Houghton, Megan Ryan, Eibhlin Walsh.**

Recruitment & Sample

The study sample has been recruited through a variety of means, including social media, distribution through partner organisations, networks and charities, the media and targeted online advertising. The self-selecting nature of recruitment means that *this will not be a nationally representative sample*. For the long-term, we are aiming to have good representation across a wide range of socio-demographic and health factors (e.g., income, ethnicity, pre-existing mental/physical health difficulties) to investigate the experiences for different groups that may be particularly vulnerable during and after the pandemic.

We are keen to recruit as many families as possible to the study. Parents/carers can sign up and take part at any point:

<https://www.i-teach.ie/co-space-study> or <https://cospaceoxford.com/survey>

Further information

For further information or to request specific analyses, please contact the research team at cospace@ul.ie

Key findings

- **The top 3 stressors for parents/carers were (i) their children's education, (ii) work (even in jobs that were secure), and (iii) their children's screen-time.**
- **Nearly 2/3 of parents/carers reported that they were sufficiently meeting the needs of both work and their child with 1/3 reporting that they were only meeting their needs a bit or not at all.**
- **Less than half of the parents reported that their child completed 2 or more hours of schoolwork per day. 60% of adolescents and 23% of children were completing 2 or more hours of schoolwork per day.**
- **More than 1/2 adolescents are keeping in daily contact with friends via WhatsApp app/texting and social media.**
- **Around 3/4 of children and young people are getting more than 30 minutes of exercise per day.**
- **The top ways children and adolescents combined are spending their time is i) Schoolwork ii) Watching TV/Netflix/Films/YouTube iii) Listening to Music iv) Playing video or computer games.**

Further Information

This report is based upon the data from the first 500 parents/carers who have taken part in Co-SPACE Ireland. These participants completed the survey during a 3-week period, between Monday 7th April and Saturday 29th April (please note that this time period was inclusive of Easter holidays and although participants were asked to reflect on a typical day, not school holidays, this may have impacted on how parents/carers reported on specific findings such as routine). In the current report, 89% of all participants who completed the questionnaire were female, mostly mothers. Furthermore, the majority of the sample was employed, either part-time (28%) or full-time (35%), and had an average income of >30,000 (73%). Child age ranged from 4-18 years (average age 11.3 years old). 39% responded for children and 61% responded for adolescents. Approximately 54% of children are male, and 43% female (<1% other; <1% not sure/questioning; and <1% prefer not to say). Approximately 51% of adolescents are male, and 48% female (1% prefer not to say; <1% not sure/questioning). For the purposes of this report children refers to those aged 4-10yrs, adolescents refers to those aged 11-18yrs.

1. Parent/carer stress

(a) Work

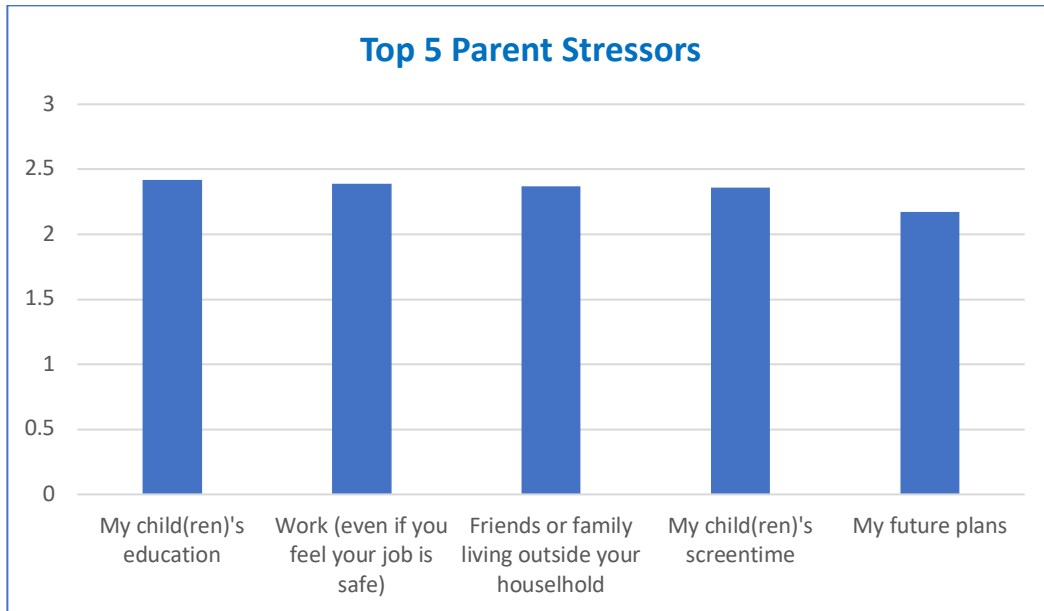
Responses indicated that 63% of parents in the survey were working. Of these, 43% were working part-time and 57% were working full-time. 79% were working from home and 21% of those were working out of the home. Of the 21% of parents working outside the home, 47% are healthcare workers, 18% are essential services workers, and 11% are frontline workers. The remaining parents are employed in a variety of positions, including transport services, farming, online retail, childcare, and PPE manufacturing.

