Effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on children: an analysis of the situation through a cross-sectional study

Efeito da pandemia de COVID-19 nas crianças: análise da situação através de um estudo transversal

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Abstract

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in Vietnam, providing support for children has emerged as a significant challenge for social workers. However, there is a lack of research examining how social workers assess the pandemic's impact on children. In this study, we conducted a survey

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within a population-based cohort of children in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. By employing the "Children’s Coping Strategies during COVID-19" scale, we evaluated the pandemic's multifaceted influence on children through the lens of the effectiveness of social work measures. The results revealed distinct and significant positive correlations between the impacts of COVID-19 on children, children’s coping strategies during COVID-19, the social work approach, and the effectiveness of the social work approach. Moreover, the impacts of COVID-19 on the effectiveness of the social work approach on children after the pandemic, encompassing aspects like ensuring primary care for children, personal intervention, discussions on the pandemic's impact on children's lives and activities, as well as school support, were all significantly and positively associated with the effectiveness of social work measures. Additionally, the analysis unveiled that social workers assessed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Vietnamese children as yielding average effects. These findings underscore the significance of interdisciplinary support and rehabilitation for children grappling with the consequences of COVID-19. Nevertheless, for a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term effects, future longitudinal research is imperative. Please review the text for grammar and accuracy.

**Keywords:** COVID-19. Social Workers. Child Support.

**Resumo**

Em meio à pandemia da Covid-19 no Vietnã, o fornecimento de apoio a crianças emergiu como um desafio significativo para os assistentes sociais. No entanto, há uma falta de pesquisa para examinar como os assistentes sociais avaliam o impacto da pandemia nas crianças. Neste estudo, realizamos uma pesquisa dentro de uma coorte populacional de crianças da cidade de Ho Chi Minh, Vietnã. Ao empregar a escala "Children’s Coping Strategies during COVID-19" (Estratégias de enfrentamento das crianças durante a Covid-19), avaliamos a influência multifacetada da pandemia nas crianças através da lente da eficácia das medidas de trabalho social. Os resultados revelaram correlações positivas distintas e significativas entre os impactos da Covid-19 nas crianças, as estratégias de enfrentamento das crianças durante a Covid-19, a abordagem de trabalho social e a eficácia da abordagem de trabalho social. Além disso, os impactos da COVID-19 sobre a eficácia da abordagem de trabalho social nas crianças após a pandemia, abrangendo aspectos como a garantia de cuidados primários para as crianças, a intervenção pessoal, os debates sobre o impacto da pandemia nas vidas e atividades das crianças, bem como o apoio escolar, foram todos associados de forma significativa e positiva à eficácia das medidas de trabalho social. Além disso, a análise revelou que os


**Introduction**

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (WHO, 2023). Children of all ages are susceptible to COVID-19. Since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, concerns regarding children's mental health have been on the rise. The stress brought about by the disease, its physical effects, economic instability, uncertainty, social justice and racial equity issues, isolation, and disruptions to daily life can contribute to increased mental health difficulties in children (Hawke et al., 2020b). Furthermore, the shift to remote or hybrid schooling has raised concerns that children may require more mental health support without access to traditional resources (Phelps & Sperry, 2020). A study conducted by Rosen et al. (2020) found that Canadian adolescents and young adults with pre-existing health conditions or COVID-19 symptoms were more likely to meet screening criteria for anxiety disorders or depression compared to those without physical health issues. Among individuals with poor physical health conditions, there were greater declines in mental health during COVID-19 compared to the three months prior to the pandemic (Hawke et al., 2020b). Another Canadian study reported that between 67% and 70% of youth, depending on their age group, experienced deterioration in at least one aspect of mental health, such as anxiety or irritability. Additionally, a survey of 8,079 Chinese high school students revealed that 43.7% exhibited depressive symptoms, 37.4% experienced anxiety symptoms, and 31.3% had a combination of anxiety and depression symptoms. Furthermore, a study by Duan et al. (2020) involving 3,613 Chinese students found that 22.28% reported a higher rate of clinically significant depression compared to the period before the pandemic. Thus, our aimed to assess the extent to which children and adolescents have experienced significant repercussions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
The Role of Social Workers on Vietnamese Children in COVID 19 Pandemic

