



Coronavirus and my life: What children say

A collaboration between Children Heard and
The Open University's Children's Research Centre



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Background

Children Heard

The Children Heard project was launched in March 2020, after two psychologists Dr May Lene Karlsen and Dr Gail Sinitsky noticed a strikingly limited space for children to share their views and lived experiences of the Coronavirus pandemic. Motivated to promote children's voices, they created an online platform offering an opportunity for children to express and share their feelings and views both in written and art form. Translated into four languages (English, Icelandic, Norwegian and Slovenian), to date the survey has collected the experiences of over 500 children aged 3 to 18. The survey and a gallery of children's artwork can be viewed at www.childrenheard.com.

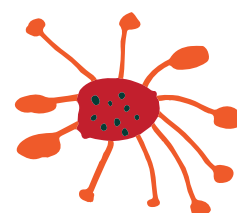
The Open University's Children's Research Centre

The Children's Research Centre (CRC) was established in 2004 by Professor Mary Kellett. It was the first university centre of its kind to support children and young people to undertake their own research. The impetus for the Centre can be traced back to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, that children are the 'experts' of their own lives and they have the right to participate in everything that has an impact on them. The Centre maintains as its core value the belief that children and young people are experts in their own lives and that any partnership should focus on empowering children and young people by placing them at the heart of research.

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Chamberlain, L., Karlsen, M., Sinitsky, G., Bennett, S., Plowright-Pepper, L., Vackova, P. (2021)
Coronavirus and my life: What children say. Milton Keynes Children Heard/The Open University.



What makes this collaboration unique are the shared values of Children Heard and the CRC underpinning this research. Of most importance to this partnership is that the findings from the data analysis are made accessible to children and young people. To achieve this goal, this is the first of two learning outputs that should be read in parallel and viewed as complementary. This summary report is written for wider stakeholder groups (including parents/carers, schools, local authorities, non-governmental organisations, decision-makers and funders). It positions children as competent and agentic interpreters of their own lives and focuses attention upon their lived experiences. The second learning output, a child-focused poster (Appendix A) communicates the findings through illustrations to capture a young audience.

Project Foreword

When lockdown hit Europe in March 2020, we were struck by the nations' collective compassion for children and the speed at which professionals and parents alike found creative and child-friendly ways of informing children about Coronavirus as well as supporting them through lockdown. These initiatives have had a very positive impact on the experiences of children so far during this pandemic.

Yet, we also noticed how few attempts there were to hear directly from children at a societal level: how were they making sense of the lockdown? What thoughts or feelings did they have about the pandemic? Moreover, there appeared to be few attempts at involving children in decision-making or at systematically gathering their views and experiences.

We wanted to make a difference, to put children 'at the table', and this has been the beating heart of our Children Heard initiative, launched in early March 2020. Later that same month, we designed a survey for parents/carers to use with their children, as a means of providing a space for children to express their experiences both verbally and through art (Appendix B).

What began as an activity to facilitate child-focussed conversations within the home has grown to become a valuable database of information that we hope could lead to children being heard collectively at a societal level. The survey has created something quite unique. It features not only amazingly rich and diverse accounts of children's experiences of the pandemic, but it also captures moments of connection between parent and child (Appendix C). Moments such as when a parent realises that their child knows more than assumed; or when a child shared their fear for a family member's health; or when a child expressed appreciation for being able to spend more time with their parents.

The process of hearing directly from young children about their experiences is not always an easy one. In developing our survey and reaching out to various organisations and professionals, we were met with excitement and encouragement, as well as some well-intentioned reluctance. We worked through a variety of ethical considerations. How can we most meaningfully engage with children under 12 who may struggle to verbally articulate their experiences? How do we collaborate

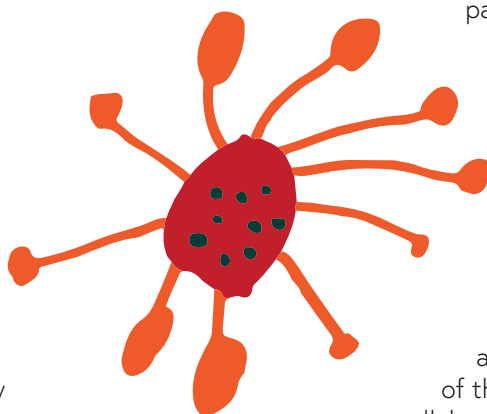
with parents/carers to do this? Do we hold an end-goal in mind, or do we keep it open-ended and allow the children's responses to guide us? How do we ensure children are safeguarded in the process? How do we hold a balance between protecting children and yet knowing that answering questions about the pandemic may elicit difficult feelings?

These are no doubt some of the very real obstacles that we meet as a society in our endeavours to truly listen to children. Yet, if we do not navigate these obstacles, with what are we left? We are left with an absence of children's voices on any given topic or in any given debate, including those related to the Coronavirus pandemic. Giving children an active part in the dialogue is likely to enrich society's understanding and decision-making, while children come to know: their views matter.

From our very first communications with The Open University Children's Research Centre (CRC) in late June 2020, we knew we shared this vision of promoting - in their own words and pictures - children's experiences of the pandemic. We are thrilled to be collaborating with the CRC for this next phase - the analysis of the survey responses. The combination of their academic lens and our clinical approach creates a uniquely valuable engagement with the responses. The analysis process has been organised into two phases. This current phase (the focus of this report and the children's poster) involves the analysis of the written survey responses of children aged between 3 and 12 years. It is our hope that, funding dependent, our next phase will involve broadening the analysis to include the written responses of children aged between 13 and 18 years, as well as the art-based responses that children submitted.

Our aim is to ensure that children are active voices in pandemic-related dialogue. Children's lives - their experiences, identities and relationships - are being impacted by the pandemic. It is vital that they are invited to be part of the collective response. Our hope is that our survey helps to inspire a range of further initiatives to hear directly from children, and that children's ideas and perspectives form a valuable contribution to decision-making processes.

Dr May Lene Karlsen and Dr Gail Sinitsky
Children Heard



Executive Summary

At the start of the Coronavirus pandemic, the World Health Organisation (WHO) responded to key questions about the impact of the pandemic on children's mental health. It highlighted potential anxieties that children and young people may have about the virus and stressed the importance of providing opportunities for them to share their feelings in caring and supportive environments. In response, professionals and parents found creative and child-friendly ways of informing children about Coronavirus as well as supporting them. However, there appeared to be few attempts at involving children in decision-making or at systematically gathering their views and experiences.

As a result, Children Heard launched an initiative in March 2020 for children to express their experiences. This featured an online 16-question interview schedule for parents/carers to use with their children, as a means of facilitating a space for expressions both verbally and through art.

After six months, 504 children had completed the survey in one of four languages: English, Icelandic, Norwegian, and Slovenian. Children Heard then invited The Open University's Children's Research Centre (CRC) to lead the rapid response analysis of the survey responses. The analysis involved two elements, a quantitative analysis of survey responses and a qualitative multi-phase process of thematic analysis. The focus of the analysis was on the 240 children aged 3-12 (48 Early Years and 192 primary school age participants) who took part in the survey. Children in this younger age group are historically neglected in research and continue to be neglected in contemporary research about Coronavirus and the pandemic. The outcome of the analysis and the collaboration between Children Heard and the CRC has led to this report, which highlights children as competent and agentic interpreters of their own lives and focuses attention upon their lived experiences.

Findings

Overall, children completing this survey had high levels of awareness about the widespread nature and potential impact of the virus.

There are costs of the pandemic on children's lives

- **Children's emotion word choices reflected mostly negative feelings about the pandemic**
Children completing the survey in English were more likely to express feelings of sadness, worry, and fear. The most frequently referenced emotion words were 'bad', 'not good', 'scared', and 'sad'.
- **Children were highly conscious of the limitations on their freedom**
Children's physical worlds were reduced, and they missed being able to exercise, pursue activities and go on special outings.
- **Children missed their friends and expressed concern for family members**
Children missed playing with friends and the physicality of being with them, both in and out of school. Children felt cut off from their wider circle of loved ones, primarily grandparents, and they expressed an overall sense of concern for their immediate family.

Children feel the impact of the pandemic on their lives

- **Children expressed disliking a whole range of aspects of the pandemic**
The most reported disliked aspects of the pandemic were fewer social connections, concern over deaths and the spread of the virus, restrictions, and isolation.
- **Children expressed liking a whole range of aspects of the pandemic**
Children liked being with their family at home. Some enjoyed the new flexibility of learning at home and the opportunity to be with family and spend time outdoors. Children exhibited resilience towards the pandemic, characterised by a wish to understand more about the virus and how to stay safe going forward.

- **Children experienced both limitations and new opportunities brought by the pandemic**

The all-pervading, limiting presence of Coronavirus created a backcloth to children's day-to-day lives. Children spoke positively about maintaining social connections with friends and their wider family and engaging more with neighbours and the local community.

Children construct a rich context that shapes their experiences of the pandemic

- **Children exhibited an awareness of global issues and facts related to the pandemic**

Many children questioned what was happening around them and had questions for those in charge.

- **Children demonstrated a rich knowledge and insight** into what it is like to live during a pandemic in their respective countries.

- **Children shared feelings of vulnerability but seemed to maintain a sense of safety**

Some children expressed reassurance about what they perceived to be reliable and capable social institutions.

- **Children's relationships with others shaped the way they made sense of themselves in relation to the virus**

The changing nature of children's relationships was fundamental to whether children had positive or negative experiences during the pandemic.

- **Children expressed personal and unique perceptions of the pandemic**

The pandemic was described as important to many of the children, and the severity of its impact was relayed in terms of health, history and greater social impact. Children were looking to the future with a mostly positive outlook.

Recommendations

Children expressed a wide range of fresh and sometimes complex insights, understandings and feelings about living with the pandemic. The breadth and complexity of children's experiences, even in this small-scale rapid response study, suggests that there is more work to do to ensure children and young people's views about the pandemic are included in a comprehensive community response to Coronavirus. This report makes three recommendations:

- 1 Firstly, this report indicates that where children and young people themselves are asked, important insights emerge about the impact of the pandemic. Organisations should ensure they engage with children directly, rather than refracting children's views through the lens of an adult. We know that it can be challenging to negotiate ethical and safe practices and spaces for listening to children's ideas and feelings. Nevertheless, engaging children and young people means trusting them and valuing their perspectives. In the process of listening, decision-makers must also commit to actively hearing what has been communicated and seek ways to involve children and young people in decisions that impact their lives.
- 2 Secondly, every country should hold a Coronavirus press conference for children and young people. The pandemic has not only been a global leveller, but also a generational one. Children know what is happening and they have questions for decision-makers that are currently going unanswered. Their questions are important ones, showing a nuanced understanding of the current situation. A press conference for children and young people would serve a crucial purpose in helping them know that they are part of the response to the pandemic, not just the recipients of adults' decisions. Additionally, it would give those in government important insight into what is important to children.
- 3 Thirdly, in the longer term, qualitative research is needed to capture insights about the pandemic directly from children and young people about the ongoing and changing nature of their responses over time. Quantitative and at-scale research is important, but it is best understood through the individual stories of children's lived experiences. To enable this to happen, child and youth-led organisations and institutions should work together to pool resources and research capability.

