

Research Article Critique:

Emotions and Reactions to the Confinement by COVID-19 of Children and Adolescents with High Abilities and Community Samples: A Mixed Methods Research Study. Valadez et al. (2020)

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1. Reference:

Valadez, M. A. D. L. D., Làpez-Aymes, G., Ruvalcaba, N. A., Flores, F., Ortàz, G., Rodràguez, C., & Borges, À. (2020). *Emotions and Reactions to the Confinement by COVID-19 of Children and Adolescents With High Abilities and Community Samples: A Mixed Methods Research Study*. *Frontiers in Psychology*, NA.
<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A642591457/HRCA?u=txshracd2679&sid=HRCA&xid=52b3a324>

2. Purpose/Research Problem

The purpose of this study by Valadez et al. (2020) is stated clearly “to know and compare” the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and resulting confinement on the “emotions and reactions” of “children and adolescents with high abilities and community samples” (p.1). By studying the effects of the pandemic on these groups, the researchers would like to understand how “educational intervention” can be used in the future to benefit students during similar events (Valadez et al., 2020, p.1).

3. Literature Review

The review is logically organized with clear headings and a natural order. The introduction lays out the reasons for the predicament that the participants are in due to the pandemic. The intentions of the questions they would like answered with this study are backed up with supportive literature. They discuss the difference between children with high abilities and those without, as well as, similarities between adults and some children with high abilities. A further breakdown among those groups is discussed with regards to sex and age.

Most of the literature from this section is extremely current, as it deals with the recent pandemic, however, a few examples are used from older research as pertaining to supportive psychological research regarding anxiety and depression. This adds to the credibility of the need for this study and lays a foundation for why these questions are important to address.

4. Research Questions and/or Hypothesis:

Valadez et al. (2020) would like to obtain a broader understanding of these three questions:

- 1) “What emotions and reactions do children and adolescents show from the confinement of COVID-19?”
- 2) “Are emotions and reactions different between children and adolescents with high ability and other young adults?”
- 3) “Are there differences between age groups and sex?”

They make clear their intention is to use the information they obtain to create a plan and tools to combat the negative effects of this pandemic by developing “intervention strategies” while shining light on the differences of the groups studied. They have mentioned the issues of stress, anxiety, and depression, but in the future, there may be unforeseen consequences that arise and need to be studied.

Null Hypothesis (implied): There is no impact of the pandemic induced isolation on children and no difference in the reaction between high ability participants and community sample participants.

Research Hypothesis (implied): There is an impact of the pandemic induced isolation on children and a difference in the reaction between high ability participants and community sample participants.

5. Population and Sample:

The population is not clearly labeled in the Participant section; however, I believe the population is students with high ability and community samples. The sample is clearly stated and was made up of “649 children aged between 5-14 years old” (Valadez et al., 2020, p.3). One thing that stood out to me as unfortunate about this study, was the fact that the sample was chosen “by convenience” and included children from only 3 countries, when this is a worldwide pandemic (Valadez et al., 2020, p.3). Of the children studied, an overwhelming number of children were from one country. I believe it could have been more diverse and this would strengthen the credibility of the research. The size of the sample could be scaled up in the future if many countries were included, but it seems like a good number for this study.

6. Research Design:

The setting of this research takes place online by questionnaire, which seems appropriate given the situation of a very contagious worldwide pandemic. The context of the research is the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in late 2019 and the resulting isolation recommended or required for social distancing and avoidance of the disease during the year 2020.

This is a mixed methods research study and utilizes both qualitative and quantitative methods to obtain their data. The design of this study is non-experimental.

7. Data Collection:

The data collection was obtained with questionnaires which included “46 open and closed-ended questions” and covered their basic demographics, understanding of the pandemic, the mental state of adults in the home and their feelings regarding the situation (Valadez et al., 2020, p.3). I believe it was appropriate considering the pandemic to obtain this data digitally. When and if COVID-19 is no longer a threat, it might be appropriate to do interviews in person or utilize other methods of data collection.

Additional questionnaires were used for the children that were 8-14 years of age. They used a Likert-like scale and a negative effect scale. Everything was explained to the parents of the participants and the data collection was obtained in an ethical manner.

The reliability was determined with Cronbach’s alpha test. I could not find a validity test mentioned in the article.

8. Data Analysis:

There were different age groups within the study, which I think complicated the analysis portion for the researchers and readers. The qualitative open-ended questions were analyzed using the ALCESTE program, which is a software that can analyze words and is trusted for research analysis applications. The quantitative closed-ended questions were analyzed with scales and a MANOVA test was used to further break down the results into

the categories of high ability or community sample and sex, age and response scale to COVID-19.

The ALCESTE program is fascinating and it was amazing that it could put together keywords into groupings, although this was a little bit confusing to me, the computer made good sense of it in the article's figures which looked like a pie chart broken down into percentages. I thought open-ended questions would be harder to analyze, but this seemed to be the right software for the job. It would have taken humans a very long time considering the sample size and the amount of questions.

9. Results/Discussion:

The results of the study were pretty much in line with the original thoughts in the introduction. For instance, females responded differently than males in many cases and age groups responded differently too. The study decided that high ability children and adolescents did not have a remarkable difference in emotional, social or personal adjustment at this point in the pandemic. However, high ability answers in two instances showed a keener understanding of the need to stay isolated at home. Even though both groups disliked homework, the high ability enjoyed the freedom to work at their own pace and may have recognized easier assignments.

I thought it was predictable that the high ability students were less likely to be bored, and more likely to do their homework, but I found it sad that the community sample children were more concerned about the pandemic and had more sadness. This could be due to more stress at home, while children with high abilities saw home as a protective place.

Limitations were discussed, and researchers presented something I didn't even think about during the previous sections. Due to the online questionnaires, there was no way of knowing how much parental help was given during the questions – especially for the younger children. The other limitation involved the lack of questions regarding the physical activity of the children.

Suggestions were made for continuing to research the effects of this “new normal” because this study was done during the first wave, and we have endured isolation for longer than expected. Their goals are to help develop coping skills and appropriate interventions to counteract the effects of these types of prolonged isolative events.

10. Overall Evaluation

I believe that Valadez et al. (2020) did a wonderful job at choosing and combining data collection methods to give an idea of some of the challenges brought on by the isolation associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. However, I think a broader and more diverse sample that represents more children from all over the world would be appropriate for future studies. I also would like to see these population groups broken down into more factors, for instance socioeconomic background of the household, urban vs. rural, large vs. small school districts, online vs. in-person learning, introverts vs. extroverts, etc. In conclusion, this study gives us an idea of some of the feelings, positive or negative, among students brought on by this horrible pandemic, and shows a need for more research.