

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the educational experiences of Latina/o/x families navigating K-12 and higher education institutions

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INTRODUCTION. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated social inequalities, negatively affecting the mental health of Latina/o/x students and their families in the United States. Closures of schools and college campuses severely limited engagement in social interactions and increased responsibilities of parents and teachers of K-12 students and college students. A 2020 study sample showed 41.1% of parents experienced a struggle in balancing employment needs, personal work, and emotions to support their child's at-home learning (Garbe et al., 2020). K-12 teachers faced the challenge of adapting curriculum and work hours to support learning while maintaining students' and parents' engagement. Latina/o/x parents and teachers also have an additional concern for the quality of online education given language and technological access barriers (U.S.G.A. Office, 2020). For Latina/o/x college students, the main concerns revolved around social interaction, health, strained job conditions, and financial burden.

PURPOSE. Assess the lived experiences of Latina/o/x college students, parents, and teachers of K-12 students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESEARCH METHODS. Our data includes interviews from the *Voces of a Pandemic* project. We conducted a thematic analysis of in-depth one-on-one interviews with fifteen Latina/o/x individuals that either work in K-12 schools or parents of children who attended K-12 schools during 2020. Also, we analyzed interviews with six Latina/o/x individuals who attended higher education institutions during the same period. We extracted the participants' views rather than the predefined views of the researchers.

INITIAL FINDINGS. The three-pronged study offers salient characteristics for parents, schoolteachers, and college students facing the pandemic. In terms of K-12 education, the most pressing themes were barriers to technological access and increased responsibilities for parents and teachers. Digital access failures encompassed lacking Internet access to not having enough devices for the household members' simultaneous activities. Moreover, parents struggled to have time after work and technological savvy to help their children with their online education.

Furthermore, this dynamic fostered a change of schedule and increased tasks for K-12 teachers alike. Also, the educators had to overcome the limits of distance learning on the children's learning process. Across all themes, parents and teachers were concerned about the students' engagement in their studies. Regarding college students, the testimonies focused on their psychological states, such as anxiety and stress during the pandemic, coping behaviors, and loss of employment. Those interviews were majority Latina and discussed the stay-at-home orders, the social responsibility, the COVID-19 sickness, and social isolation.

DISCUSSION. K-12 and higher education establishments need to support Latina/o/x students and teachers to alleviate anxiety and stress and further engage students in learning. When institutions fail to offer concrete plans -- students, parents, and teachers face uncertainty and are forced to adapt to the systemic shortcomings individually.