Conclusion

Understanding children's experiences is important when mobilising a whole community in one unified response. Most significantly, children's unique lenses on the world - often characterised by immediacy, honesty, compassion and 'questioning the obvious' - are needed now more than ever, in our efforts to make sense of, and to move forward together in the wake of the pandemic. We hope this report has achieved its aim of amplifying the voices of those who took part, and advocating that children and young people are part of the societal response to the pandemic.

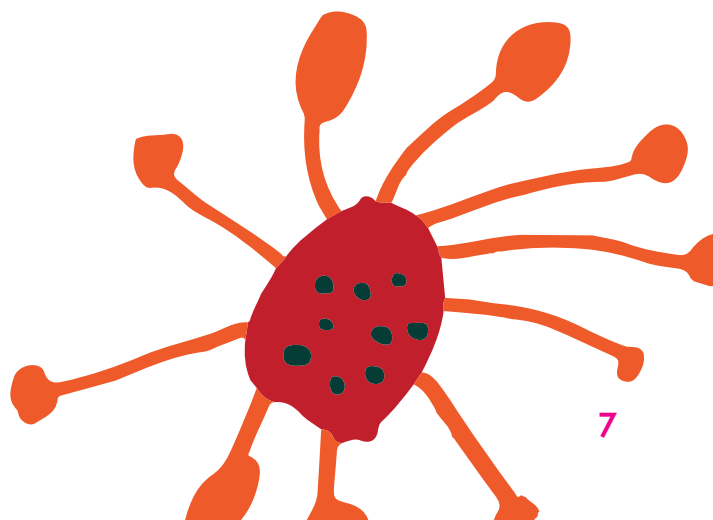
Purpose of This Report

The purpose of this current report is to amplify the voices of a cross-section of children who participated in the survey. In particular, the report highlights the 240 responses of children aged 3-12 years. This age group is historically neglected in research (Chamberlain, 2019; Plowright-Pepper, 2020) and continues to be neglected in contemporary research about Coronavirus and the pandemic. Indeed, a recent report, based on the views of practitioners from 20 European countries, highlighted that at the height of the initial lockdown, there was little evidence of children's views contributing to public decision-making (Larkins, 2020). This is further supported by the Children's Commissioner for England (2020, p.2) who expressed that decisions about the pandemic have not put children at the forefront. While this report does not claim to represent the views of all children, it does aim to shine a light on the ways in which these 240 children have experienced the pandemic and their feelings and views. In so doing, the aim is to highlight the importance of ensuring that children are invited to contribute to debates and decision-making in relation to the pandemic, and to ensure that they are part of the societal response.

This report supports the many organisations who have committed to listening to children and young people's views about their current experiences, rather than interpreting their experiences through an adult, parent or researcher's lens (Cooper, 2017). For example: The Children's Parliament in Scotland (2020), The Children's Commissioner in Wales (2020), and the Dulwich Centre in Australia (2020). We applaud their efforts in making children and young people's views heard at this unprecedented time, and we hope this report builds on their work and provides a gateway for further research.

The report sets out to do four things:

- 1** To foreground the feelings, thoughts and experiences of the 240 children aged 3-12 years who participated in the Children Heard survey (March – August 2020).
- 2** To highlight the importance of inviting children to be part of debates and decision-making in relation to the pandemic.
- 3** To provide a set of questions for adults to use with children to help facilitate conversations about the pandemic (Appendix D).
- 4** To encourage further research with children about their constructions and lived experiences of the pandemic (Appendix E).



Introduction to the Survey

Over a six-month period, from March – August 2020, the Children Heard project collated 504 responses to their online survey (Appendix B), created using Survey Legend. It was hoped that the survey would offer a framework for children and parents to have conversations together about children's experiences of the pandemic, and in so doing, would also be an opportunity to share children's thoughts and feelings more widely.

It was felt that an online mechanism would be the most efficient way of capturing a large number of children and young people's views from across regions and countries. In the UK, Children Heard promoted the survey on several social media platforms and was supported by several organisations who shared the survey within their networks. In addition, Children Heard worked in collaboration with UNICEF offices in Iceland, Norway and Slovenia and information about the project was disseminated through their channels. As such, the survey was offered in four languages - English, Icelandic, Norwegian and Slovenian – and captured the views of children and young people living in Iceland, Norway, Slovenia, the UK, as well as other countries. Table 1 lists the total subset of Early Years and primary age response, by country.

The survey comprised 16 fixed and open-ended questions, including an invitation to submit a drawing or piece of artwork under the title 'Coronavirus and My Life'. Ethical and safeguarding information was provided before children participated in the survey (Appendix F). All responses were submitted anonymously, and participants did not share identifying details in their submissions other than their age and country of residence.

Some of the questions invited children and young people to share their feelings, thoughts and experiences of the Coronavirus (Q3-8). Two questions asked about their experiences of school (Q9-10). One question asked what children wanted to know about the Coronavirus (Q11). Two questions invited children to consider what the people in charge of their country should be doing about the pandemic and what they would like to ask them (Q12-13). One question asked children to reflect on how life might be different once the pandemic ended (Q14). On the final page of the survey, parents/ carers were invited to share their reflections of the survey and to share any additional information (Q15). These reflections are presented in Appendix C.

This survey was originally intended to offer a framework for child-focussed conversations with their parents/carers. As such, the research team are mindful that younger children are likely to have completed the survey alongside their parents/carers, and this may also be the case for older children.

| Country | Frequency | % |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Iceland | 92 | 38.3 |
| Slovenia | 65 | 27.1 |
| UK | 53 | 22.1 |
| Norway | 23 | 9.6 |
| Greece | 2 | 0.8 |
| USA | 1 | 0.4 |
| Spain | 1 | 0.4 |
| Canada | 1 | 0.4 |
| Switzerland | 1 | 0.4 |
| Unknown | 1 | 0.4 |
| Total | 240 | 100.0 |

Table 1: The total subset of Early Years and primary age responses, by country

In total, 504 children participated in the survey. Their ages ranged from 3 – 18 years. The mean participant age was 12 (12.03, n = 485). Not all participants provided their age (19 participants did not).

The children were classified into three age categories, as follows:

Secondary school age: 13 – 18 years

Primary school age: 5 – 12 years

Early Years: 3 – 6 years in most countries, but 3 – 5 in the UK

This report focuses on the responses of the 240 children aged 3-12, categorised as Early Years and primary school age. There were 48 Early Years and 192 primary school age participants (Figure 1 and Table 1). Most children in this age subset were aged 6-10 years, with the mean age 8.41 years.

Participating Children

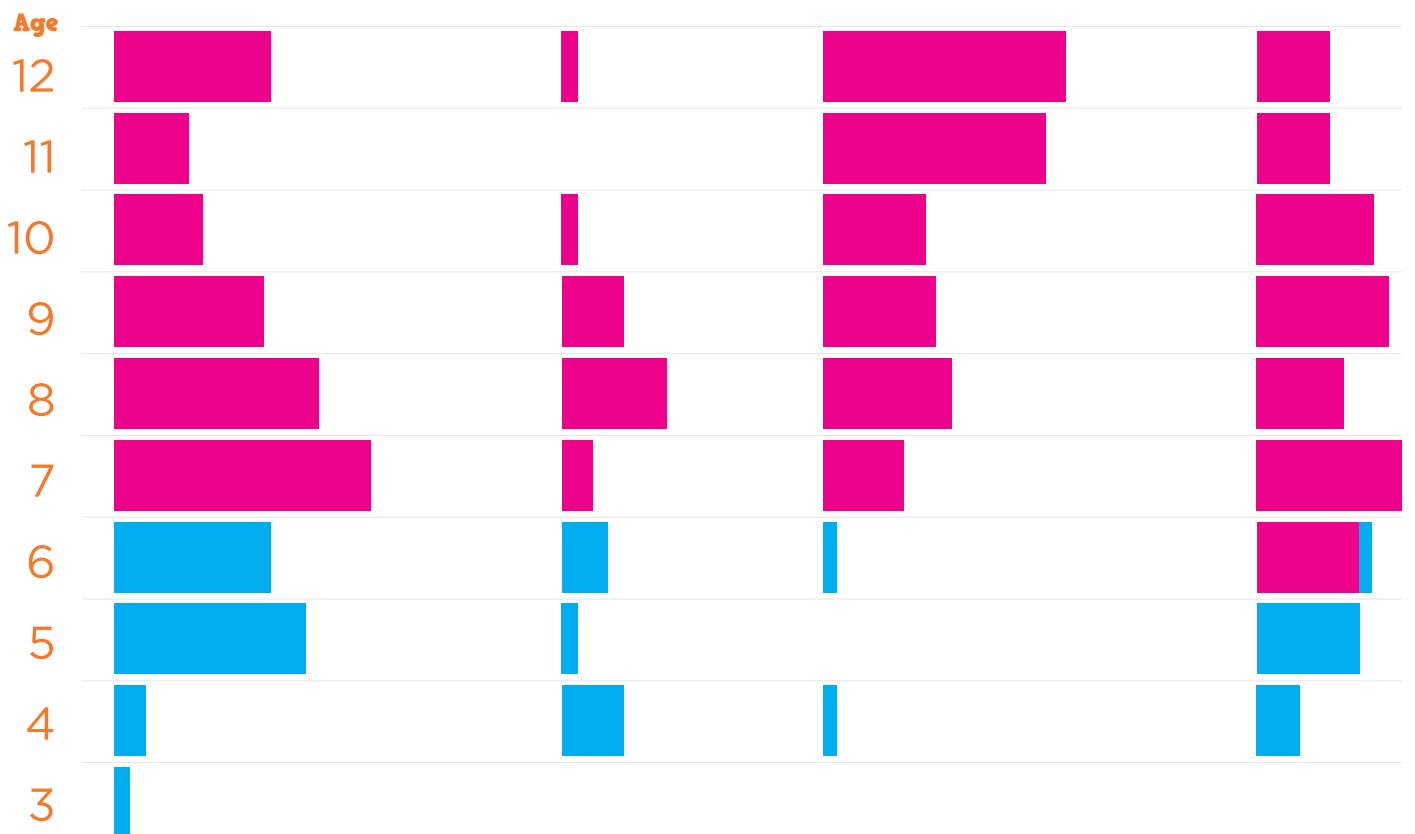
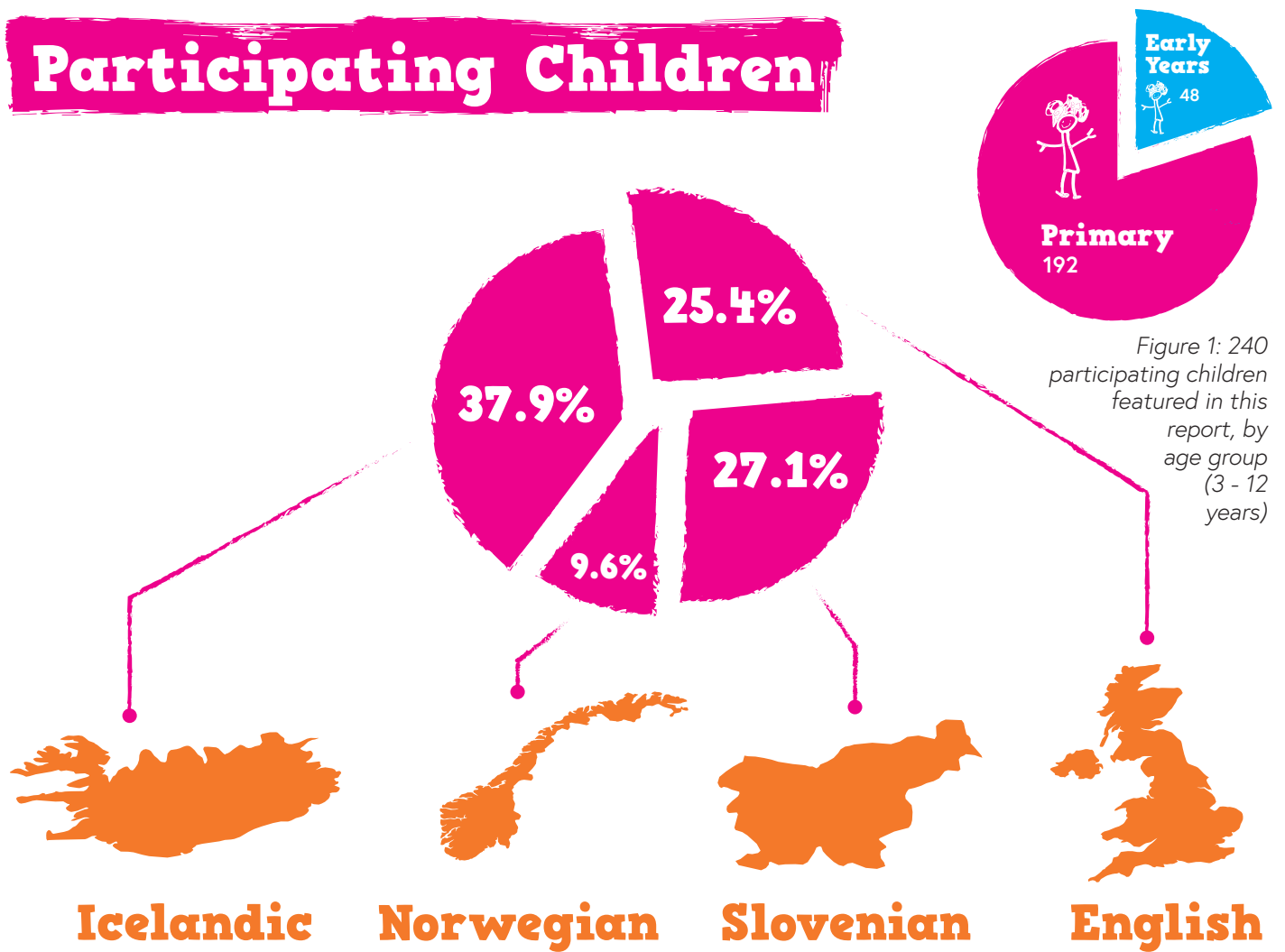


