Positive Parenting during the Pandemic of COVID-19: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT: *The outbreak of the global pandemic, COVID-19, significantly changed our perspectives on fundamental life needs. As a result of remote learning, hybrid workspaces, increased reliance on technology, and a range of emotional and health concerns, both children and adults struggled to adapt to these changes. Parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic required balancing these challenges while fostering essential life skills. It meant adopting new and modified roles, learning new skills, and prioritising psychological well-being for parents and their families. This qualitative research study examines the critical role of positive parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic and its significant contributions to helping children cope with stress during this challenging period. Data collection involved conducting semi-structured virtual interviews with parents of thirteen children aged 6 to 10 years, residing in Mumbai and Bengaluru, India. A thematic analysis approach was used to analyze the interview transcriptions. The preliminary findings reveal common themes related to parental involvement, parental stress, social-emotional learning, and resilience, particularly in the context of virtual or online schooling. The study discusses the potential implications of positive parenting interventions during the COVID-19 pandemic and proposes strategies for fostering responsible and responsive skills among parents in the post-pandemic   era.*

I.   INTRODUCTION

Schools are regarded as institutions that create a holistic environment, focusing not only on education but also on the overall development of children and adolescents. This includes cognitive, academic, and social-emotional growth. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a global lockdown that severely disrupted traditional schooling methods. Schools halted their usual operations, and the sudden closures, lasting for extended periods, raised various concerns for both children and parents.

The education system experienced a significant transformation as it transitioned completely to online platforms. Establishing a sustainable system for remote learning proved to be challenging. This situation added extra pressure on parents, who had to balance their children's education with their work responsibilities. Parents were required to offer comprehensive support for their children's learning within the home environment.

During this period, parents assumed many responsibilities that are usually handled by schools. They found themselves balancing work-from-home arrangements with their children's education. The global COVID-19 pandemic brought about numerous challenges, resulting in financial and emotional concerns that increased psychological stress among parents.

Parental Involvement and Parental Stress

Research shows that employed parents often had to work from home while juggling childcare responsibilities, or they had to continue with essential jobs while arranging for childcare due to the closure of schools and daycare centers. Parents of school-aged children faced the additional challenge of supporting their children's schoolwork or overseeing full-time remote learning (Fisher et al., 2020).

The pandemic introduced new concerns for parents, including their family's health and safety, financial stability, job security, and an uncertain future. These stressors may have elevated the risk of adverse outcomes for both parents and children. Experts have raised concerns about a potential increase in domestic violence and child abuse during this period (Brown et al., 2020).

A review by Jaiswal and Choudhri highlights that parental involvement both at home and in school positively influences academic performance, although the effects may vary. Notably, parental expectations regarding their child's educational achievements have the most significant impact on academic success, surpassing other forms of involvement such as attending school events, engaging in communication, or assisting with homework (Jaiswal & Choudhri, 2017).

Research by Dong et al. (2020) indicates that since many parents are untrained or less capable of supporting their children's online learning demands, they may experience increased levels of stress and dissatisfaction regarding their children's education. Consequently, many parents prefer traditional face-to-face instruction.

Social-Emotional Learning and Resilience
A study exploring the link between parental resilience and demographic characteristics found that resilience is crucial for parents in managing everyday challenges, addressing problems, and recovering from adversities within the family (Rupjyoti, Juri, & Gita, 2022). Research by Noddings (1999) indicates that students who receive parental support tend to exhibit positive behaviour. Empirical findings further emphasize that family support significantly fosters resilience in students' lives.

The present study, conducted in India, aimed to examine the vital role of parents in their children's overall development during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also explored the factors that influence and impact parent-child interactions moving forward, with an emphasis on organizing the data into significant themes to enhance the understanding of these interactions.

II. METHODOLOGY

Sample: This study used a purposive sampling method and involved 13 parents from Mumbai and Bengaluru, India, who participated voluntarily. The children of these participants were aged between 6 and 10 years and were enrolled in kindergarten through fourth grade. Among the parents interviewed, 69% were employed, and 76% held at least a graduate degree, reflecting a well-educated and diverse participant group.

Procedure: A qualitative approach was employed for data collection in this research study. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews with parents were conducted virtually via Google Meet, a video conferencing platform. The interviews consisted of 18 carefully crafted questions aimed at exploring parental involvement in their children's holistic development and well-being during the pandemic. These questions examined various aspects of parental engagement, including managing pandemic-related stress, balancing work and family responsibilities, coping strategies for stressors, differences between online and offline schooling, overseeing online education, and methods for maintaining social connections.
Qualified psychologists conducted the interviews, providing a thorough explanation of the research purpose and obtaining informed consent from participants to record the sessions. The parents' responses were recorded with their permission and then transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis: An inductive approach was used to analyze the qualitative research data. This method focuses on distilling raw textual information into a concise summary, creating clear connections between the research objectives and the processed data. Additionally, it facilitates the identification and organization of patterns and key themes emerging from the data.

