



# Parenting Hurdles Experienced During Lockdown in South Africa: Eclectic Contexts

Ntombophelo Sithole-Tetani<sup>1</sup> , Andile Qotoyi<sup>1</sup> ,  
Simon Murote Kang'ethe<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Department of Psychology, Walter Sisulu University, South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Social Work, Walter Sisulu University, South Africa.

## ABSTRACT

Unequivocally, South Africa, amid an environment of paucity of resources, faces the arduous challenge of fighting the scourge of coronavirus. This has necessitated assessing the parenting hurdles experienced during the lockdown in eclectic contexts in South Africa. This article applied a review of the literature methodology. The researchers drew their literature from journal articles, monographs, and book chapters and used informal conversations amid their intuitive and experiential powers. The article established that South African families face parenting hurdles driven by the COVID-19 lockdown due to the following factors: Children and their parents driven to a state of duress; children facing various kinds of mistreatment; pecuniary dimensions; lockdown presenting states of distress to people generally; and a surge of gender-based violence. This article recommends that social service professionals such as psychologists, counsellors, and social workers be on the frontline in discharging various psychotherapeutic education to the communities. These researchers also recommend that the government and other community development practitioners emphasize the application of the tenets of ubuntu as a conflict resolution tool to reduce conflicts and afford the children qualitative parenting. This research provides some interventions for handling parenting during any other disruptions, such as the coronavirus-imposed lockdown.

### Correspondence

Simon Murote Kang'ethe  
Email: [skangethe@wsu.ac.za](mailto:skangethe@wsu.ac.za)

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## INTRODUCTION

Axiomatically, the advent of coronavirus upset the parenting routine, with parents experiencing a socio-psychological doldrum and having to moot ways of managing their children at home. This is because they were not attending school.<sup>1</sup> Inopportunistly, the government restrictions during the first lockdown in early 2020 in many countries, such as South Africa, led to the closure of all facilities, including schools and public spaces, except for those providing necessities such as healthcare services and food providers; a stay-at-home order outside of situations of necessity; and the isolation of persons

<sup>1</sup> Teresa Haller and Shally Novita, "Parents' Perceptions of School Support during COVID-19: What Satisfies Parents?," in *Frontiers in Education*, vol. 6 (Frontiers Media SA, 2021), 700441.

infected by COVID-19 and those in contact with them.<sup>2</sup> This critical situation glaringly upset family routines.<sup>3</sup> Surprisingly, parents had to manage their children at home because they no longer attended school.<sup>4</sup> This was a new and strange milieu that none of the stakeholders, whether the parents or the children, expected. This created room for conflict and abuse, whether children-children abuse, parent-children abuse, or partner-partner abuse.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the environment was perturbing as well as it was boring to children. Research by Babore, Trumello, and Lombardi has shown that children get bored easily when they are not at school because they are less physically active and spend most of their time watching TV or playing with cell phones, and often disregarding their parents' instructions to do their school-related chores.<sup>6</sup> Amongst other things, this milieu provided a fertile ground for conflict with their parents. On the other hand, for workers in institutions of higher learning being forced to engage in remote teaching and attending to other institutional tasks online, the home environment demanded they combine both the role of a full-time teacher and home manager.<sup>7</sup>

This was a stressful new environment, majorly because children and the opposite sex partners would fail to understand the urgency of the office occupational tasks and forcibly make other individual demands that grossly interfered with the execution of office tasks that had deadlines to be met.<sup>8</sup> Such demands inter alia include asking for food to be prepared before the scheduled time or even engaging in inadvertent conversations when one is on their computer, perhaps in the middle of a very important meeting. Perhaps a pernicious circumstance that exacerbated conflict is the misuse of alcohol by some working parents.<sup>9</sup>

The free time became a seduction factor for parties to drink, usually to overcome boredom, and sometimes to happily pass the time.<sup>10</sup> Inopportunistly, this circumstance attracted more spending, even against an opportunity of dwindling resources.<sup>11</sup> This is a pointer to how the phenomenon of lockdown drove many into a state of poverty and exacerbated financial-related conflicts.<sup>12</sup> Incontrovertibly also, the seclusion that the lockdown imposed is believed to increase parental neglect of their nurturance tasks on account of consuming alcohol. This is the most prevalent form of child neglect that manifested in most parts of South Africa during lockdown.<sup>13</sup> Another form of neglect that parental consumption of alcohol may have developed is leaving children on computers, sometimes exposing themselves to pornography.<sup>14</sup> In an endeavour to stem this exposure to computers, many parents found themselves imposing stringent disciplinary measures on their children that bordered on abuse.<sup>15</sup> Inadvertently,

<sup>2</sup> K. Moodley, Adetayo Emmanuel Obasa, and L. London, "Isolation and Quarantine in South Africa during COVID-19: Draconian Measures or Proportional Response?," *South African Medical Journal* 110, no. 6 (2020): 456–57.