Figure 2: Participating children featured in this report, by survey language

Primary Early Years

Engaging with the Data

Engagement with the data by the team was framed through a rapid analysis, or first impressions lens. This approach provides sufficient data of interest to highlight the experiences, thoughts and ideas of these 240 children. This approach also makes a strong case for further funding to support a greater, in-depth analysis of these responses, as well as the inclusion of the secondary age data and the images submitted to Children Heard's online gallery.

When engaging with the data, the researchers were mindful of the social, cultural and political contexts in which children participated in the project. In reading and making sense of the children's responses, it is important to recognise that their experiences of the pandemic may have been impacted by various factors including, their age, their cultures, the countries in which they lived and the varying impacts of the virus within those countries. Not only this, but children participated in the survey in the context of an ever-changing pandemic terrain. For example, in the UK some children completed the survey in March when lockdown was imposed most strictly, while others in August when many restrictions had been lifted. Moreover, the researchers themselves have their own unique experiences and perceptions of the pandemic which may contribute to their interpretations and understandings of the responses. It is important, therefore, that these contexts and differences are considered, both in the analysis of the data and in the reading of the project findings.

The survey findings in this report are framed within the experiences of these 240 children and no attempt is made to generalise from these findings or to suggest that all children feel the same.

The analysis has two elements:

- Quantitative analysis of the survey responses by survey language, age of children and categorical responses, using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS v26) software, plus content analysis of the shorter open ended responses.
- Qualitative thematic analysis of survey data using the Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) tool Dedoose, framed around three research questions.

All responses not originally submitted in the English language were translated into English before the dataset was collated and analysed.

Data was analysed using a multi-phase process of thematic analysis. The first phase of inductive coding generated 65 initial codes and 106 subcodes, leading to a second phase of re-coding and merging of themes. Following this, a number of connected themes were put forward for review and re-coding before being synthesised with the quantitative responses.

Survey findings

The survey findings are presented in three sections, in line with the research questions. Each research question draws on the mixed methods approach taken in the data analysis process, by presenting both qualitative and quantitative data.

Research Question 1

What are the costs of the Coronavirus pandemic that children report on their daily lives?

Research Question 2

What are the wider impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic on children's lives?

Research Question 3

How do children position themselves in relation to the Coronavirus pandemic?

To foreground the focus of the survey responses throughout this section, we first draw on the responses to the first survey question, *'What is happening in your country and the world at the moment?'* (Q3).

All 240 participants responded to this question. Almost all of the children spoke about Coronavirus or its associated restrictions (93.8% of the Early Years children and 98.4% of the primary age children). Only six children responded with 'I don't know' or un-related comments - three from each age group.

Most of the children specifically replied 'Coronavirus', 'The Virus', 'COVID-19' or the equivalent (77.1% of the Early Years children and 80.7% of the primary age children), as all or part of their response to this question. The children who did not state 'Coronavirus' or similar did, however, give responses associated with the changes in their lives as a result of the Coronavirus. For example, home-schooling, people getting sick, limited daily activities, boredom of the virus, and sadness at being disconnected from their friends and wider family. Responses to this question show that most of these children were acutely aware of the pandemic in their own country or in the world.

Research Question 1

What are the costs of the Coronavirus pandemic that children report on their daily lives?

The first research question sets out to capture the various personal costs that the children reported experiencing as a result of the pandemic. It highlights the sacrifices that children have made during the pandemic and the losses that many have experienced.

Key Themes

- 1 Emotional costs
- 2 Restriction on movement
- 3 Impact on relationships

Emotional costs

The children communicated experiencing difficult emotions as a result of the pandemic. We analysed the emotion words used by the children in answer to the question, 'How do you feel about the Coronavirus?' (Q7). Overall, 42 out of the 48 Early Years participants (88%) and 182 out of 192 primary age children (95%) responded to this question. Most common across all ages were the feelings 'bad', 'not good', 'scared' and 'sad'. When coding the responses, the phrase 'bad' was kept separate from 'not good' as it was considered that there may be subtle differences in meaning across the children.

Table 2 lists the emotions expressed by children according to the language of the survey they completed. It is suggestive of differences in the children's emotional responses across different countries. Most notably, children completing the survey in English were more likely to express feelings of sadness, worry and fear in comparison to children completing the survey in the other languages.

| English | | Icelandic | | Norwegian | | Slovenian | |
|--------------|----|-----------------|----|---------------------|---|---------------|----|
| sad | 13 | not good | 22 | nothing | 4 | bad | 14 |
| worried | 9 | bad | 19 | scared | 3 | ok | 7 |
| scared | 8 | ok | 9 | safe | 2 | scared | 4 |
| upset | 3 | strange | 6 | look forward to end | 2 | sad | 4 |
| bored | 3 | ambivalent | 5 | don't know | 2 | normal | 4 |
| unhappy | 2 | nothing | 4 | annoyed | 2 | worried | 3 |
| don't know | 2 | normal | 3 | | | uncomfortable | 3 |
| danger virus | 2 | annoyed | 3 | | | good | 3 |
| anxious | 2 | varied emotions | 2 | | | weak | 2 |
| annoyed | 2 | stressed | 2 | | | | |
| | | sad | 2 | | | | |
| | | excited | 2 | | | | |
| | | don't know | 2 | | | | |

Table 2: What do children feel about the Coronavirus? By survey language*

*Frequencies of at least 2 included here in Table.

As may be expected, there were differences in the types of language used across these two age groups of Early Years and primary aged children (Figures 3 and 4). In total, 61 different emotion words were mentioned by primary aged children, whilst Early Years children mentioned 13. (Appendix G lists the detail of children's responses.) It could be anticipated that younger children would draw

on a smaller repertoire of feelings language than slightly older children, though it is also possible that this smaller range of phrases is because only 20% of the whole sample were Early Years children. It should also be noted that the nuances in words expressing feelings may have not been fully captured in some responses due to the translation into English.



Figure 3: Early Years responses to Question 7: How do you feel about the Coronavirus?

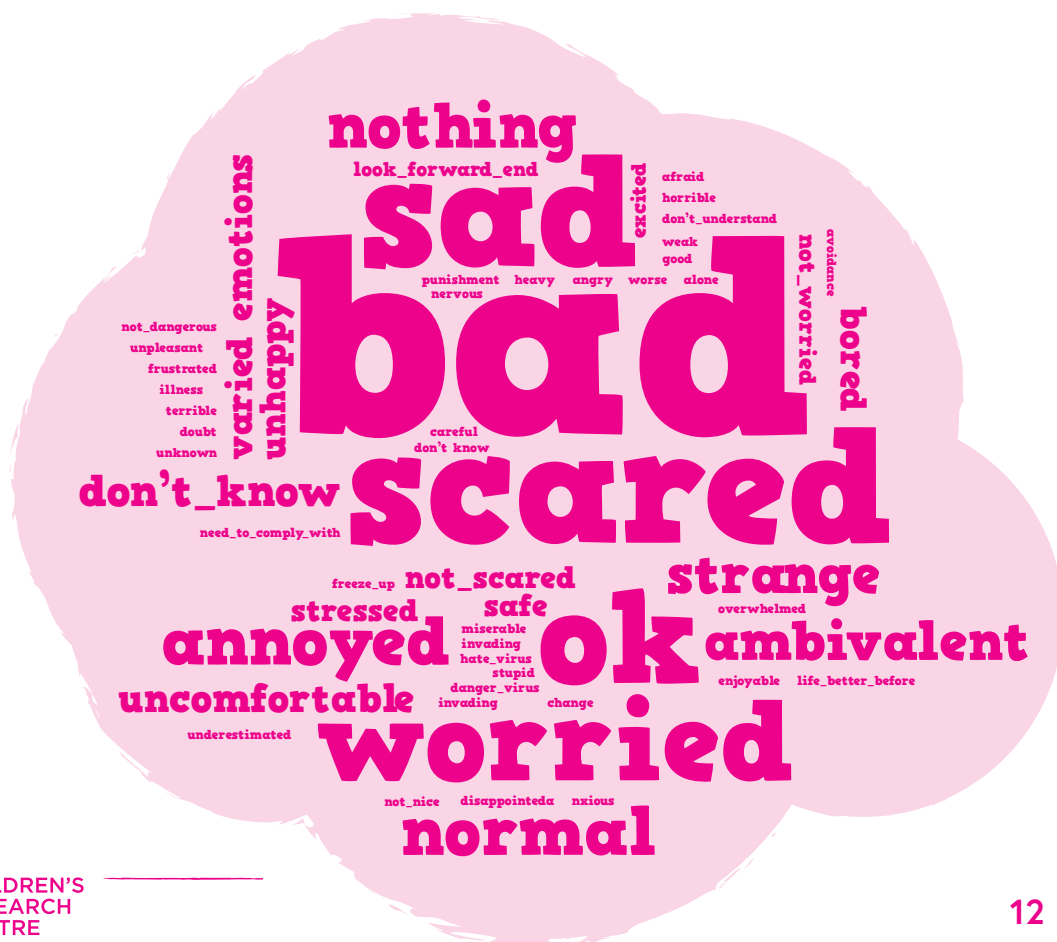


Figure 4: Primary age responses to Question 7: How do you feel about the Coronavirus?