III. RESULTS
The results of the analysis of the data obtained during the research process revealed four key themes. These are presented below with accompanying transcriptions of relevant excerpts from parental interviews.

Theme 1: Parental Involvement

A prominent theme that emerged from the parental interviews was a heightened sense of responsibility among parents, who became more engaged in their children's academic and overall well-being during the pandemic. Parents observed significant changes in daily routines, especially concerning their child's education and mental health. Many parents consciously made efforts to spend more time with their children and spouses to

better support their child's academic needs, engage in recreational activities like playing games to enhance family time and attend to their child's physical requirements.

Parents adopted proactive measures to familiarize themselves with various digital platforms for their child's online education, and they closely monitored their child's progress. With the rise of digital platforms, parents noted that they had improved access to their child's educators, which helped in addressing the challenges their child faced as well as supporting their academic growth.

Despite the increased reliance on technology during the pandemic, 77% of parents reported that they did not participate in structured training programs that could assist them in supporting their children during this time. While parents agreed that the extra digital time allowed them to connect with their child's teachers at any moment, they also noted a decline in peer interactions, which limited opportunities for individual attention from teachers.

Parent 1 stated, *"... we used to tell the school that children should be allowed to chat in between.....you know their class and school and...so the teachers would allow them actually to chat with each other in the chatbox...we made a point to the teachers as well that they could talk to the children based on their (attendance) roll numbers so that everyone is heard... we were allowed to talk to the teachers as well on the phone, or WhatsApp message to tell them and to discuss with them what the problems of the children are and they used to listen to us."* **Parent 2** reported *"....Let me say I educated myself.... and I put myself in the shoes of school teachers about what they would do so that all these online classes that they are going through where the teacher cannot fill in, I can fill in that space. They are trying their best to provide the best service to the children through online media. So what is falling short, the parents have to provide. So, for that, self-education did help."* **Parent 6** expressed that *"the connection that the child will have with the teacher physically cannot take place in the online medium. Some may interact, some may not, but that interaction can't be taken as a connection or bonding that we talk about in an offline class."*

Theme 2: Parental Stress

This theme focuses on the stressors and challenges faced by parents, as well as the coping strategies they employ. Many parents reported actively struggling with various issues, including financial burdens, physical health concerns, managing COVID-19-positive family members at home, the absence of house help, and the additional strain of supervising their children's online education, especially during the early days of the pandemic.

With both parents working, they faced significant difficulties in balancing their professional and personal responsibilities. Additionally, the inability to travel or engage in social gatherings was noted as a major drawback. To address these challenges, parents successfully implemented various coping mechanisms, such as establishing effective exercise routines, prioritizing self-care, and using technology to stay in touch with extended family members virtually.

The thematic analysis also highlighted parents' satisfaction in meeting their children's academic and socio-emotional needs, which was aided by increased family time. However, a small percentage (15%) of parents felt that they could have done better than they were currently doing.

Parent 5 said, **"***We went crazy. The initial phase was very stressful. Everything was uncertain and gloomy. Bonus payout, salary increments – very gloomy… Job stress was too much. It was chaotic. Today it has turned into attrition. Work itself became stressful...No job security- Will I get a job? No confidence of when the market will open up.. leading to more stress...did not know when it will end...slowly things are easing".*
Then I started creating a "me" time. Created rituals...went for walks. Started following digital detox weekend – started by the office and then followed personally. Sitting with my child and engaging in activities.. spending time in the true sense.
Parent 9 stated, " *…for me, it is about not going out and just being trapped at home...sitting at home 24/7 doing your work on the laptop and it's like being with the technology again and that was the biggest problem...*" **Parent 7** reported " *Somewhere our mental health was not proper, because suddenly the whole routine changed, suddenly there were financial issues, a lot of things, it wasn't normal...There were so many people in the house...I had no time for myself. I used to take out some time. We were stressed because of the work only...I had no time for myself, the full day was like doing chores, finishing this, finishing that, taking care of others... Then I started sketching, going for a short walk which helped...*" **Parent 3** expressed, " *I think what happened is... I'm not happy with the amount of time I spent with my child because... given an option, I would have spent more time with him online, but I couldn't because there was my own business to look after....*" **Parent 11***: "I used*

to talk to my sister-in-law, so that used to make me feel better. I also began talking more to other people in general…"

Theme 3: Social Emotional Learning

The theme of Social Emotional Learning examined parents' awareness of social-emotional learning and the actions they took to support their children's emotional well-being during the pandemic. Some parents reported noticeable changes in their children's behaviour. They observed a significant decline in their children's ability to regulate emotions, which manifested as increased anger, yelling, and aggression towards siblings. Parents also noted feelings of loneliness in single children, as well as heightened and misplaced aggression. Behaviors that were previously absent included hitting themselves or others and experiencing emotional breakdowns due to separation from friends and lack of interaction with them. Additionally, some parents mentioned that their children seemed lost in an imaginary world, engaging in self-talk.