According to the report "Rapid assessment of the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable households in Vietnam" by UNDP (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic has had various effects on children. In 62 out of 63 provinces and cities in Vietnam, a total of at least 11,822 children were identified as F0 cases (confirmed COVID-19 cases), and 27,334 children were classified as F1 cases (close contacts of F0 cases). Many children have been left orphaned by the loss of their fathers, mothers, or both due to the pandemic, leaving them without a reliable support system. It is worth noting that during the first six months of 2021, there were 1,233 reported cases of child abuse, representing a 21.8% increase compared to the same period in 2020. These cases involved the abuse of 1,284 children, indicating a 21.2% increase compared to the same period in 2020. Among the reported cases, 1,014 were related to sexual abuse of children. While the specific link between COVID-19 and child abuse in Vietnam has not been investigated, it can be inferred that the pandemic has had an influence on children's well-being. In a study conducted by Weng (2022), participants expressed how their lives have become overwhelmingly busy since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. They described their days as "hectic," "nonstop," and acknowledged the presence of compassion fatigue and exhaustion, which have had an impact on their mental well-being and ability to provide care to patients. One participant highlighted the additional time and effort required to adapt to the changes brought about by telehealth usage and the implementation of personal protective equipment (PPE) (Weng, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has presented numerous challenges to the healthcare system in the United States, resulting in devastating consequences. The sudden and frequent changes, such as shelter-in-place orders, quarantining, and social distancing mandates, have likely contributed to increased anxiety among both healthcare staff and patients (Sharif et al., 2020). The interdisciplinary healthcare team consists of professionals from various backgrounds, including social workers, psychiatrists, primary care physicians, and nurses, who collaborate to provide holistic patient care. Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the workforce in integrated healthcare settings in the United States was already facing heightened stress and burnout (Rodriguez et al., 2020).

To the best of our knowledge, no previous research has examined the measures implemented to support children affected by COVID-19 in Ho Chi Minh City from the perspective of social workers. It is important to evaluate the effectiveness of these measures by considering the different aspects of social worker support for children affected by the
pandemic. In addition, our study will demonstrate that the Children’s Coping Strategies during COVID-19 will be positive correlated with the efficacy of social work measures.

**Methodology**

**3.1 Participants**

The current study involved 62 participants who are social workers in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Of the participants, 1 (1.6%) held a Ph.D. degree, 19 (30.7%) held a master's degree, 41 (66.1%) held a bachelor's degree, and 1 (1.6%) had other degrees. Among them, 24 (37.1%) participants had less than one year of experience in their job, 7 (11.3%) had one to three years of experience, 5 (8.1%) had three to six years of experience, and 27 (43.5%) had more than six years of experience. In terms of the duration social workers dedicated to supporting children affected by COVID-19, 20 (32.2%) participants spent approximately one month, 17 (27.4%) spent between one month and six months, 4 (6.5%) spent from six months to one year, and 21 (33.9%) spent more than a year.

**3.2 Procedures**

Our study utilized a convenient sampling method to gather data from a limited sample of social workers in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam who were actively involved in supporting children affected by COVID-19. Social workers were identified and contacted through a list obtained from the social worker club in Ho Chi Minh City. Prior to participating in the research survey, participants were provided with comprehensive information about the research objectives, and their consent was obtained. The survey itself was conducted anonymously, and participants were requested to complete a 20-minute self-report that included demographic information and survey items relevant to the study.