Emotional costs (cont.)

Children expressed a variety of emotion words specifically in relation to Q7. However, a range of emotions about the Coronavirus, and the pandemic as a whole, also emerged from the qualitative analysis of other survey questions. These include: *Tell us more about how important it is [what's happening in the world] for you? (Q5), What do you think about the Coronavirus? (Q6), and What do you like and what do you dislike about the Coronavirus being around? (Q8).*

Many - although not all - of the children stated that they felt scared by Coronavirus. These feelings were combined with detailed knowledge and high levels of awareness about the widespread nature and potential impact of the virus. The children expressed concern for the safety of their close family but also for themselves, *'I am scared even though they say the children get less sick'*. This was particularly the case when a family member caught the virus, *'I was afraid that my dad would die when he was sick.'* Children were also scared that their parents or grandparents might die, *'I'm a little scared of it, because it kills some people'* and, *'I'm afraid my grandparents will die'*. However, some children appeared reassured by the knowledge that the virus, *'does not have much effect on children and healthy people'*.

“ The world has become boring and I'm not allowed to play with my friends. ”

In addition to feelings of concern for others and worries about the virus, other emotions were conveyed including boredom. Some children appeared less alarmed about the Coronavirus but expressed frustration that it was taking, *'quite a long time'* to learn how to combat it, whilst others expressed concern as they were, *'not quite sure what's going to happen'*. The necessary rules and restrictions irritated some children, *'It's boring to have to wash hands and disinfect so often'*. Some children's emotions changed over time, suggesting fatigue set in as the weeks progressed; whilst quarantining had been fun at first, *'it was hard in the end'*. This was in contrast with one child's feelings towards the Coronavirus as, *'Nothing bad. I'm completely calm.'*

Restriction on movement

The children communicated a cost related to the increasing restrictions on their movement. Many were upset about not being able to exercise and mentioned not being able to go swimming or pursue other activities and special outings. Their school experience was also limited. Some could not take the school bus to school; children talked of having to eat their lunch in their classrooms; and *'not everyone could attend kindergarten together'*. Other children mentioned that they couldn't *'play with kids at school who are not in your group'*. In school, children found their usual experience *'different'* and the impact of social distancing caused one child to say: *'I feel bad being stuck in one classroom with a few kids at a time'*. Some schools were closed, and it was *'impossible to go to the store'*, further reducing the size of children's physical worlds and spaces.

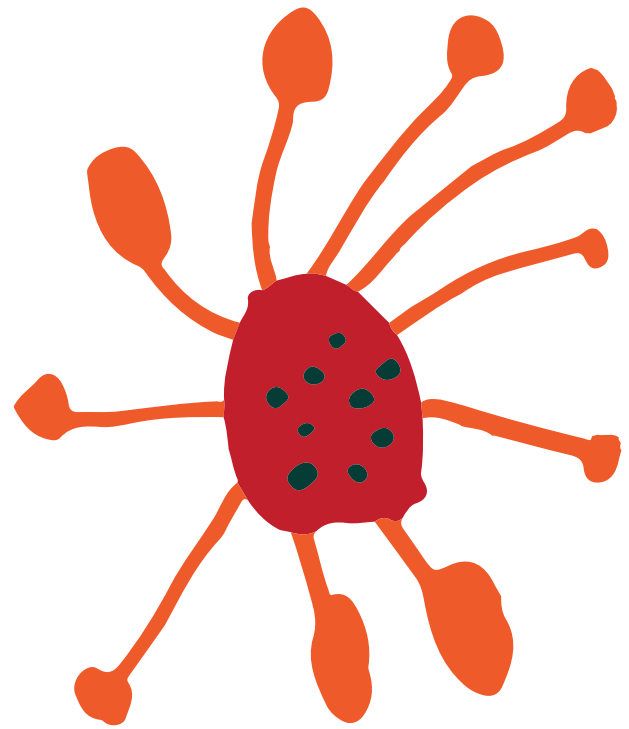
“ I want to go abroad and can't travel. I like to travel. ”

Many of the children were highly conscious of the limitations on their freedom to roam and on their free time. One described this as the virus, *'destroying [everything] for everyone'*. For instance, they felt, *'sad not to be able to visit anyone or go anywhere'* and disappointed at, *'not being able to hang out with friends'*. Children were conscious of the *'ban on gatherings'* and they missed the fun they had expected from cancelled outings and gatherings including birthday parties. Summer holidays abroad were particularly mentioned, *'I want to go abroad and can't travel. I like to travel'*. Physical distancing and restrictions were also hard for children, and the two-metre spacing was difficult for some, *'Don't like having to keep 2-metre distance from friends.'*

Impact on relationships

The impact of the pandemic on children's relationships with friends and family was expressed as a cost. Some children were annoyed at being hardly able to meet or play with friends. Children frequently mentioned feeling sad because they missed playing with friends and particularly the physicality of playing with friends. *'[You] cannot encourage them properly and not hug them when they give you something fun or do something fun for you.'* In class, children *'couldn't sit together, it was sad'*. New social distancing rules meant the children were placed in smaller groups and, therefore, unable to mix with friends in other groups, *'I did not get to be in a group with my best friend and therefore we have not met for a long time.'*

This sadness appeared to be felt even more deeply when some children spoke about their play, *'I'm a little sad because I'm not allowed to go to recess with my friends'* and, *'I am very scared in these moments and I have no friends with me'*. Children did not like being socially distanced from their friends. They talked about not being able to touch or play in close proximity, *'It's Coronavirus and nobody can touch anything'* and *'You have to be careful not to hug or kiss'*. Children described feeling, *'A little bad because you can't touch anyone. It's very strange at school!'*



“

You cannot play with your friends. ”

“

When can friends come to my place?

”

Some children also missed being able to meet their grandparents and other close relatives and felt they, *'dare not hug or hold hands with anyone but Mum or Dad'*. There was an overall sense of concern for immediate family, whilst feeling cut off or disconnected from their wider circle of loved ones, primarily grandparents. For one child, this feeling of disconnectedness from others extended to missing a dog who had become a significant part of this child's life, *'I like to stay at home, but I miss my friends, my teachers and my grandparents and seeing the dog at my grandparents.'*

As well as missing family members, several children also expressed concern about their wellbeing, particularly their grandparents and parents, and were *'afraid someone in the family will get it and get sick'*. Some children expressed concern that they themselves were a risk to their loved ones and might, *'infect a family member'* and, *'I'm worried and worried. My worry is for my friends'*. There was also concern for keyworker parents who *'take care of sick people and could get sick'*. A child of a hospital-worker reflected that her Mum could *'get more sick than others and needs to take care of herself'*. One child wanted to know, *'if Mum or Dad are in danger.'*



Research Question 2

What are the wider impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic on children's lives?

As the first research question highlighted, many of the children felt the costs of the pandemic acutely. However, in looking at the responses, it became clear that it was important to also capture the whole range of experiences that were expressed, not just the costs. This second research question therefore expands our understanding of the impact of the pandemic on children's lives and highlights some of their diverse experiences. It moves from a sole focus on the costs of the pandemic to exploring and engaging with the full range of children's experiences. In this way, children - who are so often represented as a group of people who are vulnerable or in need of protection - are looked at more individually.

In looking more widely at the impact of the pandemic, two themes were noted. These themes are drawn from across four survey questions: *Tell us more about how important it is [what's happening in the world] for you?* (Q5) *What do you think about the Coronavirus?* (Q6) *How do you feel about the Coronavirus?* (Q7) and *What do you like and dislike about the Coronavirus being around?* (Q8).

Key Themes

- 1 Children's likes and dislikes of the pandemic
- 2 Children's experiences of the limitations and new opportunities brought by the pandemic

| | Overall (%) | Early Years (%) | Primary (%) |
|--------------------------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Family togetherness | 74 (37) | 17 (41.5) | 57 (35.4) |
| Home-schooling | 36 (17.8) | 1 (2.4) | 35 (21.7) |
| Learning Covid-safe behaviour | 18 (8.9) | 11 (26.8) | 7 (4.3) |
| Hobbies activities | 14 (6.9) | | 14 (8.7) |
| Virus could be worse | 13 (6.4) | 6 (14.6) | 7 (4.3) |
| Environmental nature | 12 (5.9) | | 12 (7.5) |
| Improved wellbeing | 11 (5.4) | | 11 (6.8) |
| Nothing | 9 (4.5) | 1 (2.1) | 8 (5) |
| Social connections + community | 5 (2.5) | 1 (2.1) | 4 (2.5) |
| Improved hygiene | 4 (2) | 1 (2.1) | 3 (1.9) |
| Peaceful solitude | 4 (2) | 3 (6.3) | 1 (0.6) |
| Appreciation | 2 (1) | | 2 (1.2) |
| Number of responses | 202 | 41 | 161 |

Table 3: What do you like about the Coronavirus being around? (Q8a)*

*Each child's response was given one code.

Children's likes and dislikes of the pandemic

The children were asked to share what they liked and disliked about the Coronavirus being around. Their responses highlighted a complex and nuanced experience, an experience of simultaneously liking and disliking aspects of the pandemic.

What the children reported liking about the Coronavirus being around (Q8a) was coded, resulting in 12 overall categories of response (Table 3). The children's responses to the question about what they disliked about Coronavirus being around (Q8b) were coded, resulting in 10 overall categories (Table 4).

Children expressed liking and disliking a whole range of aspects of the pandemic. As highlighted in the first research question, the impact on relationships was a dominant theme. Indeed, 'fewer social connections' was one of the most reported disliked aspects of the pandemic (33.3%). This was closely followed by 'deaths and the spread of illness and infection' (29.2%). Over 40% of the Early Years children talked about the number of deaths and the spread of the virus. The 'restrictions and isolation' was the third most common aspect of the pandemic that children reported disliking (16.9%).

Table 5 presents the children's responses to what they disliked (Q8b) by survey language. It highlights how the children who completed the survey in Icelandic were more likely to be concerned about the death rates and the spread of the virus, compared to the children who completed the survey in Slovenian or Norwegian, but less

likely to mention fewer social connections. For children who completed the survey in Slovenian, the findings were reversed.

A small number of participants communicated that there was 'nothing' that they liked about the Coronavirus being around (9 participants).

In addition to expressing their dislikes of the virus being around, the children shared what they felt were positive aspects of the pandemic. This begins to highlight the nuanced and complex experiences of the children. Many of the children communicated their appreciation for 'being together with family at home' (37%). Some of the children liked 'home-schooling' (17.8%) and could identify benefits of this: *'It was good to be home schooled', 'It is comfortable to be able to study at home', and 'met new friends when I was doing online practice'*. Being relieved of specific aspects of their school routine, such as the early start to the school day, was also mentioned as a positive. The new flexibility to learn at home resulted not only in opportunities to spend more time with family but also more time outdoors. Some children talked about improvements this brought to their physical and mental wellbeing. For example, some talked around the fact that they were enjoying the peace and quiet (*'peaceful solitude'*).