(b) Combining work and child's needs

Responses indicated that 59% reported that they were meeting the needs of their child either 'a lot' or 'completely' compared to 41% who reported they were either 'not' or only 'a bit' currently able to meet the needs of both their work and their child.

(c) Main causes of stress

The top five sources of stress (that were causing parents/carers either 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal' of stress) related to work, children and family/friends outside the household, and the future.



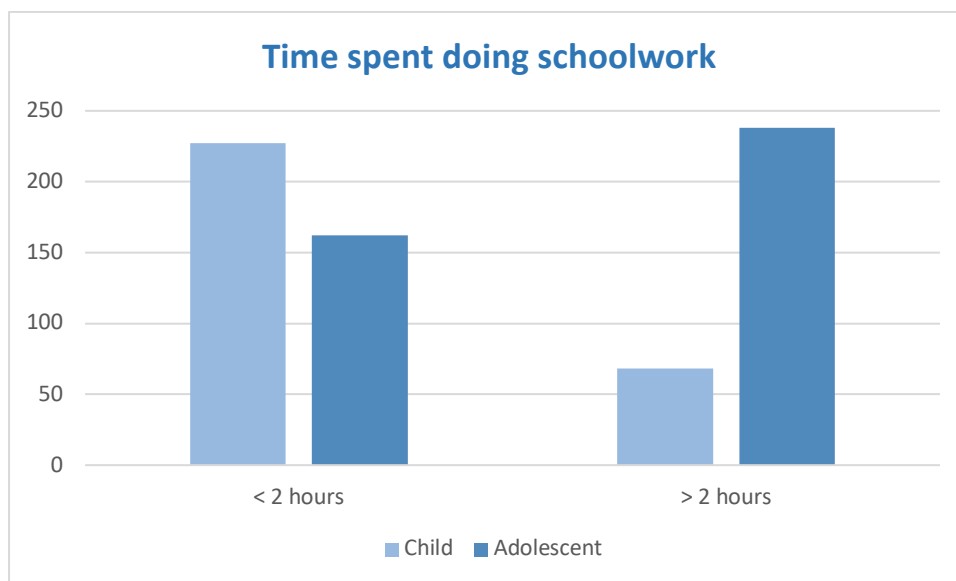
2. How children and adolescents spent their time

Parents were asked how their child was spending their time on a typical day.

(a) Schoolwork

Parents reported that very few of their children/adolescents were completing no schoolwork (5% of children and around 6% of adolescents) each day.

44% of the children and adolescents were completing more than 2 hours of schoolwork per day. Broken down by age, about 60% of the adolescents and nearly one quarter (23%) of the children were reported to be completing more than 2 hours of schoolwork per day.