<sup>3</sup> Simona Gabriella Di Santo et al., "The Effects of COVID-19 and Quarantine Measures on the Lifestyles and Mental Health of People over 60 at Increased Risk of Dementia," *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 11 (2020): 578628.

<sup>4</sup> Haller and Novita, "Parents' Perceptions of School Support during COVID-19: What Satisfies Parents?"

<sup>5</sup> Mzikazi Nduna and Siyanda Oyama Tshona, "Domesticated Poly-Violence against Women during the 2020 Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa," *Psychological Studies* 66, no. 3 (2021): 347–53.

<sup>6</sup> Alessandra Babore et al., "Mothers' and Children's Mental Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown: The Mediating Role of Parenting Stress," *Child Psychiatry & Human Development* 54, no. 1 (2023): 134–46; Daniela Fontenelle-Tereshchuk,

"'Homeschooling' and the COVID-19 Crisis: The Insights of Parents on Curriculum and Remote Learning," *Interchange* 52, no. 2 (2021): 167–91.

<sup>7</sup> Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, "'Homeschooling' and the COVID-19 Crisis: The Insights of Parents on Curriculum and Remote Learning."

<sup>8</sup> Jasleen Kaur and Anupam Sharma, "Establishing Early Foundations to Promote Emotional Competence in Preschool Children," *Journal of Applied Social Science* 16, no. 2 (June 22, 2022): 399–418, <https://doi.org/10.1177/19367244211054381>.

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., "Couple Conflict and Intimate Partner Violence during the Early Lockdown of the Pandemic: The Good, the Bad, or Is It Just the Same in a North Carolina, Low-Resource Population?," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 5 (2022): 2608.

<sup>10</sup> Silvia Eiken Alpers et al., "Alcohol Consumption during a Pandemic Lockdown Period and Change in Alcohol Consumption Related to Worries and Pandemic Measures," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 3 (January 29, 2021): 1220, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18031220>.

<sup>11</sup> Ludovica Principato et al., "Caring More about Food: The Unexpected Positive Effect of the Covid-19 Lockdown on Household Food Management and Waste," *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences* 82 (2022): 100953.

<sup>12</sup> Principato et al., "Caring More about Food: The Unexpected Positive Effect of the Covid-19 Lockdown on Household Food Management and Waste."

<sup>13</sup> Mónica Ruiz-Casares, Nico Trocmé, and Barbara Fallon, "Supervisory Neglect and Risk of Harm. Evidence from the Canadian Child Welfare System," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 36, no. 6 (2012): 471–80.

<sup>14</sup> Ruiz-Casares, Trocmé, and Fallon, "Supervisory Neglect and Risk of Harm. Evidence from the Canadian Child Welfare System."

<sup>15</sup> Lesley Gittings et al., "'Now My Life Is Stuck!': Experiences of Adolescents and Young People during COVID-19 Lockdown in South Africa," *Global Public Health* 16, no. 6 (2021): 947–63.

many parents would use belts, smack them as well as use sticks to beat them. These are aspects that made them conflict with their children and the law of the land.<sup>16</sup>

Further, the family's seclusion without the freedom to move had an economic implication. It was apparent that expenses on various aspects of life increased. Both children and adults alike increased the volume of food they erstwhile used to consume. This posed a big challenge as people's financial capacity did not change.<sup>17</sup> Since the South African system allows the accumulation of debts, many people are believed to have sunk deeply into debts that may take years to settle.<sup>18</sup>

Unequivocally, the severity of the economic impact of the lockdown increased the surge of gender-based violence.<sup>19</sup> While boredom and being confined to one setting could increase states of anxiety and spates of confusion that could easily trigger gender-based violence, the dwindling state of finances against the demands is believed to have exacerbated the state of gender-based violence.<sup>20</sup> This was dire to couples who lost their jobs. Some, it is believed, were fighting because they lost their jobs and, upon failing to provide for their families, displayed their anger toward their partners and children.<sup>21</sup> In Freudian psychology, displacement is an unconscious defense mechanism to release pent-up emotions by directing them elsewhere, in this case, to partners and children.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, during the national hard lockdown, the phenomenon of some couples who may have been living in a toxic and abusive relationship were now involuntarily forced to stay together. This formed and encouraged a fertile ground for the increased prevalence of Gender-based Violence.<sup>23</sup>

Just one month after the COVID-19 outbreak, higher cases of post-traumatic stress symptoms in women were reported.<sup>24</sup> Such women experienced body dysfunctionality and manifested frail psychological well-being, which made it impossible for them to balance their work, parenting, and any other domestic duties.<sup>25</sup> All these aspects are likely to have impacted parents' distress levels, with a possible impact on children's well-being.