**3.3 Measurements**

There were 9 instruments applied in the present study. The first questionnaire, which was based on the quantitative study by Cherewick and Glass (2018), was used to assess children’s coping strategies during COVID-19 including 9 factors. For example, Impacts of COVID-19 on children was Children’s coping strategies during COVID-19 was 0.923. Impacts of
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COVID-19 on children was 0.923. Children’s coping strategies during COVID-19 was 0.949. Social work approach was 0.917. Effectiveness of social work approach on children was 0.958. Impacts of COVID-19 on the effectiveness of social work approach on children after the pandemic was 0.952. Impacts of COVID-19 on the effectiveness of social work approach on children during the pandemic was 0.931. The feasibility of the social work approach on children during the pandemic was 0.92. Ensures primary care for children was 0.914. Personal intervention and discussion of how children’s lives and activities are affected by COVID-19 was 0.938, School support was 0.901. According to Malhotra et al. (2017), certain sets of observable variables are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree/not at all/very low) to 5 (strongly agree/extremely/very high). The score ranges were calculated based on the formula: (Maximum–Minimum)/number of levels = (5–1)/5 = 0.8. The meanings of each level are represented in Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The score ranges</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.00 - 1.80</td>
<td>Strongly disagree/ Not at all/ Very low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.81 - 2.60</td>
<td>Disagree/ Slightly/ Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.61 - 3.40</td>
<td>Neutral/ Moderate/ Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.41 - 4.20</td>
<td>Agree/ Much/ High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.21 - 5.00</td>
<td>Strongly agree/ Extremely/ Very high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Meanings of each level.
Source: Author results

3.4 Data Analysis

In this study, SPSS version 20.0 was used for data screening and management. First, Cronbach's Alpha was tested to examine the reliability of the instruments. Second, correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationships between variables. Finally, we used regression test our hypothesis.

Results

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Table 2 showed the descriptive statistic of the impact of COVID-19 on children. Impacts of COVID-19 on children was (M = 3.70, SD = 0.83). Children’s coping strategies

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during COVID-19 was \((M = 2.80, SD = .89)\). Social work approach was \((M = 3.81, SD = .77)\). Effectiveness of social work approach on children was \((M = 3.90, SD = 0.65)\). Impacts of COVID-19 on the effectiveness of social work approach on children after the pandemic was \((M = 3.94, SD = 0.62)\). Impacts of COVID-19 on the effectiveness of social work approach on children during the pandemic was \((M = 3.66, SD = 0.78)\). Ensures primary care for children was \((M = 4.09, SD = 0.73)\). Personal intervention and discussion of how children's lives and activities are affected by COVID-19 was \((M = 4.10, SD = 0.72)\) and School support was \((M = 3.97, SD = 0.80)\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M ± SD</th>
<th>R</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Impacts of COVID-19 on children</td>
<td>3.70 ± 0.83</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Children’s coping strategies during COVID-19</td>
<td>2.80 ± 0.89</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Social work approach</td>
<td>3.81 ± 0.77</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Effectiveness of social work approach on children</td>
<td>3.90 ± 0.65</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Impacts of COVID-19 on the effectiveness of social work approach on children after the pandemic</td>
<td>3.94 ± 0.62</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Impacts of COVID-19 on the effectiveness of social work approach on children during the pandemic</td>
<td>3.66 ± 0.78</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Ensures primary care for children</td>
<td>4.09 ± 0.73</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Personal intervention and discussion of how children's lives and activities are affected by COVID-19</td>
<td>4.10 ± 0.72</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. School support</td>
<td>3.97 ± 0.80</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Assessment of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children**

