Understanding young children’s perspectives on and experiences of COVID-19 in China and England

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Background: COVID-19 Lockdown

- Worldwide lockdowns during the COVID-19 outbreak

- **China:** National lockdown in Feb. 2020 (Chinese Spring Festival and winter holidays); students returned to schools in mid/late March 2020 (second lockdown in limited regions);

- **England:** National lockdown in March 2020, schools reopen in June beginning with nursery classes, reception (4-5), Year 1 (5-6), and Year 6 (10-11); second lockdown in January 2021 for most pupils, early years settings remained open; reopen in March 2021.

- **This study:** Data collected in between *April and June 2021.*
Background: Children during the lockdowns

- Negative effects on children’s physical and mental health are well documented and much discussed (Duan et al., 2020);

- Little is known about how children actively integrate their everyday thinking within the context of coronavirus outbreak;

- Few studies focus on how young children cope with the confinement experiences from their own perspectives (Bertram & Pascal, 2021).
Theoretical framework

- **Child agency** (Xu, 2020): children are active and resilient participants in the context of the pandemic;

- **Discourses** (Foucault, 1972 & 1980) in which child agency is embedded and shaped by different political and sociocultural contexts in China and England
Research aims and questions

• To investigate young children’s perspectives on and experiences of COVID-19:
  ❖ What dominant discourses about COVID-19 were identified from children’s narratives and drawings?
  ❖ How do children engage, interact, and represent those discourses?

Parents as co-researchers (Hackett, 2017)

• Children’s drawings and/or photo-taking facilitated by parents;
• Follow-up conversations between children and parents about the drawings/photos;
• Interviews with parents
Participants

- 11 Chinese children (aged 4-8; 6 boys & 5 girls; from across China);

- 13 children from England (aged 4-10; 6 boys & 7 girls, including 3 pairs of children from the same households; 2 Chinese children, 1 Turkish child);

- Activities mostly conducted by mothers in both countries, lack of fathers’ participation;

- All children come from relatively affluent family backgrounds.
Ethical considerations

- Gaining consent from children through parents (e.g. informed consent compromised; power relations)

- Parents’ own interests
Initial findings: Children’s drawings and narratives

- Beating the ‘monsters’ in China
- Staying safe in England
- Social relationships
• **Beating the ‘monsters’ in China**

Parent: What did you draw?
Child: The virus and the virus.
Parent: A big one and a small one?
Child: Yes.
Parent: How about those in red?
Child: It’s blood.
Parent: Why is there blood?
Child: Because it [the virus] **gets killed by the doctor**.

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Parent: Are you scale of the COVID virus?
Child: No.
Parent: Why not?
Child: Because we can prevent it.

Child: These are vegetables and fruits, and this is a big milk bottle, it can **beat them**.
Parent: Who are they?
Child: The little pandemic.
Parent: Oh, the virus.
Child: They do not like showering (**Xixiangxiang** in Chinese child language). ... so I’ve drawn a big tub, they get in and they eat vegetables. ... Then the milk bottle and dad will **beat them**.
• **Staying safe in England**

Parent: Tell me about your picture?

Child: So this is the sun and the cloud coughing, and this is the girl coughing – oh and these are the viruses. Here’s a glass of water which you can put on your hands. And also – and also this is some soap …

Parent: So why have you drawn the water and the soap?

Child: Because that’s why you can **wash your hands**.

Parent: Does that give you the virus? Does that get rid of the virus?

Child: No, the virus on your hands can, splash away and wash away. And also so these are face, this is for your face. You put it over your face.

Parent: So that you don’t …

Child: So that you don’t get the virus on – it’s just like a **face covering**. And it also – and it’s see-through.
Social relationships (The ‘bubbles’ in England)

Parent: Right, Jack, what did you draw on the experience of lockdown?
Child: I did draw two people seeing each other. That one is a boy, that one is a girl.
Parent: OK. Why have you drawn them like that? What are they doing?
Child: They are trying to hold their hands.
Parent: Why are they inside circles?
Child: Because that means that’s their bubbles.
Parent: OK, so they’re inside their bubbles. Why have you drawn that as your experience of lockdown?
Child: Because I don’t really see my friends very much.
Parent: OK. What did you during lockdown?
Child: Quite a lot of staying at home. Sometimes we go to the park and see some of my friends.
Parent: OK. What did you like about being in lockdown? Was there anything you liked about it?
Child: Because that means I can see a couple of my friends.
Social relationships (Fathers’s participation in China)

Parent: What have you drawn?
Child: I’ve drawn dad cooking and doing reading with me during the pandemic.
Parent: Why did you draw this?
Child: Because I think these are the most impressive memories to me during the pandemic.

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Parent: What did you find most enjoyable and happiest during the lockdown?
Child: Dad cooking and reading with me.

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Parent: What did you want to do most during the pandemic?
Child: What I want to do most is to communicate more with dad, because he is rarely home usually. Every day I go to school, coming back at 6 or 7 pm and dad is still not home yet. ..... But during the pandemic he had a lot of time staying with me, I felt happy because of this.
Parent: So why there is no mom in the picture?
Child: Because I think I had enough time with mom before, I want to also know about dad.
Initial findings: parents’ perspectives

• Real-life experiences & knowledge

• Surprise

• Sense of pride and relieve
Discussion

• Children’s active engagement with dominant social discourses in the contexts of COVID-19 in China and England

• Children are emotionally coping

• The classed privileges

• The invisibility of children from less privileged families and backgrounds
Thank you

Q & A

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