This article intends to bring to the fore some pertinent environmental parenting hurdles that parents in South Africa underwent, using multifarious literature from ubiquitous contexts around the globe.

## METHODOLOGY

This article has used a review of literature methodology aiming to discuss the parenting hurdles experienced during the lockdown on account of coronavirus in eclectic contexts in South Africa. The data was gathered through desktop research, amid drawing literature from a heterogeneous source that inter alia includes empirical monographs, books, theses, journal articles, secondary data, and informal conversations amid the researchers' intuition and their experiential knowledge. A literature search based on the main concepts from various Google engines, such as EBSCOhost, resulted in several themes discussed below.

<sup>16</sup> Gittings et al., "Now My Life Is Stuck!": Experiences of Adolescents and Young People during COVID-19 Lockdown in South Africa."

<sup>17</sup> Dorrit Posel, Adeola Oyenubi, and Umakrishnan Kollamparambil, "Job Loss and Mental Health during the COVID-19 Lockdown: Evidence from South Africa," *PLOS ONE* 16, no. 3 (March 30, 2021): e0249352, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0249352>.

<sup>18</sup> Jan Douwe Van der Ploeg, "From Biomedical to Politico-Economic Crisis: The Food System in Times of Covid-19," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 47, no. 5 (2020): 944–72.

<sup>19</sup> Simon Murote Kang'ethe, "Unpacking South African Institutions of Higher Learning Efforts and Hurdles to Respond to COVID-19: Social Service Professionals' Lenses," *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 21, no. 1 (2022): 84–99.

<sup>20</sup> Principato et al., "Caring More about Food: The Unexpected Positive Effect of the Covid-19 Lockdown on Household Food Management and Waste."

<sup>21</sup> Principato et al., "Caring More about Food: The Unexpected Positive Effect of the Covid-19 Lockdown on Household Food Management and Waste."

<sup>22</sup> Paul Kline, "A Critical Perspective on Defense Mechanisms," in *The Concept of Defense Mechanisms in Contemporary Psychology: Theoretical, Research, and Clinical Perspectives* (Springer, 1993), 3–13.

<sup>23</sup> K. Lyons and R. Hill, "V.C Salaries Are a Sign of What's Wrong with Universities," 2018, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20180213090646627>.

<sup>24</sup> Nianqi Liu et al., "Prevalence and Predictors of PTSS during COVID-19 Outbreak in China Hardest-Hit Areas: Gender Differences Matter," *Psychiatry Research* 287 (2020): 112921.

<sup>25</sup> Liu et al., "Prevalence and Predictors of PTSS during COVID-19 Outbreak in China Hardest-Hit Areas: Gender Differences Matter."

## FINDINGS

### Children and their parents under duress due to coronavirus epoch lockdown

Without an iota of doubt, the lockdown, which forced people to stay at home of their own volition, hurt people's mental health and physical stability.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps a section of the population that found itself vulnerable was children as they couldn't go out to play as schools were closed, and inopportunistly, most residential domiciles, especially in towns and cities, do not have any playgrounds for children to play.<sup>27</sup> These children's only opportunity to comfortably pass time is engaging with technology, such as navigating through different channels on the television, some of which are meant for adults, as well as playing with their phones or those of their parents. Inopportunistly, their excessive engagement with these items created conflict between them and their parents. This happened when the children would find it difficult to stop playing and attend to their parents' requests to do some schoolwork or carry out some errands for them.<sup>28</sup> Research has shown that children easily get bored when they are not at school. This is because they are less physically active and are inclined to spend most of their time watching TV or playing with their cell phones, which increases the likelihood of conflict with their parents.<sup>29</sup> Arora and Singh agree that children who spend most of their time in front of the TV, playing with phones, and on the internet are highly prone to psycho-social problems, such as experiencing lower self-esteem and suffering from an internet addiction disorder.<sup>30</sup> These conditions are perfidious to their mental health.

