

Adaptations of young people in monetary-poor households for surviving and recovering from COVID-19 and associated lockdowns (PANEX-YOUTH)

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Our project looked at how vulnerable young people adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to their access to food, education and play/leisure. It focused on case studies in three locations: Mangaung and Mophaka in Central South Africa, West Midlands in the UK, and São Paulo state in Brazil. Young people – and particularly those who are most marginalised or vulnerable – were not heard enough and should have a voice in future policies, actions and decision-making processes. In addition, our findings reveal the following:

1. School absence and refusal have increased since COVID-19. Where appropriate, schools should introduce and/or signpost to students measures that enable school engagement during and after a period of lockdown (or similar), whilst also addressing the root causes for disengagement. Cognisant of the multiple pressures on schools, schools may focus on some or all of the following: (a) making school environments less pressurised (thrown into sharp relief during time at home, when many students felt less pressurised); (b) measures to support young people with loss of confidence whilst away from school; (c) addressing sometimes patchy support in schools for student wellbeing and mental health; (d) finding (creative) ways to mitigate loss of contact with school during a crisis, which in turn can mean loss of the wider benefits of school.
2. There is a need for further work around the ‘soft skills’ that some young people lost or did not develop during COVID-19, particularly as there is a shared feeling that we ‘moved on’ from the pandemic in a way that did not enable young people to come to terms with what had happened. Many professionals who work with young people have reported that there are cohorts who, for instance, lack the skills and ability to relate to others in appropriate ways.
3. Whilst recognising they are vital, we must not over-emphasise the role that schools can play during or after a pandemic. They cannot provide and do not have the resources to provide a one- stop shop for all the issues young people face. They are not and should not be the only place that CYP gain support – families, friends, communities, and other organisations should also be key. There could be greater consideration of how in turn to support those organisations, and how there could be greater coordination, partnership and/or multi- agency working to ensure some young people, and some needs, do not slip between the cracks.
4. There could be planning for greater resources and sharing of good practice for organisations outside of schools who provided support for home education during lockdowns. This would also need to acknowledge that after COVID-19, some young people did not return to school and remained home educated. Any work with such organisations should also ask young people how they would like to be supported outside of school.
5. There could be a concerted focus on support for young people’s key transitions – for instance to secondary school, to College/University, and to work. Those transitions and support for them were compromised during COVID-19, with some young people getting ‘lost in transition’. Guidance and support for young people could be two- fold: targeted at young people, now, who missed out during key transitional periods during the COVID-19 pandemic; better preparedness, plans and resources to provide guidance and support for young people going through transitions during future pandemics.
6. Address inequalities in children and young people’s access to greenspace, and outdoor spaces, which in turn affect their opportunities for play, learning and socialisation. Outdoor playgrounds should not have been closed. There should be greater efforts towards and investment in building on guidance

to make public spaces more accessible to diverse children and young people, and placing greater emphasis on children and young people's access to such spaces during a lockdown scenario.

7. Support and advice around technology use (especially social media and gaming) could be more nuanced. Use of these technologies is a complex issue, especially when children and young people cannot access outside spaces. It should not be assumed that social media use or gaming are always negative behaviours, when they can facilitate learning new skills, socialization and allow downtime; but it should be recognized that use of digital technologies can also be dangerous, problematic and toxic. Supporting young people to find a balance – where that balance may be different during a pandemic – is key.

8. We need to recognise and support the ways in which digital media can enable young people's participation in high-level decision making and co-research (as with the PANEX- Youth project) alongside or even more than more traditional approaches to meeting/consultation cannot. There could be greater consideration of how to ensure scaling up of these approaches, inclusion in terms of the young people involved (equal access to these opportunities) and training for young people participating in such activities.

9. Ensuring better preparedness and equitable opportunities for digital access (to devices and/ or data) for different groups of children and young people, their families and those who work with them (both for education and other purposes).

10. Work with young people to battle misinformation around crises. Young people have the skills to act as a bridge (and/or to co-produce) accurate information, especially in short form on digital media, to counter misinformation in, for instance, the circulation of public health information during a pandemic. Remembering and learning from COVID-19 – and listening to children and young people

11. Learn from what worked in COVID-19. Some apparently haphazard or reactive approaches happened to work – whether in terms of flexibility in pedagogic approaches or ways of working through digital media, or how local organisations responded to meet local needs. At the national, regional and local scale there could be efforts to collate and share examples of what worked (our longer reports, referenced at the end of this document, are examples of such efforts). Similarly, more learning is still needed on what could still work in a post-COVID context, and what could work in terms of better and equitable preparedness for a future crisis.

12. Don't just move on: COVID-19 happened but young people have not had the opportunities to deal with its shorter- and longer-term impacts. COVID-19 was a major part of their lives (proportionately, compared with adults, and because of the impact of restrictions on them). It is crucial to keep talking about COVID-19 and address trauma.

13. Develop a systemic approach to policy for children and young people, particularly for times during and in the years after a crisis. In particular, working across health, education and employment can help deal with challenges in respect of young people's transitions. Such policies – as per wider policy-making for (and with) young people – need to be aligned, coherent and joined up, stopping young people from falling down the cracks. They also need to be properly resourced and involve children and young people in appropriate ways in their design.

14. Those working with and advocating for young people could call out and put pressure on organisations who should be engaging young people in debate about and responses to crises, but don't. Examples of good practice in engaging children and young people – whether specifically during crises or more widely – could be collated and shared, with resource to support good forms of engagement.

15. Finally, recognize the importance of food in times of crisis and post-crisis. This includes access to food (specifically healthy, nutritious and culturally diverse food) in a context of increased food poverty for young people. It also involves acknowledging its role as a way to get together and cope but also as a mean to access vulnerable young people and their families and hence provide adequate support.