The third most mentioned 'like' was children's increased 'knowledge about Covid-safe behaviour' (8.9%). *'We can learn a lot from this epidemic, for example never giving up' and, 'this has taught us many things. Like how not to get infected and how to take care of viruses'*.

| | Overall (%) | Early Years (%) | Primary (%) |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Fewer social connections | 73 (33.3) | 15 (34.1) | 58 (33.1) |
| Deaths + spread of illness | 64 (29.2) | 18 (40.9) | 46 (26.3) |
| Restrictions and isolation | 37 (16.9) | 6 (13.6) | 31 (17.7) |
| Missed opportunities | 14 (6.4) | 1 (2.3) | 13 (7.4) |
| Home-schooling | 10 (4.6) | 1 (2.3) | 9 (5.1) |
| Negative impact on wellbeing | 7 (3.2) | 3 (6.8) | 4 (2.3) |
| Changes to routine | 6 (2.7) | | 6 (3.4) |
| Everything | 6 (2.7) | | 6 (3.4) |
| Bringing out worst in humankind | 1 (0.5) | | 1 (0.6) |
| Having to attend school | 1 (0.5) | | 1 (0.6) |
| Number of responses | 219 | 44 | 175 |

Table 4: What do you dislike about the Coronavirus being around? (Q8b)*

*Each child's response was given one code.

| Survey Language | Social (%) | Death + spread (%) | Restriction (%) | Missed Opportunity (%) | Home School (%) | Other (%) |
|-----------------|------------|--------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| English | 32.1 | 32.1 | 16.1 | 1.8 | 7.1 | 10.8 |
| Icelandic | 20.7 | 47.6 | 12.2 | 7.3 | 0 | 12.2 |
| Norwegian | 31.8 | 13.6 | 27.3 | 13.6 | 13.6 | 0 |
| Slovenian | 52.5 | 6.8 | 20.3 | 6.8 | 5.1 | 8.5 |

Table 5: Survey Question 8b, by survey language*.
*Percentages are reported in this Table.

Children's experiences of the limitations and new opportunities brought by the pandemic

Many of the children's responses highlighted an all-pervading, limiting presence of Coronavirus creating the backcloth to their day-to-day lives. As reported in the first research question, children experienced the virus as restrictive - preventing them from their usual activities and impacting on their relationships. Some children, for example, identified restrictions to their daily movements, such as it being 'impossible to go to the store'. Some children spoke of being unable to attend and participate in their free-time activities, including outdoor play and other sports pursuits. One child commented on how they, 'Can't compete and can't practise sports.' Children felt 'sad not to be able to visit anyone or go anywhere' and disappointed at 'not being able to hang out with friends'. For some children, this limiting presence of the pandemic was felt more broadly: they also missed events happening outside their immediate experience, such as the 'Eurovision'. Indeed, some children looked forward to a time after the pandemic when they would no longer be constrained and could, for example, do 'more shoulder to shoulder in football' and 'spend the night with your friends.'

It was striking that, alongside this restrictive experience, many of the children also expressed the ways in which the pandemic had given them new opportunities which they valued. One such opportunity was spending more time with family. Children frequently mentioned the benefits of being at home with their family, 'I like being with my family a lot and I'm having a lovely time at home'.

Some children valued being able to spend more time at home and with family, as well as the relief of not worrying about school, 'I'm spending more time with my close family and I do not have to worry about school' and 'It is fun to get to stay at home (super fun)'. Some valued 'being able to be with my parents more and my dad works from home'. As one child expressed, it was 'good to be at home in quarantine with mom'.

“ I have more time to think about myself and my hobbies. ”

As well as more time with family, some children commented that the restrictions meant that they were able to engage with their neighbours and other people in their local area. Children spoke positively about maintaining other social connections with friends and wider family.

One child described the pandemic period as 'exciting and fun.... an emotional roller coaster' as they experienced new things. Some children found that the disruption to their usual activities meant they had more time for their hobbies and other activities. For example, some children mentioned that they 'watch[ed] more Lord of the Rings and YouTube' and 'already read more than usual'. Another child provided an interesting insight into their sense of increased personal freedom: 'I have more time to think about myself and my hobbies'. Getting a new puppy during this time was good timing for another child.

Many of the children in this study carried a consciousness of the restrictions that the pandemic placed upon everyone. For some, this was expressed as an all-pervading, limiting presence which they always kept in mind. One child described this as, 'there are stricter rules, e.g., when we go out, we always need to keep some rules in mind'. Yet, simultaneously, many children navigated a dynamic relationship with Coronavirus, as they also appreciated the new opportunities that the pandemic offered them. For instance, alongside expressions of loss associated with missing friends came an appreciation of the additional time spent at home with family.

Research Question 3

How do children position themselves in relation to the Coronavirus pandemic?

The third research question provides an opportunity to further attend to the complexity of children's experiences by inquiring in depth about how children make sense of events, relationships, and themselves during the pandemic. This third research question became a rich site of exploration in which new questions arose in response to children's insightful comments. For example, how do children construct meaning in relation to the virus and the pandemic? Thus, the analysis of this final research question highlights the rich, in-depth knowledge and experiences that the children communicated.

Key Themes

- 1 Children on thinking and knowledge making
- 2 Children on actively participating
- 3 Children on being vulnerable
- 4 Children on experiencing the pandemic through their relationships
- 5 Children on their unique perceptions of the pandemic

Across the survey responses, the children discussed and constructed a very rich context that shaped their experiences of the pandemic. They talked about government, healthcare, their community, family and friends. They referred to a range of topics, such as schooling, technology, religion, and concerns for the environment, and reflected on what it is like to live during a pandemic in their respective countries. Within these contexts and through their reflections, the children

positioned themselves as knowledgeable, active, and vulnerable, whilst being part of an event shaped by their unique experiences and relationships to others.

Children on thinking and knowledge making

Through the survey responses, the children positioned themselves as thinkers and knowledge-makers. When talking about themselves and their position within the context of the pandemic, the children actively and curiously constructed meaning and understanding of the pandemic, *'Who created Covid-19?'* and *'It's less dangerous than the flu.'* The children showed awareness of being part of a world event that affects not only them and their loved ones but their contexts too, *'Take care of our health system.'*

The children showed a reflective awareness of global issues and of various facts related to the pandemic and questioned what is happening around them, *'We learn a lot and take a lot from this period, from technology to hygiene,'* and *'Why do [people in charge] make so much up?'*

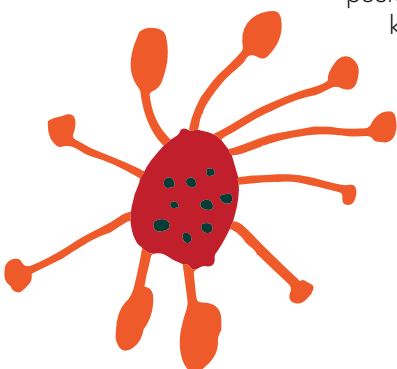
Many children demonstrated detailed knowledge about the pandemic and formulated their own ideas about what should happen as demonstrated in their suggestions and questions to those in charge (Q13). They often addressed what they think should have happened or should happen in terms of rules and regulations, *'I think we should stay home until the end of school year,'* and, *'We should close the roads.'*

While some of the children were in general very curious, others responded differently. For some children, they chose not to think about it, and this may have been a helpful way of coping with the pandemic, *'I don't think about it. I just think about [name of toy].'* When asked, *'Is there anything you wish you knew about the Coronavirus?'*, a high proportion of children replied *'nothing/I don't know'* or similar (Figure 5). For some children this may have meant they had sufficient information already, while for others perhaps they did not want to know more.

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Why and how are you being so patient with people who are not doing what they are supposed to be doing?

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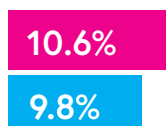
Nothing / I don't know



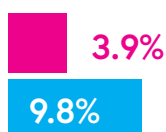
How can the virus be stopped?



How did the virus start?



How does the virus function?



Other



Figure 5: Responses to Question 11: Is there anything you wish you knew about the Coronavirus?

Children on actively participating

The children not only demonstrated rich knowledge about the pandemic, they also talked about themselves as being active participants in the pandemic. They shared ways they have been coping with the situation and they sought solutions to their problems as well as problems within their communities. Many children proposed ways they believe the situation can be managed and made demands for change in the ways the pandemic is being handled, *'I think [those in charge] should help the hospitals.'*

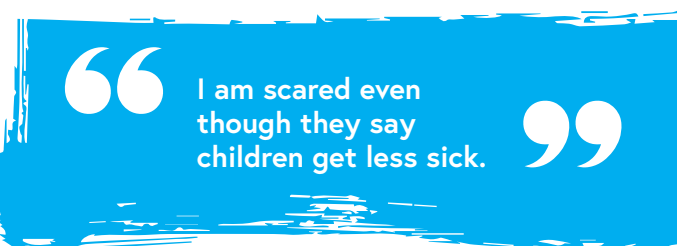
Some children also reflected on how they care for their family and their community, and how they wished they could help others or do more to enable others to resolve the pandemic. They said, *'I want them to be healthy and be able to hang out with relatives and friends'* and *'I wish there was something I could do to help.'*

Most children talked of actively following the health and safety regulations, even if they did not always agree with

them. Some asked others to do the same. The children showed a sense of responsibility for dealing with the pandemic and expected the same sense of duty and responsibility from others. *'I think it is very important that we stay on lockdown for a while to prevent the spread of the virus because it has a huge effect on the country.'*

Children on being vulnerable

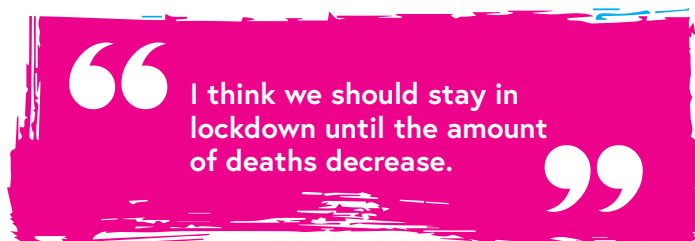
Many children expressed a sense of vulnerability in their responses. Most children talked about their experiences of the Coronavirus in negative terms, as illustrated in Figures 3 and 4 (Page 12). When asked how they feel about the Coronavirus, many responded, *'It is bad'*, *'Bad because it all fell apart'*, and *'I think that the coronavirus is the worst thing in my whole life.'* Some wondered whether the virus poses a threat to them, *'I am scared even though they say the children get less sick'*, *'Do children die from it?'* and *'Is it dangerous to me?'*



In this way, vulnerability is expressed in relation to children's own physical health. Many children also expressed their vulnerability in other ways, for example in relation to the health of their family and those on whom they depend, *'I don't want my family to be hurt by it.'* In the face of such a threat, children may rely on adults to govern and make decisions on their behalf, and this came across in their recommendations to the government, succinctly put by one child, *'Protect us!'*

Some children shared feelings of fear and frustration in relation to the pandemic, not only in terms of physical health, but also in response to the uncertainty of the situation, *'I feel scared because it's quite new and we're still learning but it's taking quite a long time'* and, *'[I am feeling] just a bit frustrated because it's I'm not quite sure what's going to happen'* and *'I wish there was not so much uncertainty.'*

Nevertheless, despite this vulnerability, many children seemed to maintain a sense of safety, with some children expressing reassurance about what they perceived to be reliable and capable social institutions. They said, *'despite the Coronavirus, I feel safe'* and, *'I feel that I'm a little bit scared and in a way a bit safe because I think about the hospitals who have planned everything and are ready.'* Many children communicated that they could regain a sense of control and agency over an unpredictable situation through following government rules, *'I'm not too worried because we are following the rules'* and *'I feel like we have to do better at listening to the rules so we can get better, and the virus will go away'* and *'Why don't they set more rules, so people follow them properly.'*



The majority of the children appeared not to experience the pandemic as overwhelming, with the possible exception of a few responses such as, *'I never imagined it could be so bad'* and, *'maybe EVERYBODY in the world will get sick'*. Overall, the sense of vulnerability discerned from many of the responses may largely be attributed to the children's reflective openness and honesty about their feelings and experiences, often combined with accounts of resilience. For example, *'At first, I was a little scared but then I got used to it'* and, *'Coronavirus has made me feel upset and I am sure it has made everyone upset, but my family and solidarity has helped me through it'*.