Moreover, children who spend more time inside their houses are susceptible to the effects of indoor pollution, which can hurt their brain development.<sup>31</sup> Once children experience slow brain development, their cognitive abilities can be limited. This contentious arena makes it more difficult for parents to manage their children.<sup>32</sup>

Additionally, children's cognitive needs that can be effectuated by giving attention to children should not be overlooked. Parents must talk with their children timeously to create a workable and fruitful relationship.<sup>33</sup> This will also form an environment where children will express their needs without fear.<sup>34</sup> Parents must also set boundaries, offer stimulation, and show their children the requisite love and assurance. Suspicion is that during the lockdown, parents who abused alcohol and engaged in bouts of fights and conflicts between them possibly failed to achieve these obligations. Inopportunistly, a lack of response to these needs can lead to emotional neglect, which is a pandemic on its own.<sup>35</sup>

### Children being mistreated during the lockdown

Several studies conducted around the world raised the alarm about the high rate of child ill-treatment during the COVID-19 lockdown.<sup>36</sup> The lockdown has created several problems that could effortlessly lead to child ill-treatment. For example, some irresponsible parents who were circumstantially forced to live in one enclosure increased their alcohol consumption, which was coupled with unprecedented

<sup>26</sup> Kaushal Shah et al., "Impact of COVID-19 on the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents," *Cureus* 12, no. 8 (2020).

<sup>27</sup> Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, "'Homeschooling' and the COVID-19 Crisis: The Insights of Parents on Curriculum and Remote Learning."

<sup>28</sup> Babore et al., "Mothers' and Children's Mental Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown: The Mediating Role of Parenting Stress."

<sup>29</sup> Babore et al., "Mothers' and Children's Mental Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown: The Mediating Role of Parenting Stress."

<sup>30</sup> Rabia Arora and Satinder Pal Singh, "Lockdown Boredom in COVID-19 Pandemic: As a Cause of Pediatric Foreign Bodies," *Indian Journal of Otolaryngology and Head & Neck Surgery* 74, no. Suppl 2 (2022): 2799–2800.

<sup>31</sup> Sermin Genc et al., "The Adverse Effects of Air Pollution on the Nervous System," *Journal of Toxicology* 2012, no. 1 (2012): 782462.

<sup>32</sup> B. Arora and J. Kaur, "Emotional Stability Among Adolescents about the Parent-Child Relationship," *The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies* 2, no. 5 (2014): 305–8.

<sup>33</sup> Paul Weigle and Dana Reid, "Helping Parents Promote Healthy and Safe Computer Habits," *Adolescent Psychiatry* 4, no. 2 (2014): 92–97.

<sup>34</sup> Weigle and Reid, "Helping Parents Promote Healthy and Safe Computer Habits."

<sup>35</sup> Claire Chamberland et al., "Emotional Maltreatment in Canada: Prevalence, Reporting and Child Welfare Responses (CIS2)," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 35, no. 10 (2011): 841–54.

<sup>36</sup> Mélanie Loiseau et al., "Physical Abuse of Young Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Alarming Increase in the Relative Frequency of Hospitalizations during the Lockdown Period," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 122 (2021): 105299.

economic problems.<sup>37</sup> The cut-off worsened these issues and restricted access to other support systems such as medical, social services, schools, and nurseries for young children.<sup>38</sup> This external support plays a vital role in parenting and was restricted during the era of lockdown. The government and other child-friendly organizations must take stock of the episodes of child ill-treatment in the eclectic contexts of various countries. This is to assess the human rights deficits experienced by children during the lockdown in various countries. This is because many countries have stringent child-friendly policies that abide by and obligate them to provide their children with all the dignity their age deserves.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the lockdown interfered with the flow of daily routines of families.<sup>40</sup> While most people were told to work from home, some were suspended permanently.<sup>41</sup> Children who used to spend most of their time at school and in daycare centres also stayed at home, and parents had no choice but to take care of such children full-time. This was exasperating and confusing, noting that they may not have well-developed professionalism to educate the children and offer house help services.<sup>42</sup> The parents took some time to adjust to the new milieu and sometimes had to throw away the towel and leave their children unattended.<sup>43</sup> This is child neglect that, in some countries, attracts either a fine or incarceration.<sup>44</sup>

Inopportunistically also, assuming the role of a full-time teacher to cater to their children, doing household chores, and sometimes having to attend to numerous demands of one's partner, perhaps in an environment of one having lost the job exacerbated a state of pain and agony of some parents.<sup>45</sup> Further, the state of children having no access to their friends whom they missed, detachment from social contacts outside their homes, and no break or relief from family also increased their discomfort as well as parental stress that made it difficult to execute their positive parenting.<sup>46</sup> This is an environment that motivated physical and emotional neglect of their children. Notably and observably, cases of parents in ubiquitous circumstances shouting, yelling, and screaming at children have not been uncommon during lockdown.<sup>47</sup> To this end, Bérubé, Clément, and Lafantaisie aver that, amongst other things, during the lockdown, concerns were raised about the availability of food that children were benefiting from in schools.<sup>48</sup> Accessing food in schools is a government effort to maintain children's health and, therefore, to ensure that all children can go to school. It is also an effort to address the risk of maltreatment. Parents were, therefore, wondering how the gesture could be administered during lockdown.<sup>49</sup> This is to offset the burden of feeding their children during the day, a role that schools offered perfectly.