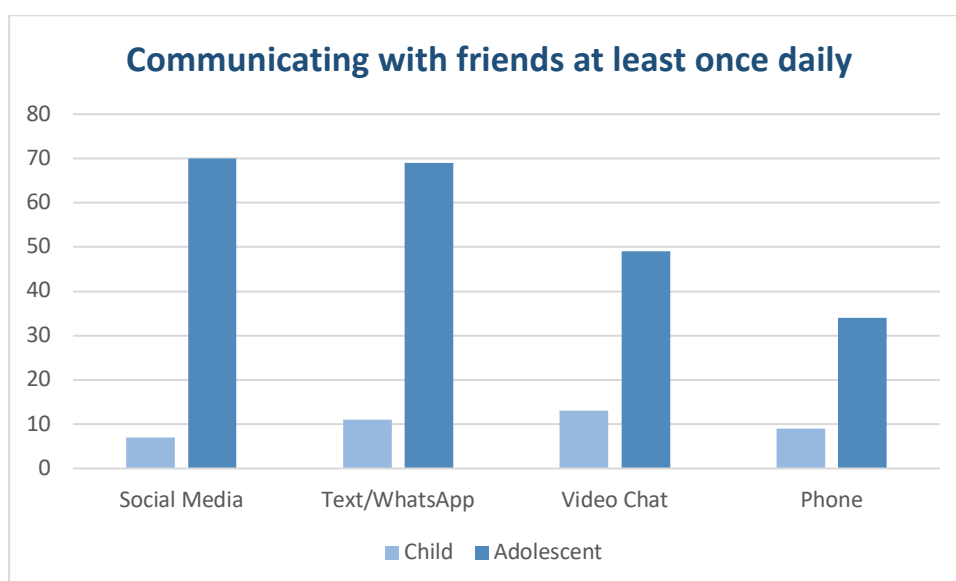
Almost three quarters (72%) of parents of children and just over half (59%) of parents of adolescents reported that they were able to support their children a lot or a great deal around schoolwork.

(b) Regularly communicating with friends

Around one third of children and adolescents were reported to be regularly communicating with friends (at least once per day) using video chat (13% of children and 49% of adolescents).

Just under half the adolescents were using a range of other means to communicate at least daily with friends over the last week (WhatsApp/text messaging 69%; phone 34%), with the most popular being social media (70%). A portion of adolescents were using these communication means either ‘not at all’ or ‘less than once per day’ (video chat 51%; WhatsApp/text messaging 31%; phone 66%; and social media 30%).

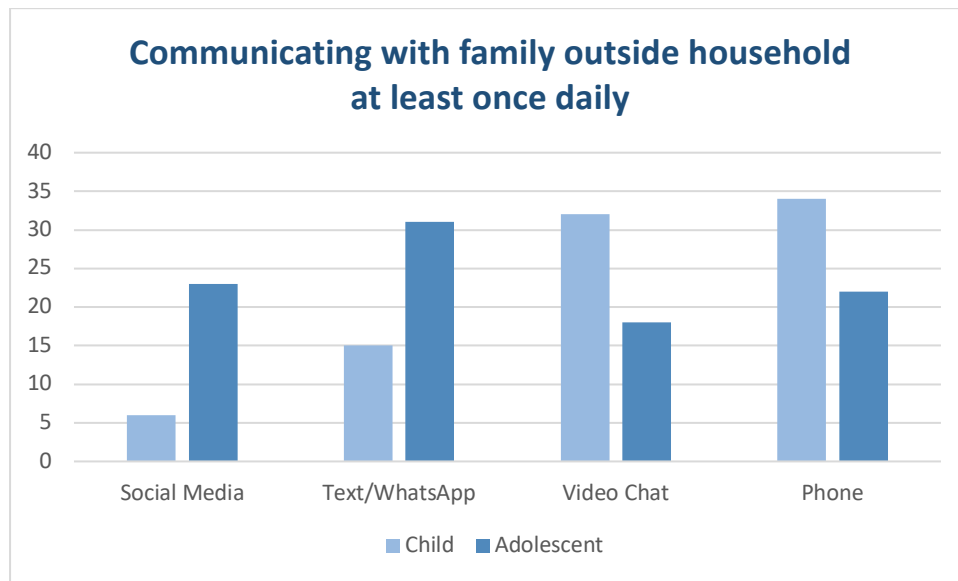
A small number of children were using other means to communicate with friends at least once daily (WhatsApp/text messaging 11%; phone 9% and social media 7%). The majority of children were using these communication means either ‘not at all’ or ‘less than once per day’ (video chat 87%; WhatsApp/text messaging 89%; phone 91%; and social media 93%).