Children on experiencing the pandemic through their relationships

Throughout the survey, the children reflected often about how their relationship with others – such as their family, school, community, and even the virus itself – shapes the way they make sense of themselves in relation to the virus. Through children's accounts, relationships with others gained new significance. It seemed that relationships, and in fact the changing nature of relationships, was fundamental to whether children had positive or negative experiences during the pandemic, *'Despite the fact that we sometimes meet people, I feel like there is not a connection between even the best of friends since we have not seen each other for the last few months'*. In addition, some children's experiences involved feelings of fear for their family, *'I am a bit worried about grandma and grandpa'*. Indeed, children often talked specifically about their worries for their families, including fearing for grandparents' health, and worrying for parents having to juggle various roles such as home-schooling or working from home.

Children connected their experiences with those of their wider community, thus going beyond their immediate family. One child reflected, *'We have more free time. This has strengthened the community'*.

Children also talked about the government, and their complex relationship to government measures, and how it affects their life. The children were asked what questions they had for those in charge of their countries (Q13).

“

Why did you close schools?

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Across all the Early Years and primary aged participants, 70% of children responded to this and had many interesting questions to ask (Appendix H), including one child's question, *'How do you feel about running a country?'* In total, 168 children responded with questions

for decision-makers, comprised of 27 Early Years children (56% of the Early Years subsample) and 141 primary age children (73% of the primary age subsample), suggesting that questions important to children – even very young children – are currently going unanswered.

Children on their unique perceptions of the pandemic

Throughout the analysis, we were struck by the children's personal and unique perceptions of the Coronavirus, and the pandemic as a whole, which then contributed to how they understood themselves within this context. The children drew on a wide range of ideas and reflected on different and often powerful topics, such as death and dying, rules and restrictions, health and isolation.

The pandemic was described as important to many of the children, and the severity of its impact was relayed in terms of health, history and greater social impact. When asked, *'How important is this to you?'* (Q4), the pandemic was described as important to many of the participants, with 49% of the Early Years and 47.3% of the primary school aged children responding 'Important' or 'Very Important'.

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I would like to ask what does the Coronavirus look like?

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In the children's descriptions of the pandemic, a reoccurring character was of course the Coronavirus itself. Children related to the Coronavirus in different ways, for example as an independent entity that interfered with their life as they described how the virus, *'enters our body without telling us'*, or as fundamentally connected to people as part of their daily life by noting, *'I think it will spread everywhere and everyone will get sick'*. In making sense of the virus, some children speculated about its origins and the degree to which it was brought about intentionally. Some also expressed a desire to see the virus or that the virus would be made visible to them. They expressed a wish *'That I could turn on the light and see it'* and said, *'I want to see the germs'*. When describing the *'fight against the virus'* some saw it as a battle against a separate, agentic entity, *'We're getting hit by Corona'* and, *'She just wants to drink our blood'*. Many children focused on the virus as deadly and highlighted that *'people die'* as important to their understanding of the virus.

Although the virus itself is at the heart of the pandemic, it was the impacts of the virus on their lives that featured most heavily in the children's accounts. Many children wrote about the places they inhabit and how they related to these in new ways as a consequence of the pandemic. For example, being in the safety of their homes, or opportunities to be in nature, or wanting to return to school. For example, *'Let us go to school and keep our distances'* and *'In the beginning it was pleasant because I was at home in nature and I was with a lot of family outside'*.

Moreover, the impact on the environment and climate change were often mentioned as an important aspect of the pandemic, with some children describing how nature is thriving now that people were spending more time indoors, *'[I like that] it turned out that we pollute less when we are more at home,'* and *'I like that people don't pollute as much anymore'*. Another eloquently reasoned the benefits of permanent 'schoolwork at home' for the benefit of the environment by reducing driving children to school.

Some children wrote about their experience of the pandemic as visceral and being felt as a bodily experience, *'I feel it's a bit bad in my heart and lungs'*. One child shared their concerns, *'We can't hug and kiss'*, but others expressed hope that in the future they will be able to, *'lick the spoon when we bake in the kindergarten'*.

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After the Coronavirus we will no longer need to wear masks.

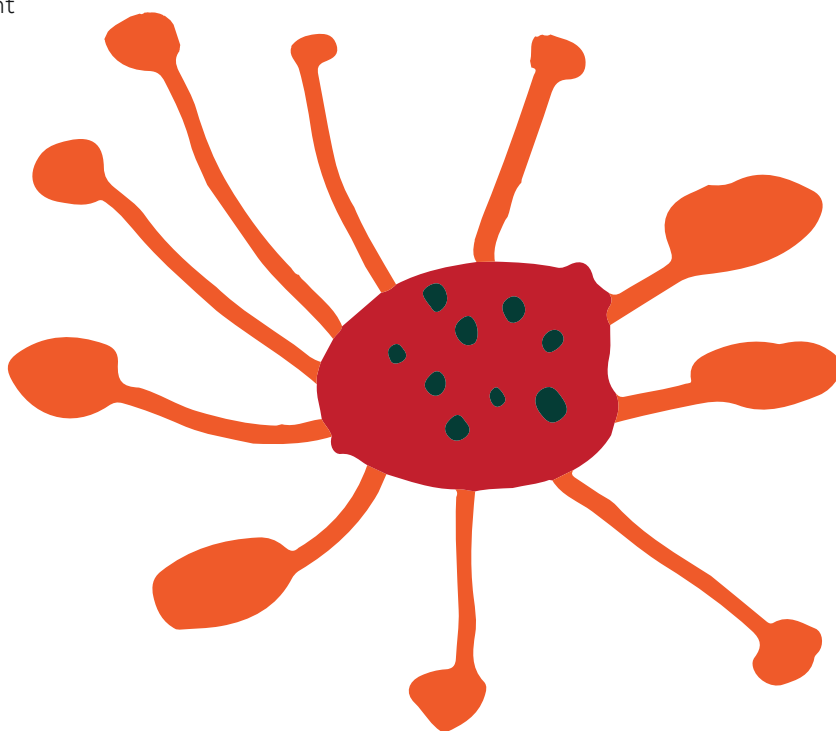
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When asked about how things might be different after the pandemic, many children talked about moving forward and life going back to normal. Others talked about learning from their experiences, *'We learn a lot and take a lot from this period'*, whilst implementing changes to their way of life, *'[Things will change], people [will] remember to do outdoors activities much more and see how much life changes'*. Other children looked to preparing for a future living with the virus, *'Yeah, people will be more careful not to get it'* and, *'Everyone will be ready for a new epidemic'*.

Reflections on the findings

As a rapid response analysis, there has been an ongoing discussion within the research team about the framing of the findings and whether the research questions best capture the team's initial intentions. We continually reflected on whether there were alternative ways to frame this report. Nevertheless, our intention was always to present the initial findings gathered from listening to the voices of these 240 children.

When engaging with the children's accounts and experiences, we were always aware that we were doing so with adult and researcher lenses. Our interpretation of the children's accounts and of what is important to them may have been impacted by our own unique experiences, perspectives and ideas. This is an important point to keep in mind when working to understand children's experiences. To what extent do adults or researchers make sense of children's experiences through their own lenses? How, for example, can we understand the significance of being 8 years old and separated from a best friend? Or what it means for children to not be able to engage in spontaneous play or organised activities for long periods of time? Perhaps we cannot fully understand, but a very good place to start is to listen. Indeed, a listening lens and ongoing reflections about our understanding of the data were integral to this project, and we invite others to adopt a similar perspective as they reflect on the findings and the report.



Conclusions

Throughout the analysis, we were struck by the children's personal and unique perceptions of the Coronavirus, and the pandemic as a whole, which then contributed to how they understood themselves within this context.

In participating in the survey, 240 Early Years and primary aged children provided us with the opportunity to hear what their personal experiences have been thus far of the Coronavirus pandemic. They talked about the costs of the pandemic and the negative effects it has had on their lives. These included the emotional costs, the restriction to their movement, and disruption to their daily lives and relationships. Yet, it also has been important to capture the expressions that many children made regarding the positive impacts the pandemic has had on their lives. Most notably, this focussed on the additional time spent with their family members as well as the new opportunities for learning and outdoor pursuits. The children also revealed high levels of resilience in how they have been able to adapt to rules and restrictions. Indeed, the rules and restrictions imposed during the pandemic were a prominent feature of the children's accounts. Learning to navigate and abide by rules is a big part of growing up, and children are no strangers to the idea of 'playing by the rules'. A considerable amount of resource has gone into informing and enforcing restrictions globally. Yet, as a society we know little about how this effort been experienced by children; the findings from this report offer a starting point for discussion.

It is important not to take too narrow a lens when looking at the impact of the pandemic on children, because it is likely that it has been neither solely negative nor solely positive. Throughout this analysis, the impact of the pandemic on children has been understood in both negative and positive terms, with children positioned as simultaneously vulnerable and resourceful. In fact, feeling vulnerable and fearful during a global crisis may be an adaptive response, a way of drawing people closer, seeking support or providing a reminder of the need for care and compassion. Through their responses, the participating children shared their vulnerability with openness and honesty. Their readiness to be vulnerable may be seen as a strength – and when given a chance to share this with society at large during a time of crisis, it could serve as a reminder that that we are all vulnerable and that this is okay.

Listening to children is at the heart of this research, and it is one important way of ensuring children are supported in what could be experienced as an anxiety-provoking time. As such, the Children Heard survey was an intervention in itself, as it supported children to express their feelings and created a space to explore their experiences together with a caregiver. The children who took part in this study addressed topics including those at a personal level involving community, friends and family, and at a societal level with concerns about healthcare, reflections on the government, and questions for those in charge of their countries.

Understanding children's experiences is vital when mobilising a unified, whole-community response to the pandemic. Children's particular lenses on the world are often characterised by immediacy, honesty, compassion and 'questioning the obvious'. Now more than ever those qualities and insights are needed to help make sense of the crisis and to move forward together. We hope this report has achieved its aim in amplifying the voices of the children who took part and highlighting how children and young people are an essential part of an effective and sustainable societal response to the pandemic.