### The Pecuniary Dimension Imposed by the Lockdown

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to high unemployment rates in most parts of the world, South Africa notwithstanding.<sup>50</sup> The extent of burden linked with this unemployment differs from household to

<sup>37</sup> Loiseau et al., "Physical Abuse of Young Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Alarming Increase in the Relative Frequency of Hospitalizations during the Lockdown Period."

<sup>38</sup> Loiseau et al., "Physical Abuse of Young Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Alarming Increase in the Relative Frequency of Hospitalizations during the Lockdown Period."

<sup>39</sup> A. Bérubé et al., "How Societal Responses to COVID-19 Could Contribute to Child Neglect," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 116 (2021): 104761.

<sup>40</sup> Xavier Thierry et al., "Children's Experience of the First Lockdown in France," *Population Societies* 585, no.1(2021):1-4.

<sup>41</sup> Meenakshi Kaushik and Neha Guleria, "The Impact of Pandemic COVID-19 in Workplace," *European Journal of Business and Management* 12, no. 15 (2020): 1-10.

<sup>42</sup> Kaushik and Guleria, "The Impact of Pandemic COVID-19 in Workplace."

<sup>43</sup> Akanksha Jaiswal and C Joe Arun, "Unlocking the COVID-19 Lockdown: Work from Home and Its Impact on Employees," 2020.

<sup>44</sup> Don Weatherburn, *Arresting Incarceration: Pathways out of Indigenous Imprisonment* (Aboriginal Studies Press, 2014).

<sup>45</sup> Shawna J Lee et al., "Parental Social Isolation and Child Maltreatment Risk during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Family Violence* 37, no. 5 (2022): 813-24.

<sup>46</sup> Lindsey Rose Bullinger et al., "The Neglected Ones: Time at Home during COVID-19 and Child Maltreatment," *Children and Youth Services Review* 131 (2021): 106287.

<sup>47</sup> Rohani Jeharsae et al., "Associations between Stress and Child Verbal Abuse and Corporal Punishment during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Potential Effect Modification by Lockdown Measures," *MedRxiv*, 2021, 2021.

<sup>48</sup> Bérubé et al., "How Societal Responses to COVID-19 Could Contribute to Child Neglect."

<sup>49</sup> Ilan Katz et al., "Child Maltreatment Reports and Child Protection Service Responses during COVID-19: Knowledge Exchange among Australia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Germany, Israel, and South Africa," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 116 (2021): 105078.

<sup>50</sup> Posel, Oyenubi, and Kollampambal, "Job Loss and Mental Health during the COVID-19 Lockdown: Evidence from South Africa."

household, with some families on the verge of sleeping on empty stomachs.<sup>51</sup> This is also because the level of family support differs largely.<sup>52</sup> Unemployed families with children during the lockdown reported extreme hardships because most people were suspended from their jobs, and those who were self-employed could not continue their work.<sup>53</sup> This posed perfidious pecuniary short and long-term consequences for child well-being and development.<sup>54</sup> Imperatively, the increase in parental unemployment in the era of COVID-19 and the lockdown presented socio-economic doom to the family's well-being, with children being the innocent culprits.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, social isolation, unstable finances, and psychological distress are connected to higher levels of parental stress. This parental stress constitutes a toxic risk factor with negative mental health outcomes in children.<sup>56</sup>

Although many parents showed resilience in the face of the challenges associated with COVID-19, a huge number could not, whose prolonged lockdown and a lack of support exacerbated their existing vulnerabilities, which largely contributed to the onset of new stress-related disorders.<sup>57</sup> For instance, parents could not satisfy the five-tier model prescribed by Maslow's Hierarchy of needs due to insufficient finances. This includes love, food, shelter, security, etc.<sup>58</sup> According to Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, if physiological needs are unmet, they could lead to other life and growth deficits, such as illnesses.<sup>59</sup> Further, during the lockdown, the services for neglected children in most parts of the country and children in "at-risk" families offered in some educational centres daily were suspended. This saw most children left vulnerable and exposed to the hands of neglectful parents. This caused stress and despondence among these children, as well as exacerbated stress levels among the unemployed parents.<sup>60</sup>

The COVID-19 lockdown restriction also had financial glitches, especially for children from poor communities and households.<sup>61</sup> Inopportunistically also, children with special needs, cognitive disabilities, behavioural problems, etc., had to be taken care of out of the facilities that catered to their needs. These children were confined and forced to stay at home without any specialized support that they would otherwise access at school and facilities. This phenomenon placed increased stress on parents, with serious implications for parenting.<sup>62</sup>

Furthermore, the severity of the economic impact spurred and triggered bouts of gender-based violence.<sup>63</sup> In ubiquitous circumstances, undocumented evidence abounds that, cases of parents fighting because of insufficient money against their needs were not uncommon. Inopportunistically, the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 lockdown appeared to take a serious toll on couples with young children and their relationships when these children were forced to stay at home. They also became targets of abuse from their parents.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, Carlson et al. and Lyttelton et al. observed that most

<sup>51</sup> Paul C Ikwegbue et al., "The Challenges of COVID-19 Pandemic and South Africa's Response," *African Renaissance* 18, no. 1 (2021): 271.