(c) Contact with family living outside the household

For children, nearly one third (32%) were regularly (at least once daily) communicating with family members outside the household via video chat and just over one third (34%) by phone. WhatsApp/text messaging (15%) and social media (6%) were less regularly used by children.

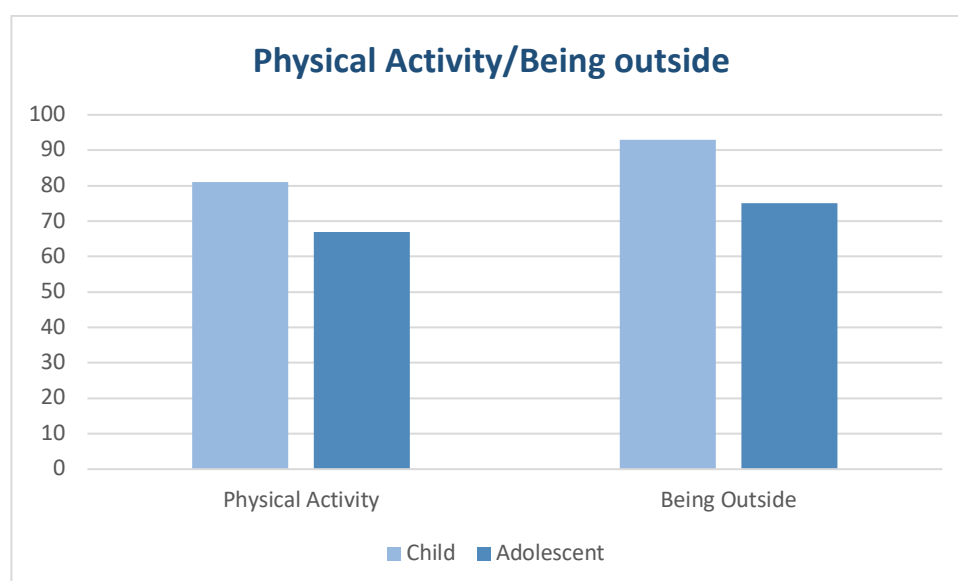
For adolescents, almost one third were regularly communicating with family members outside the household using WhatsApp/text messaging (31%), social media (23%) or the phone (22%), with video chat less regularly used (18%).



(d) Physical activity/being outside

Almost three quarters, 73%, of parents reported that, on average, their child took part in at least 30 minutes of energetic physical activity per day, inside or outside the house. Broken down by age, 81% of children and 67% of adolescents were reported to take part in more than 30 minutes of energetic physical activity per day.

83% of parents reported that, on average, their child was spending more than 30 minutes a day outside. Broken down by age, 93% of children and 75% of adolescents were reported to be spending more than 30 minutes outside per day.



Appendix A

Participants' demographics

		Number of observations	%
<i>Parent/carer</i>	Parents	485	97
	Carers	15	3
<i>Gender</i>	Female	446	89.3
	Male	49	9.7
	Other	5	1
<i>Work</i>	Working full time	175	34.9
	Working part-time	139	27.9
	Not working	186	37.3
<i>Annual household income</i>	< €34,000	92	18.5
	> €34,000	367	73.4
	Prefer not to say	41	8.1
<i>Child age</i>	Child (aged 4-10 years)	196	39.2
	Adolescent (aged 11-18 years)	304	60.8
<i>Child gender</i>	Female	231	46.2
	Male	262	52.3
	Other	7	1.5