*Note:* M: Mean; SD: Standard Deviation; R: Rank

**Source:** Author results

### 4.2 Correlation Analysis

Table 3 presents the correlations between the seven scales. Results showed that the relationship between school support (F9) and impacts of COVID-19 on children (F1), children’s coping strategies (F2), and the impacts of COVID-19 on the effectiveness of social work approach on children during the pandemic (F6) were not found. Also, correlations between the social work approach (F3) and personal intervention and discussion of how children's lives and activities are affected by COVID-19 (F8), and between ensures primary care for children (F7) and the impacts of COVID-19 on the effectiveness of social work...
approach on children during the pandemic (F6) were not supported. Other relationships were positively associated at a 0.05, 0.01, and 0.001 level of significance respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>F1</th>
<th>F2</th>
<th>F3</th>
<th>F4</th>
<th>F5</th>
<th>F6</th>
<th>F8</th>
<th>F8</th>
<th>F9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2</td>
<td>0.704***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F3</td>
<td>0.408***</td>
<td>0.318*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F4</td>
<td>0.367***</td>
<td>0.376**</td>
<td>0.665***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F5</td>
<td>0.383***</td>
<td>0.254*</td>
<td>0.519***</td>
<td>0.710***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F6</td>
<td>0.359***</td>
<td>0.393**</td>
<td>0.065n.s</td>
<td>0.356**</td>
<td>0.383**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F7</td>
<td>0.298*</td>
<td>0.271**</td>
<td>0.602***</td>
<td>0.720***</td>
<td>0.636***</td>
<td>0.194n.s</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F8</td>
<td>0.388***</td>
<td>0.314*</td>
<td>0.178n.s</td>
<td>0.448***</td>
<td>0.597***</td>
<td>0.374**</td>
<td>0.506***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F9</td>
<td>0.206n.s</td>
<td>0.234n.s</td>
<td>0.354**</td>
<td>0.514***</td>
<td>0.519***</td>
<td>0.189n.s</td>
<td>0.612***</td>
<td>0.608***</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3: Correlation analysis.**

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001 (two-tailed), n.s = non-significant. F1 = Impacts of COVID-19 on children, F2 = Children’s coping strategies during COVID-19, F3 = Social work approach, F4 = Effectiveness of social work approach on children, F5 = Impacts of COVID-19 on the effectiveness of social work approach on children after the pandemic, F6 = Impacts of COVID-19 on the effectiveness of social work approach on children during the pandemic, F7 = Ensures primary care for children, F8 = Personal intervention and discussion of how children’s lives and activities are affected by COVID-19, F9 = School support.

Source: Author results

### 4.3 Regression

**Table 4** illustrates the unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients pertaining to the evaluation of children's coping strategies amidst the COVID-19 pandemic factors on the efficacy of social work measures.
A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to explore the relationships among various factors, including Impacts of COVID-19 on children (F1), Children’s coping strategies during COVID-19 (F2), Social work approach (F3), Effectiveness of social work approach on children (F4), Impacts of COVID-19 on the effectiveness of social work approach on children after the pandemic (F5), Impacts of COVID-19 on the effectiveness of social work approach on children during the pandemic (F6), Ensures primary care for children (F7), Personal intervention and discussion of how children’s lives and activities are affected by COVID-19 (F8), and School support (F9). The regression model demonstrated that the impacts of COVID-19 on children were significantly positively correlated with the efficacy of social work measures ($\beta = 0.113; SE = 0.179; t = 79.098; p < 0.001$). Furthermore, Children’s coping strategies during COVID-19 were significantly positively correlated with the efficacy of social work measures ($\beta = 0.134, SE = 0.228; t = 105.316; p < 0.001$). Similarly, Social work approach exhibited a significant positive correlation with the efficacy of social work measures ($\beta = 0.085, SE = 0.126; t = 55.562; p < 0.001$). Effectiveness of social work approach on children also demonstrated a significant positive correlation with the efficacy of social work measures ($\beta = 0.212, SE = 0.264; t = 99.408; p < 0.001$). Similarly, Impacts of COVID-19 on the effectiveness of social work approach on children after the pandemic displayed a significant positive correlation with the efficacy of social work measures ($\beta = 0.167, SE = 0.111; t = 81.509; p < 0.001$). Likewise, Impacts of COVID-19 on the effectiveness of social work approach on children during the pandemic exhibited a significant positive correlation with the efficacy of social work measures ($\beta = 0.121, SE = 0.180; t = 101.486; p < 0.001$). Moreover, Ensures primary care for children was significantly positively correlated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>-.645</td>
<td>.522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F1</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>0.179</td>
<td>79.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2</td>
<td>0.134</td>
<td>0.228</td>
<td>105.316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F3</td>
<td>0.085</td>
<td>0.126</td>
<td>55.562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F4</td>
<td>0.212</td>
<td>0.264</td>
<td>99.408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F5</td>
<td>0.167</td>
<td>0.199</td>
<td>81.509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F6</td>
<td>0.121</td>
<td>0.180</td>
<td>101.486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F7</td>
<td>0.060</td>
<td>0.084</td>
<td>34.469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F8</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td>32.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F9</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>0.086</td>
<td>41.252</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Regression coefficients
Source: Author results
with the efficacy of social work measures ($\beta = 0.060, SE = 0.084; t = 34.469; p < 0.01$). Similarly, Personal intervention and discussion of how children's lives and activities are affected by COVID-19 showed a significant positive correlation with the efficacy of social work measures ($\beta = 0.052, SE = 0.072; t = 32.048; p < 0.01$). Lastly, School support was also significantly positively correlated with the efficacy of social work measures ($\beta = 0.056, SE = 0.086; t = 41.252; p < 0.01$).