Despite these challenges, parents proactively took various steps to support and guide their children. They increased the time spent with their children, ensured that their children felt heard, and were firm and assertive when necessary. They also helped their children develop games to enhance creativity, educated them on navigating the pandemic, and discussed how their family could thrive during this time. Many parents facilitated virtual connections with extended family to create a sense of normalcy for their children during such uncertain times. All participating parents expressed that technology was a valuable tool for maintaining social connections when being physically together was not an option.

Parent 3: "*…there have been times when the child feels lonely because physically there is no one around. In the physical school environment, there are people around….children express themselves very freely. In the online environment, it is not possible. There are a lot of restrictions, they feel very, very lonely".*
Parent 8 reported, *"Yeah, initially she struggled, she used to cry, it was a struggle for all of us initially, but right now everything is fine, but she is like- I don't want online classes; she is an offline student…"* **Parent 4** expressed, *" He is being very aggressive in the pandemic; previously he was very calm and sleep timing was very good, but in the pandemic, he has become very aggressive".* **Parent 7:** *I didn't notice it first, but he started…scratching us. That was the major thing, and shouting…. Scratching was what he did when he was angry and all. First, he used to scratch his father, and nowadays he started scratching himself… but now it's reducing. Till last month it was there…"* **Parent 6** reported, *"…it was more of a talking time, so I think there's something that we encourage him to do and now he is doing the same with us …"* **Parent 5:** *"…chat, playdates, zoom birthday parties, online games, video calls were the different ways to keep our child socially connected"*

Theme 4: Resilience

Resilience was a crucial theme emerging from the parents' responses during the interview process. Many parents highlighted the significant challenges they faced, including financial strain, health concerns, and difficulties accessing medical facilities due to travel restrictions during the lockdown. They also dealt with the loss of family members to COVID-19 and the constant stress of managing their children's behaviour and well-being, all while trying to navigate the new online education system that had become the norm.

Despite these difficulties, many parents expressed that their belief in themselves, their faith in God, and spirituality helped them find a path through these challenging times. Several parents noted that the support, understanding, and companionship of their spouses, families, and friends provided much-needed comfort. Families also found joy in reminiscing through old photographs, memories, and videos, even engaging in movie nights on Netflix. Parents shared that these activities served as bridges to initiate conversations with their children about various experiences—both challenging and uplifting—and how to navigate the difficult aspects of life together.

Parent 12 reported *"Everything within God and family connection, friends connection, everything, and we are living in a joint family. So there were fewer difficulties for me because we were living in a joint family. We were not alone…"* **Parent 5:** *"Two biggest challenges – multi-tasking to the next level, overcoming your fear and negative emotions and staying calm, composed and also being hopeful that the pandemic will end one day. Self-talk was needed. Fear was dominating… no house help, work increased tremendously, handling a child, a senior citizen and loss of a family member. What helped- Extended family, your inner strength, to not hold on to negative thoughts, to be positive…didn't let the negative dominant thoughts dominate. Talks by spiritual gurus helped. The*

entire pandemic taught you life lessons. It was a teacher by itself". **Parent 8:** *Inner resilience to deal with the noisy environment, and I think nowadays it doesn't matter if they (children) create noise, sometimes when I'm not able to focus, I tell them and shut the door…I don't get irritated now… the inner resilience and tolerance are built up, that's the right word".*

IV. DISCUSSION AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

The main objective of this qualitative research study is to examine the impact of parental involvement on their child's social-emotional well-being during the pandemic. Additional themes explored include work-life balance, coping strategies for managing stressors and challenges, and the development of resilience during these difficult times.

The findings reveal that parents faced the significant challenge of helping their children navigate virtual classrooms necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic while also supporting and maintaining their children's emotional well-being.

Several issues emerged from the analysis, including increased parental stress, the ongoing struggle to achieve work-life balance, and the need to promote social-emotional learning in their children. Spinelli et al. (2020) found that parents who reported greater difficulties in managing quarantine measures experienced higher levels of stress, which in turn exacerbated their children's coping challenges.