Recommendations

The findings from this report contribute to wider discussions and debates around the impact of the pandemic on children. Fundamentally, we aim to highlight the importance of listening to children about their perspectives and experiences. Our resource section (Appendix D), **Questions for Children**, provides questions, inspired by the findings, that adults can use to help facilitate further meaningful conversations with children. Moreover, this report hopes to be a gateway for future research, and we offer potential **Starting points for researchers working with children on their experiences of the pandemic** (Appendix E). Indeed, we hope, in future, to develop our research findings by looking at the survey responses by secondary school aged children as well as reflecting on the images children have submitted to the online gallery.

There is of course more work to do, and we propose these three recommendations below:

- 1** Organisations should ensure they engage with children directly, rather than refracting children's views through the lens of an adult. We know that it can be challenging to negotiate ethical and safe practices and spaces for listening to children's ideas and feelings. Nevertheless, engaging children and young people means trusting them and valuing their perspectives. In the process of listening, decision-makers must also commit to actively hearing what has been communicated and seek ways to involve children and young people in decisions that impact their lives.


- 2** We believe that every country should hold a Coronavirus press conference for children and young people. The pandemic has not only been a global leveller, but also a generational one. Children know what is happening and they have questions for decision-makers that are currently going unanswered. Their questions are important ones, showing a nuanced understanding of the current situation. A press conference for children and young people would serve a crucial purpose in helping them know that they are part of the response to the pandemic, not just the recipients of adults' decisions. Additionally, it would give those in government important insight into what is important to children.
- 3** Longer term, qualitative research is needed to capture further insights about the ongoing and changing nature of children and young people's responses to the pandemic. Quantitative and at-scale research is important, but children's responses are best understood through their individual stories of their lived experiences. To enable this work, child and youth-led organisations and institutions should collaborate to pool resources and research capability. For example, it would be interesting to gain an insight into how children are experiencing different aspects of the 'new normal'.



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Appendices

Appendix A

Child-focused poster

A downloadable version of the poster can be found on the Children Heard [website](#) and on the Children's Research Centre [website](#).



Appendix B

Survey questions

- 1** How old are you? Please select number (3-18).
- 2** What country do you live in?
- 3** What is happening in your country and the world at the moment?
- 4** How important is this for you? (1-5 scale, 1 star means not important at all, 5 stars means super important)
- 5** Tell us more about how important it is for you.
- 6** What do you think about the Coronavirus?
- 7** How do you feel about the Coronavirus?
- 8** What do you like and what do you dislike about the Coronavirus being around?
- 9** Since the lockdown, how are you feeling about school?
- 10** Tell us more about how you are feeling about school since lockdown.
- 11** Is there anything you wish you knew about the Coronavirus?
- 12** What do you think people in charge of the country should do?
- 13** If you could ask the people in charge of the country one question, what question would you ask?
- 14** How do you think life will be different when the Coronavirus has gone away? Do you think it will be different in any way?
- 15** Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience of the Coronavirus?
- 16** Option to upload a picture to the online gallery.

What parents said

The following are parent/carer responses to Question 15, *'Is there anything you would like to say about what the survey was like for you and your child?'* In this project, parents/carers were invited to contribute their own responses alongside their child's. As such the reflections below give us a glimpse behind the scenes of the survey and a set of rare insights about the process. More importantly, these comments tell us something about how the survey created opportunities for many children to be heard by their most important trusted adult.

- It is a good initiative. Kids' voices are important.
- It helped the child say what she thought and felt.
- This was useful because it was the first time my daughter has told me that she is worried about older family members.
- My child didn't have that many questions about the situation.
- It was hard for him to hear, but good for me to hear and understand better his side of things. Home schooling was hard, but we made it through.
- The child is only [young] and I thought it was a bit overwhelming to think so much about the virus, I think.
- It was interesting to get my child's view of what's happening in the world today.
- The child liked it and although we have talked a lot about it together, some of the answers came as a surprise to me.
- Not comfortable talking about the coronavirus.
- Was much calmer over the virus than I thought. Did not seem to be more stressed or anxious to answer the questions.
- Very interesting and enlightening.
- It was just a cozy moment to chat.
- She is [very young] so she did not have much to say about the matter, the questions may be more tailored to older children.
- I think is very interesting to see if the government really listen to children and us.
- It's great that we're reminded to listen to what the children are thinking. I've purposely not talked a lot about Corona near my daughter, especially considering the death counts and stuff I think could frighten her.
- It's nice to go through. Not particularly surprising answers.
- My daughter is [very young] and some of the questions were a little difficult. Otherwise, and nice little conversation.
- It was interesting, most answers as I'd have expected but a few surprises which were nice to talk about.
- I think we did the survey at a bit of a bad time, so she wasn't that interested in completing it.
- Interesting to hear his answers and how much he knew for a 5yr old. I don't think he wanted to keep talking about it though as it's not a happy subject.
- Just a very important initiative.
- I thought this was a good opportunity for my child to talk about how she is feeling and to gauge her understanding of the situation.
- I am glad you are doing it. It worked out well. (my child had a very hard time to tell the more difficult experiences as she seemed to be scared/run away to even think about it. (Q15)
- Good experience for both of us.
- It was nice experience to share same survey with the child.
- It was good to talk to each other and let the child know that children all over the world are sharing the same thing to help.
- Good questions & thank you for caring about the experience of children.
- This went well and the child immediately became very interested and did not need any encouragement to respond.
- She thought carefully, and they were good questions. She understands there is a sickness that doctors and nurses are helping people with, but the main impact has been not seeing her friends and not having fun.
- He was very happy to talk about it. Didn't seem affected by the questions.
- It was nice to talk about it but perhaps difficult to hear that the children also feel that the government aren't being sensible and feeling that there is no plan.
- It's helpful to hear the children's opinion.
- My son completed the survey alone and he is happy to have helped! I didn't ask him much ;)
- Interesting to hear the answers. Good to know that the child has not felt bad. I want to point out that none of the family and friends have fallen ill and the household finances are not threatened.
- Yes, very interesting. A good opportunity to say what she is thinking.
- It spurred a good discussion although he was frustrated with the similarity of some of the questions.
- It was a nice experience listening to the answers of my child for things I haven't asked him during this difficult period.

Appendix D

Questions for children

The Children Heard survey remains open. Parents/carers may find it a helpful tool for initiating meaningful conversations about the pandemic with their children. Children may also like to view, and contribute their own artwork to, The Coronavirus and My Life gallery. This gallery may help some children to feel less alone and reassured that other children are experiencing similar feelings to them.

The following questions, inspired by the findings from this project, may also help to facilitate further conversations with children, giving them an opportunity to express their feelings, thoughts and experiences of the pandemic and, most importantly, to be heard.

- How have your relationships changed since the pandemic, if at all?
- What is school life like for you at the moment?
- What do you miss about life before the pandemic?
- How do you think life before and after the pandemic will be different, if at all?
- What do you think you will remember the most about the pandemic?
- What have you learned about yourself/ your friends/ your family since the pandemic started?
- What advice would you give to other children about coping during the pandemic?
- Would you like to draw a picture to show how you feel about the pandemic?
- In what ways is it important that grown-ups ask children about their experiences of the pandemic?
- What do you think adults can do to help children during the pandemic?
- Is there anything about the pandemic that you'd like to know more about?

It can be hard at times to talk about difficult topics. Like adults, children can experience a range of emotions when they are reflecting on or talking about things that are meaningful to them. This may make adults feel worried or nervous about having these conversations. Sometimes this may even stop adults from asking children about their experiences. But, we believe that it is better for a child to share their feelings with a trusted, supportive adult than to carry them in isolation. When talking to a child about the pandemic, keep an eye on how they (and you) are feeling. If a child does experience sadness, worry or any other difficult emotion, it is okay. Comfort, empathy and understanding will go a long way. If more help is needed, there are many services offering support and you could access information and resources from them. You could also seek help from a child's school or doctor. As one child said: 'The survey made me feel happy because I am finally expressing my feelings to someone who is listening'.

Starting points....

...for researchers

One aim of this report was to provide researchers with starting points for conversations around the pandemic that might further support their work with primary age children. As a Children's Research Centre, the CRC is committed to opening spaces for discussion with children that are led by children. Therefore, we offer a number of potential gateway questions for those working with children, for those who are interested in child-led research or for those who use participatory methods in their work.

- 1** What can we learn from children about their experiences of the virus?
- 2** What does the pandemic mean to children? How are they experiencing it? Could the experience be different?
- 3** How do children's relationships shape their experiences of the pandemic?
- 4** Where are the opportunities within, and out of, school, for children to share their experiences of the pandemic?
- 5** Where can spaces be found in the school curriculum for children to contribute their own ideas about education in a post-pandemic world?
- 6** What are the best methods of communicating public health messages to children in ways that are meaningful to them?
- 7** How has the pandemic changed how children maintain connections with family members and friends outside of school?
- 8** How can children's voices be accurately recorded and represented in academic research?
- 9** What are the best ways to involve children in research design; for example, designing questions that speak directly to them?

...for teachers and senior leaders in school

- 1** Share the report with staff and discuss the findings during a staff meeting. The meeting can be used to take stock of the current situation at your school, including:
 - * The provision for dealing with and identifying children's concerns and worries about the pandemic.
 - * The ways in which children are encouraged to share their concerns with staff and where they may be given opportunities to do so.
- 2** In future, your school may also wish to consider:
 - * Using the children's poster (Appendix A) to initiate group or class discussions with children about their reflections, experiences and views.
 - * Consider and implement methods to ensure children feel their 'voice' is listened to and valued within all aspects of school life that directly affects them.

More information about the Children's Research Centre can be found on the final page of this report. We would be interested in hearing from you and the ways you might use these starting points in your own work.

Appendix F

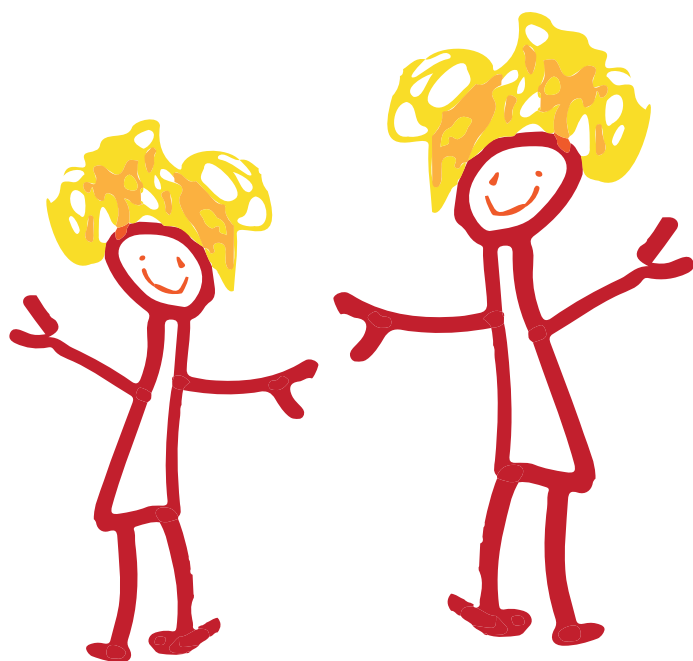
Ethics

Both of the Children Heard psychologists are chartered by the British Psychological Society. Dr May Lene Karlsen is authorised by the Norwegian Psychological Association and Dr Gail Sinitsky is registered with the Health and Care Professions Council. They are bound by their codes of ethics and conduct, and as such this project adheres to these standards. The CRC project team are bound by the British Educational Research Association guidelines. The research protocol for data analysis was submitted for ethics review and was given a favourable opinion on behalf of The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC/3707/Chamberlain).