<sup>52</sup> Daniel L Carlson, Richard J Petts, and Joanna R Pepin, "Changes in US Parents' Domestic Labor during the Early Days of the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Sociological Inquiry* 92, no. 3 (2022): 1217–44.

<sup>53</sup> Posel, Oyenubi, and Kollamparambil, "Job Loss and Mental Health during the COVID-19 Lockdown: Evidence from South Africa."

<sup>54</sup> Zachary Parolin, "Unemployment and Child Health during COVID-19 in the USA," *The Lancet Public Health* 5, no. 10 (2020): e521–22.

<sup>55</sup> Parolin, "Unemployment and Child Health during COVID-19 in the USA."

<sup>56</sup> Daniela Marchetti et al., "Parenting-Related Exhaustion during the Italian COVID-19 Lockdown," *Journal of Pediatric Psychology* 45, no. 10 (2020): 1114–23.

<sup>57</sup> Danny Horesh and Adam D. Brown, "Traumatic Stress in the Age of COVID-19: A Call to Close Critical Gaps and Adapt to New Realities.," *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 12, no. 4 (May 2020): 331–35, <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000592>.

<sup>58</sup> Tim Lang, *Feeding Britain: Our Food Problems and How to Fix Them* (Penguin UK, 2020).

<sup>59</sup> Amity Noltemeyer et al., "The Relationship between Deficiency Needs and Growth Needs: The Continuing Investigation of Maslow's Theory," *Child & Youth Services* 42, no. 1 (2021): 24–42.

<sup>60</sup> Cristina Mazza et al., "A Nationwide Survey of Psychological Distress among Italian People during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Immediate Psychological Responses and Associated Factors," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, no. 9 (2020): 3165.

<sup>61</sup> Jessica McCrory Calarco et al., "'My Husband Thinks I'm Crazy': COVID-19-Related Conflict in Couples with Young Children," 2020.

<sup>62</sup> Lilybeth Fontanesi et al., "The Effect of the COVID-19 Lockdown on Parents: A Call to Adopt Urgent Measures.," *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 12, no. S1 (2020): S79.

<sup>63</sup> Kang'ethe, "Unpacking South African Institutions of Higher Learning Efforts and Hurdles to Respond to COVID-19: Social Service Professionals' Lenses."

<sup>64</sup> Calarco et al., "'My Husband Thinks I'm Crazy': COVID-19-Related Conflict in Couples with Young Children."

couples' disagreements during lockdown were exacerbated by their inability to financially support their families due to unemployment, with the disagreements disrupting the families' routines and skills, including parenting.<sup>65</sup>

### The Lockdown Drove People To A State Of Distress

Indeed, the state of lockdown was associated with people engulfing negative temperaments as they tried to build resilience to adjust to a state of new milieu.<sup>66</sup> This disrupted their normal emotional functioning and resulted in variegated distresses and emotional hiccups. This environment prompted people to take different conflictual paths.<sup>67</sup>

Some studies indicate that the effects of the lockdown had a serious gender dimension.<sup>68</sup> Women were more likely to experience anxious temperaments, a phenomenon that is a trait-like phenotype characterized by increased behavioural and physiological reactivity to mildly stressful stimuli that is more prevalent in women than males, who are, to a certain degree, less likely to develop psychological symptoms in the face of a stressful event.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, a recent survey conducted in China by Liu et al., one month after the COVID-19 outbreak, reported higher post-traumatic stress symptoms in women, prompting them to experience body dysfunctionality and frail psychological well-being.<sup>70</sup> This made it impossible for them to balance their work, parenting, and any other domestic duties.