A recurring theme from the analyses was the continual struggle to balance work routines and family responsibilities. This situation led to significant stress, prompting parents to find creative solutions. A study by Vitória, Ribeiro, and Carvalho (2022) found that engaging in well-being practices, such as regular exercise, mindfulness, and establishing clear work-life boundaries, was essential for reducing burnout and enhancing overall well-being.

The current study demonstrated that resilience can be cultivated in both parents and children. Developing this quality will be beneficial for managing challenges in the long term. A literature review by Gayatri & Irawati (2022) highlighted how families employed effective coping strategies, such as maintaining healthy communication, engaging in faith-based practices, and fostering a positive and resilient mindset, which collectively contributed to enhanced family well-being during the pandemic.

The increased time spent together as a family heightened parental involvement, and shared coping strategies during this period significantly strengthened family relationships and communication. This time fostered a greater sense of unity, trust, and cohesion, which are essential for building family resilience. Engaging in open dialogue and participating in shared positive activities has been shown to enhance feelings of connection and happiness within families, ultimately supporting their overall well-being.

Another study by Luthar et al. (2021) indicated that parental resilience is the most significant factor influencing children's resilience. Adolescent resilience largely depends on how parents cope with difficult life situations.

Through interviews conducted with parents for this study, several common strategies emerged for increasing engagement. These included daily caregiving, involvement in online education, participation in extracurricular activities, and fostering social-emotional growth. The time parents spent with their children allowed them to better understand their children's physical and emotional needs, thereby strengthening their bonds. Online education provided parents an opportunity to improve their technological skills while gaining insight into their child's academic progress. Additionally, parents creatively engaged their children with extended family members in virtual settings.

COVID-19 has significantly influenced our relationship with technology. It has also affected young children, though in different ways. Increased engagement with technology, particularly at home, raises concerns. The impact of technology is negatively affecting children's socio-emotional development. Research indicates that children aged 6 to 12 years who use gadgets excessively may face unfavorable social-emotional outcomes.

Ridwan, Utami, and Bangsawan (2025) found that high gadget use leads to fewer in-person interactions, negatively impacting children's social skills, empathy, and communication. Excessive device use may result in a significant decrease in social abilities, particularly if parents do not set limits. Thus, balanced gadget use and parental involvement are crucial for healthy social-emotional development.

Recent studies have highlighted the importance of parental involvement in children's social-emotional development. A study conducted by Zhu, Dou, and Karatzia (2024) found that children with engaged parents demonstrated stronger social skills, greater empathy, and better emotional regulation. Additionally, research by Orazio et al. (2023) indicates that parental participation significantly enhances children's social-emotional skills, particularly when it involves quality time and instructional play.

A study by Raikes and Edwards (2022) indicates that children's social-emotional development can be influenced by their parents' stress and mental health. A supportive and nurturing family environment fosters positive development, while a stressful or neglectful one can lead to maladjustment. These findings emphasize the importance of ongoing and proactive parental involvement in supporting children's healthy social-emotional growth.

The sample size of 13 participants may be considered a limitation of this qualitative study. The results highlight the necessity of conducting larger-scale research that encompasses diverse regions across the nation. Such an approach would provide valuable qualitative insights into the experiences of parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on research evidence and findings from the present study, several recommendations are suggested:

1. Psychoeducation and Training: Providing psychoeducation and relevant training for parents and teachers can equip them with the necessary tools to manage challenging situations effectively at home or in the classroom.

2. Incorporating Life Skills in Curriculum: Integrating life skill constructs into the curriculum can be an effective step in helping students cope with their shortcomings. Numerous studies highlight the importance of incorporating life skills into education, particularly focusing on resilience, which promotes better emotional intelligence and creative stress management.

3. Managing Screen Time: Encouraging children to take breaks from screens and helping them manage their screen time through innovative thinking can enable them to use technology in moderation.

4. Screen time limits: Parents should engage in a screen time detox to set a good example for their children. This practice can help establish specific screen time limits for children and prevent binge-watching.

5. Alternative activities: Encouraging children to engage in alternative activities such as outdoor and indoor play, dramatic play, reading sessions, games, and art activities instead of excessive screen time.

6. Integrating Mindfulness: The concept of mindfulness is being widely adopted. Incorporating mindfulness practices into classrooms may enhance students' emotional regulation, concentration, and resilience.

7. Collaboration Among Stakeholders: It is essential to help various stakeholders in a child's life, such as parents and schools, work together for the betterment of the child. This collaboration can lead to richer overall student development.

8. Training for Educators: Providing educators with training in social-emotional learning and mental health will better equip them to handle challenging situations and create a supportive and safe environment for children.

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