**Discussion and Conclusion**

In this study, we established a significant positive correlation between the impacts of COVID-19 on children and the effectiveness of social work measures. Similarly, we found that Children’s coping strategies during COVID-19 were notably and positively linked to the efficacy of social work measures. Moreover, a similar trend was observed with the Social work approach, where a significant positive correlation was evident with the effectiveness of social work measures. The Effectiveness of social work approach on children also demonstrated a meaningful positive relationship with the efficacy of social work measures. Likewise, Impacts of COVID-19 on the effectiveness of social work approach on children after the pandemic, and Impacts of COVID-19 on the effectiveness of social work approach on children during the pandemic both displayed significant positive correlations with the efficacy of social work measures. Furthermore, Ensures primary care for children, Personal intervention and discussions on the pandemic's effects on children's lives and activities, as well as school support, all exhibited significant positive associations with the effectiveness of social work measures.

These findings are in line with prior research indicating that social workers assess the pandemic’s impact on children. Effective social work strategies encompass collaborating with family members to aid children, teaching social skills to children, advocating for resources and welfare policies, and utilizing case management to enhance mental health (Sharif et al., 2020). Moreover, specific principles contribute to bolstering the effectiveness of assistance for children affected by COVID-19, encompassing maintaining strict confidentiality, respecting a child's right to self-determination, upholding professional integrity and standards, and assuming professional responsibility (Sharif et al., 2020).

This study presents valuable insights into the impact of the pandemic on children in Vietnam, a country that implemented relatively Children’s Coping Strategies during COVID-19” and the effectiveness of the social work approach scales. Nonetheless, caution should be
exercised when attempting to extrapolate these findings to different contexts, considering the varying responses and circumstances during the pandemic. The study has several limitations. Primarily, due to its cross-sectional design, it becomes challenging to establish a causal relationship between Children’s Coping Strategies during COVID-19 and the severity of the pandemic’s impact on the effectiveness of the social work approach.

Moreover, our study examined the influence of COVID-19 on the effectiveness of social work approaches for children during the pandemic, including assessing the feasibility of these approaches to ensure primary care, provide personal intervention, facilitate discussions about the pandemic’s impact on children’s lives and activities, and offer school support. We cannot dismiss the potential for reverse causation, wherein severe pandemic-related impacts might have contributed to a decline in family and mental health, ultimately influencing the extent of the pandemic's impact. Nevertheless, our core finding remains robust—that tailored support for vulnerable populations is an imperative response. Furthermore, the potency of the Children’s Coping Strategies during the COVID-19 scale and the effectiveness of the social work measures scale should be acknowledged for their assessment across diverse domains at the individual and household levels. This holistic approach effectively constructs a multidimensional measure of impact, which holds promise for future endeavors. Finally, it’s worth acknowledging that although the pandemic might have yielded positive effects for certain children, this aspect wasn’t explored due to the limitations of the Children’s Coping Strategies during COVID-19” and the effectiveness of the social work approach scales. The study holds several strengths, particularly its reliance on a substantial and randomly selected sample of children from diverse age groups. Furthermore, we were able to examine numerous determinants influencing the severity of pandemic impact at both the individual and family levels. In the future, there is potential for a more profound exploration of these aspects.

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