

# Predicting parents' stress during the pandemic: Loneliness, children's social skills, and financial concerns

Charlotte I. Stewardson, Susan J. Birch

University of British Columbia (UBC)



## INTRODUCTION

In early 2020, governments around the world took emergency measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Previous research looking at the effects of quarantine due to outbreaks of various diseases and viruses (e.g. SARS, MERS) have reported a variety of psychological and socio emotional problems that range from stress, emotional difficulties, insomnia, and post-traumatic stress symptoms.(1)

Additionally, the World Health Organization postulated that essential measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 such as social distancing

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## OBJECTIVE

To gain a deeper understanding of the potential impacts of COVID-19, this study examined how the ongoing pandemic and measures put in place to stop the spread of COVID-19, relate to parent's social-emotional well-being.

Our aim was to identify which factors were the greatest predictors of parents' stress during the early part of the pandemic (June-August 2020).



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## METHOD

80 parents of 3-12-year-old children completed an online survey reporting on:

- Their own social-emotional health using the [Perceived Stress Scale](#) (3) and [Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale](#) (4)
- Their child's social-emotional difficulties using the [Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire](#) (5)
- Their child's social skills using the [Social Skills Improvement System](#) (6)
- Their child's social understanding using the [Children's Social Understanding Scale](#) (7)
- Their child's social interactions by estimating the # of hours in in-person vs. virtual interactions with adults and other children

Table 1: Description of Measures and Example Items in Parent Survey

Measure	Description	Example Items
The Perceived Stress Scale	A self-report measure of perceived stress based on responses to 10 items. High stress is associated with higher scores on this scale.	How often do you feel nervous or the "jitters" due to stress?
The Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale	A self-report measure assessing the extent to which individuals feel isolated or lonely. It consists of 20 items, with higher scores indicating greater loneliness.	In this house, there aren't many people who really know me?
Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire	A parent-report measure assessing children's social skills and emotional difficulties. It consists of 25 items, with higher scores indicating greater difficulties.	Child has a strong sense of responsibility for their own actions?
The Social Skills Improvement System - Teacher Report	A teacher-report measure assessing children's social skills. It consists of 100 items, with higher scores indicating greater social skills.	Child has a strong sense of responsibility for their own actions?
The Children's Social Understanding Scale	A parent-report measure assessing children's social understanding. It consists of 10 items, with higher scores indicating greater social understanding.	When someone is sad, it's usually because they're hungry?

Table 2: Means and standard deviations of social emotional health measures

Measure	Total Scores	N	M	SD
Perceived Stress Scale		72	16.96	8.07
UCLA Loneliness Scale		72	41.99	11.92

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## RESULTS

### Predicting Parents Stress

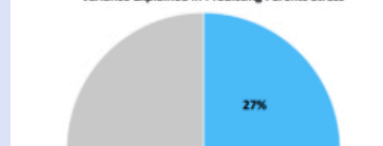
Using stepwise regression we predicted parents stress from:

- 1) Loneliness
- 2) Financial concerns
- 3) Number of children
- 4) Amount of in-person social interaction with friends and family during the pandemic
- 5) The change in the amount of in-person social interaction with friends and family (i.e., before vs. during pandemic)
- 6) Their child's social skills
- 7) Their child's social-emotional difficulties
- 8) Their child's social understanding.

3 factors accounted for 39% of the differences in parents' reported stress in our sample:

- Parents' loneliness accounted for 27% of the variance ( $p = 0.00$ )
- child's social skills accounted for an additional 7% ( $p = .01$ )
- Parents' financial concerns accounted for an additional 5% ( $p = .03$ ).

Variance Explained in Predicting Parents Stress



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## CONCLUSIONS

Parents self-reported loneliness was the best predictor of stress. Their child's level of social skills was also a significant predictor, with parents of children with greater social skills reporting less stress. Financial concerns were also a predictor of parents' stress.

Limitations include the correlational design and the reliance on parent-report. Additionally, parents were predominantly female and from a high SES background, which means that our results may not be representative of other populations.

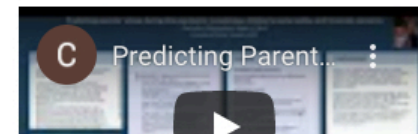
Findings highlight 3 areas for potential interventions to reduce parental stress: addressing loneliness, minimizing financial burdens, and promoting children's social skills.

## REFERENCES AND NOTES

### Footnotes:

\*More information on the child's social-emotional health is presented in an SRCD poster by Birch, Stewardson, & Passacantilli.

\*Video walkthrough of our poster presentation:



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