Walsh et al. suggest two forms of temperaments, cyclothymic and depressive temperaments, that are known to raise stress reactivity in daily life, as well as the enhanced desire for social contact.<sup>71</sup> Further, results in a study conducted in Italy by Moccia, Janiri, and Pepe revealed that cyclothymic/depressive individuals may be more likely to perceive the COVID-19 outbreak, unemployment, working from home, full-time parenting, and teaching during the lockdown as physiologically and psychologically disturbing; and to experience increased negative affect in response to social isolation.<sup>72</sup> According to Bandura, psychological distress, such as lack of social support or parental depression, can affect parenting self-efficacy, which is the belief that parents must be able to manage their parental tasks successfully to allow strong adjustments in the growth of children.<sup>73</sup>

### A Surge of Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Reports indicated that when South Africa moved to alert level 3 of lockdown, there was a sudden increase in cases of gender-based violence and femicide.<sup>74</sup> One of the negative impacts of the hard lockdown levels was that many homes became places of abuse for women and children.<sup>75</sup> During these

<sup>65</sup> Carlson, Petts, and Pepin, "Changes in US Parents' Domestic Labor during the Early Days of the COVID-19 Pandemic"; Thomas Lyttelton, Emma Zang, and Kelly Musick, "Gender Differences in Telecommuting and Implications for Inequality at Home and Work," Available at SSRN 3645561, 2020.

<sup>66</sup> Marc H Bornstein, "Introduction: The SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic: Issues for Families, Parents, and Children," in *Psychological Insights for Understanding COVID-19 and Families, Parents, and Children* (Routledge, 2020), 1–69.

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<sup>69</sup> Karen K Akiskal and Hagop S Akiskal, "The Theoretical Underpinnings of Affective Temperaments: Implications for Evolutionary Foundations of Bipolar Disorder and Human Nature," *Journal of Affective Disorders* 85, no. 1–2 (2005): 231–39.

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<sup>71</sup> James P. Walsh and Dallas Hill, "Social Media, Migration and the Platformization of Moral Panic: Evidence from Canada," *Convergence* 29, no. 3 (2023): 690–712.

<sup>72</sup> Lorenzo Moccia et al., "Affective Temperament, Attachment Style, and the Psychological Impact of the COVID-19 Outbreak: An Early Report on the Italian General Population," *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity* 87 (2020): 75–79.

<sup>73</sup> Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* (United States of America: General Learning Press, 1971); Mara Morelli et al., "Parents and Children during the COVID-19 Lockdown: The Influence of Parenting Distress and Parenting Self-Efficacy on Children's Emotional Well-Being," *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2020): 584645.

<sup>74</sup> Kang'ethe, "Unpacking South African Institutions of Higher Learning Efforts and Hurdles to Respond to COVID-19: Social Service Professionals' Lenses"; Nicole McCain, "'Surge' in Gender-Based Violence during Lockdown Level 3, Says Ramaphosa," *News24* 13 (2020).

<sup>75</sup> Kang'ethe, "Unpacking South African Institutions of Higher Learning Efforts and Hurdles to Respond to COVID-19: Social Service Professionals' Lenses."

periods, women who were in abusive relationships suffered a lot at the hands of their abusive men because they had nowhere to run away from their abusers. Muchena exposed other social ills during the lockdown that magnified the existing structural problems such as poverty, inequality, crime, high unemployment, and systematic criminal justice failures.<sup>76</sup>

Inopportunately, within weeks of South Africa being on lockdown, violence against women increased sharply across the region. In the first week of the lockdown, for example, the South African Police Service (SAPS) reported receiving 2,300 calls for help related to gender-based violence.<sup>77</sup> By mid-June 2020, 21 women and children had been killed by intimate partners in the country.<sup>78</sup> The skyrocketing statistics reported to police during this period raise much concern as to why, instead of the lockdown uniting families and marriages, reports of violence were on the rise.<sup>79</sup> Paradoxically, this is not surprising, as common sense holds that most of the time, victims of abuse either know the perpetrator or the perpetrator is a family member.<sup>80</sup> In South Africa, restrictive measures were taken, and a state of disaster was announced alongside a five-phased lockdown approach.<sup>81</sup> The primary lockdown requirement was total confinement of all the people in their homes, which minimized opportunities for women to report violence and leave their abusers. Lockdown for women in abusive relationships often meant being trapped with a violent perpetrator who may become even more abusive as alternative outlets are minimized, such as social activities.<sup>82</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The government and NGOs are recommended to facilitate social education through members of social service professionals such as social workers, counsellors, and psychologists to assist communities in upgrading their parenting skills, especially during crises like those ushered in by COVID-19. Such education should emphasize resilience, coping mechanisms during crises, and handling children. Generally, societies should apply the tenets of ubuntu as a conflict resolution tool to reduce multivarious conflicts, especially those directed toward children during crises such as those presented by COVID-19. Parents should also encourage themselves to have a positive relationship with their children and understand the cognitive processes and stages they may be in to understand their behavioural disposition. Further, parents must set boundaries, offer stimulation, and show their children the requisite love and assurance. This gesture can also impel children to express their needs without fear or distress. Imperatively, communities should be educated on the aetiology and epidemiology of COVID-19 so that they can reduce spates of stigma and stigmatisation associated with the disease. Parents also need to come up with ways and means of encouraging dialogue between themselves as well as between their children instead of resulting in gender-based violence among themselves by imposing stringent disciplinary measures that physically hurt their children. The parents also need to know and own the fact that inflicting corporal punishment on children is punishable by law.