Children Heard took responsible steps to safeguard all participating children, young people and carers/parents. Before being able to access the survey, information was provided to website visitors explaining the purpose of the website. Information

about how data would be used was also shared, in particular that children's pictures would be included in an online gallery and submitted survey responses would be used to raise awareness of children and young people's experiences and views of the pandemic. Overall, seven important points were listed concerning data storage, consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and the way submissions would be used. This was followed by an instruction to click on the survey link if happy to participate.

Advice was given to parents/carers about the importance of the care and comfort of the children and young people participating in the survey. A weblink was provided to supportive resources on the Young Minds website. On the final page of the survey, parents/carers were invited to share their reflections of the questionnaire and invited to add any additional information.



Appendix G

Responses to Q7 'How do you feel about the Coronavirus?'

| | | | |
|------------------|---------|------------|---|
| Early years* | n = 42# | don't know | 2 |
| not good | 12 | worried | 1 |
| bad | 9 | unusual | 1 |
| scared | 5 | tiresome | 1 |
| sad | 5 | nothing | 1 |
| ok | 3 | frustrated | 1 |
| look forward end | 2 | fine | 1 |

Table 6: Early years responses to Question 7: 'How do you feel about the Coronavirus?'

| | | | |
|---------------|----------|-----------------|---|
| Primary* | n = 182# | don't know | 4 |
| bad | 27 | varied emotions | 3 |
| scared | 16 | upset | 3 |
| sad | 15 | unhappy | 3 |
| ok | 14 | safe | 3 |
| worried | 12 | not scared | 3 |
| not good | 10 | good | 3 |
| nothing | 7 | excited | 3 |
| normal | 7 | weak | 2 |
| annoyed | 7 | stressed | 2 |
| strange | 6 | not worried | 2 |
| bored | 6 | danger | 2 |
| ambivalent | 5 | anxious | 2 |
| uncomfortable | 4 | afraid | 2 |

Table 7: Primary age responses to Question 7: 'How do you feel about the Coronavirus?'

*Frequencies of at least 2 included here in the tables.

#n = total participants and the numbers in the table are frequencies

Appendix H

Questions children would ask of people in charge of the country

Early Years children

Can they make the virus go away?

One day will they really make a medicine?

How do you get sick? Do you just get fever [...] or what happens?

When will the Coronavirus be over and when can we touch [...]?

I would like to ask what the Coronavirus looks like?

Can we go to school?

Please can you make lots of rules.

When can friends come to my place?

If the [...] could tell us that the virus is getting weaker and weaker.

Why the Coronavirus is, and when can I go swimming?

When will the Coronavirus leave?

When can I go shopping?

When will the lockdown end?

Why did it have to be two metres apart?

Primary school aged children

Can you stop the virus?

Can you open all the borders?

Can we invite friends on our birthday?

Can you make the Coronavirus go away?

Can you make a cure faster?

Can we see our friends and family?

Are you sure you can't be infected twice?

What kind of virus is it?

Do you think we'll get rid of it completely, or will it just mutate?

How are they going to keep us safe in school?

How come I can be in a classroom of people, but I can't go to a museum?

How long until this will stop?

How much does the Coronavirus affect a person?

How will [country name] economy be after the Coronavirus?

Why you wouldn't make it more safe – as safe as possible?

Why and how are you being so patient with people who are not doing what they are supposed to be doing?

Do you have at least one idea of a cure?

Is it difficult to govern the country when there is a situation like the Coronavirus?

Keep on doing a good job.

Is there a quick solution to it? Is there a virus that can stop the virus?

Why didn't the state finance take care of our food during this time as well?

What is the most optimistic vision you see?

What have you been doing during lockdown?

What is the most difficult decision you make on what to do to keep us safe?

When will we be able to vacation freely as we used to?

Why all of a sudden, this Coronavirus?

Why are we progressing so slowly? Why are people still feeling so insecure?

Why aren't [you] more consistent?

Why did hand sanitizers become more expensive, so it was harder to buy them?

Why do you use the virus for your political careers?

Will some rules or bans stay for the whole year?

You can be kinder and not scare us.

Acknowledgements

The findings from this research are based on the ideas, thoughts, opinions and creative responses of 240 children and young people from across the globe. Children Heard and the CRC are committed to ensuring that the children's insights that have informed the research are insights that belong to them. As such, we will continue to reflect on the ways in which we write about them and contribute to debates about children's rights.

Our thanks to the 504 children and young people who completed the survey and their parents/ guardians and carers who supported them.

With thanks to

Talia, aged 5 – for her pictures throughout this report.

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The Children Heard team

Dr May Lene Karlsen and Dr Gail Sinitsky

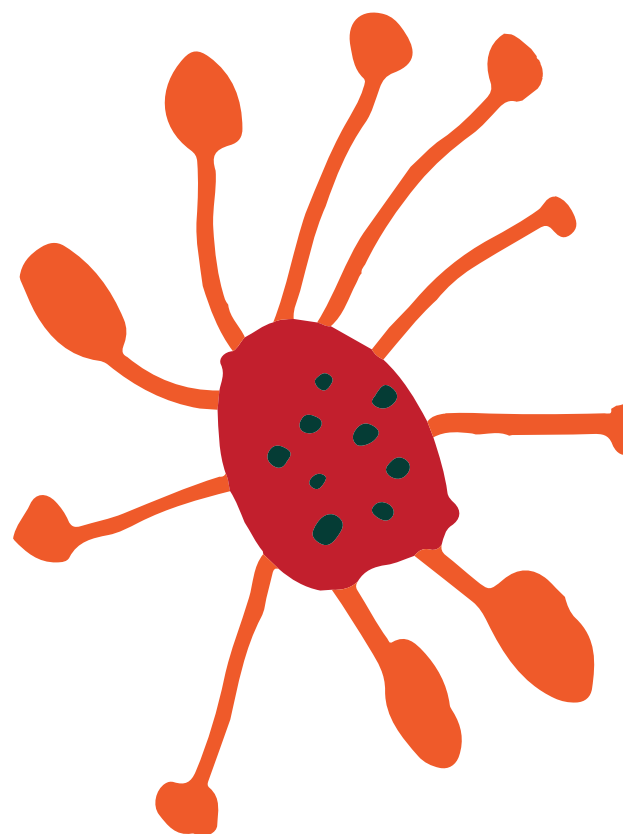
The CRC research team

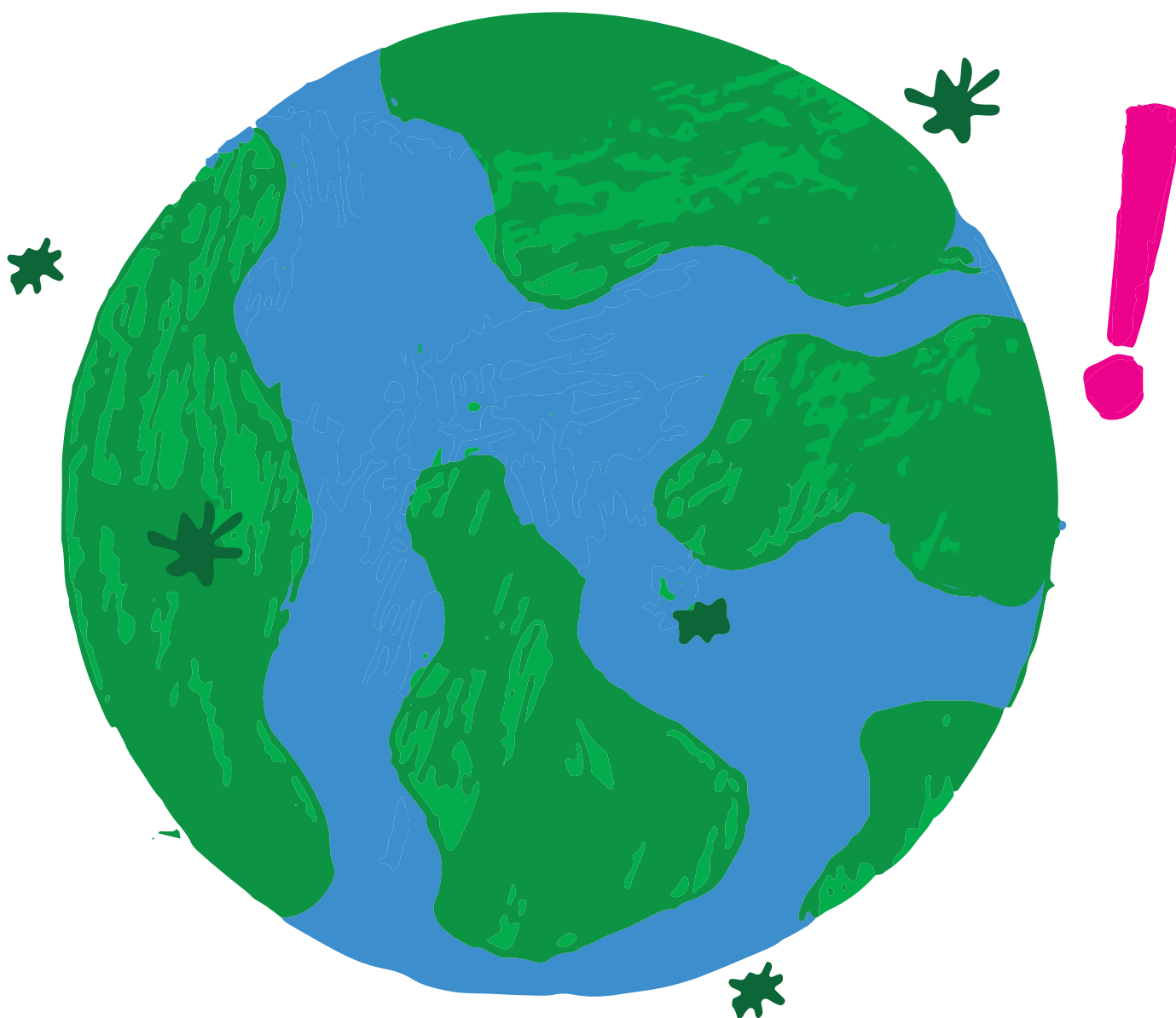
Dr Stephanie Bennett, Dr Liz Chamberlain, Dr Linda Plowright-Pepper and Petra Vackova

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Advisory Group

Following the publication of this summary report and the child-focused poster (Appendix A), the hope is to recruit an advisory group of children and young people to support the next phase of this work. This group will further reflect on the themes of the research and create opportunities for children to engage and interact with the findings, a key principle that the CRC advocates as best practice. Children Heard also hope to co-design a set of resources with children and young people for use by other children, and to create a series of resources for practitioners, parents and care-givers to support their conversations with children and young people.





If you have any questions about this report
please contact the Children's Research Centre



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