<sup>76</sup> D. Muchena, "Southern Africa: Homes Become Dangerous Place for Women and Girls during COVID-19 Lockdown," *Amnesty International*, 2021; P H Navsaria et al., "The Effect of Lockdown on Intentional and Non-Intentional Injury during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Cape Town, South Africa: A Preliminary Report," *South African Medical Journal* 111, no. 2 (2021): 110–13.

<sup>77</sup> Kang'ethe, "Unpacking South African Institutions of Higher Learning Efforts and Hurdles to Respond to COVID-19: Social Service Professionals' Lenses."

<sup>78</sup> A. Corthia, "Lockdown: More than 87 000 Cases of Gender-Based Violence Reported," *The South African*, April 3, 2020, [www.thesouthafrican.com](http://www.thesouthafrican.com).

<sup>79</sup> M Elijah Baloyi, "The Escalation of Gender-Based Violence during Lockdown as a Practical Theological Concern in the South African Context," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 22, no. 5 (2021): 103–15.

<sup>80</sup> Sylvester Ntomchukwu Madu and Karl Peltzer, "Prevalence and Patterns of Child Sexual Abuse and Victim–Perpetrator Relationship among Secondary School Students in the Northern Province (South Africa)," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 30 (2001): 311–21.

<sup>81</sup> Henna Nathoo, Thavanesi Gurayah, and Deshini Naidoo, "Life during COVID-19: An Explorative Qualitative Study of Occupational Therapists in South Africa," *Occupational Therapy in Mental Health* 39, no. 2 (2023): 211–39.

<sup>82</sup> Bianca Dekel and Naemah Abrahams, "'I Will Rather Be Killed by Corona than by Him...': Experiences of Abused Women Seeking Shelter during South Africa's COVID-19 Lockdown," *PLoS One* 16, no. 10 (2021): e0259275.



## CONCLUSION

Axiomatically, the advent of COVID-19 ushered in both pernicious and perfidious blows to parenting tasks, with increased spates of child mistreatment by their parents. The children's experience of not going to school and the phenomenon of staying at home increased their boredom and increased their opportunity to rebel. With most parents not understanding the precarious cognitive deficit that children were inclined to, parents subjected them to various kinds of corporal punishment, which landed some into conflict with law enforcement agencies. The researchers urge the parents to cultivate a good relationship with their children and understand their behavioural inclination vis-à-vis their cognitive position, to understand how to assist them. Parents should also avoid directing their pent-up distressful environment to their children during times of distress. The government must facilitate parenting methodological tips to parents, in both print and electronic media, during times of crisis such as the epoch of COVID-19. The members of social service professionals such as psychologists, counsellors, and social workers can be useful to serve in such educational platforms.

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## ABOUT AUTHORS

Ntombophelo Sithole-Tetani is working as a Lecturer in the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Law, Humanities and Social Sciences, Walter Sisulu University. She holds a BA degree in Psychology, Honours in Psychology, and an MA in Psychology from Walter Sisulu University. She is concluding her PhD in Psychology. She also holds a diploma in Psychological Counselling. She also holds a Post Graduate Diploma in Psychological Counselling (PGDip) at the University of KwaZulu Natal. She is also a registered psychological counsellor who has been involved in a community engagement programme focusing on COVID-19 awareness in 2020. Her research interests are in issues of

parenting, children, female health and mental health, HIV, and Autism. She has also supervised many students for their honours in Psychology.

Andile Qotoyi Andile Qotoyi is working as a Lecturer in the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Law, Humanities and Social Sciences of Walter Sisulu University. He teaches several modules in Psychology and Industrial Psychology. He holds a Bachelor of Administration in Personnel Management, a BCom Honours degree in Industrial Psychology, and a Master of Arts in Industrial Psychology from Unisa and Walter Sisulu University. Qotoyi has been a member of some Senate-approved committees. He has published some papers on COVID-19 and is writing some in GBV, etc. His other research interests are in Motivation, leadership and Stress management. He has supervised many students for their honours in Psychology.

Simon Murote Kang'ethe works as a full Social Work Professor at Walter Sisulu University. He is also a C2 NRF-rated researcher focusing on culture, health, children, social enterprises, and geriatrics. He has supervised close to fifty master's and PhD students and has authored many book chapters. He has authored more than 200 journal papers.