

Abstract

Perceived social support and subjective well-being on low-income mothers served by a child development support system during the COVID-19 pandemic: a multiple case study.

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Our oral presentation is directly concerned with the following conference themes: 1) Impacts of COVID-19 on childhood and adolescence, and 2) subjective well-being. In fact, we focused on social support networks and subjective well-being among low-income mothers who are struggling to respond to their children's developmental needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There has been an increasing interest in studying the role of social support networks in helping poor families through uncertain times. Furthermore, recent studies show that low-income mothers often turn to their social support network for assistance in coping with biological, psychological, and social stressors. Moreover, these women require emotional, instrumental, and informational support to promote their wellbeing, as well that of their children. However, little is currently known about the relationship between perceived social support and the well-being of postnatal mothers specially during the COVID-19 pandemic. To address this gap, this research seeks to identify and analyze the perceived sources of formal and informal support sources of mothers served by a comprehensive child support system, and to explore the influence of this support on their subjective wellbeing. An in-depth multiple case study method was adopted to examine the experience of beneficiaries of a comprehensive childhood protection child development support system known as *Chile Grows with You* which provides support to vulnerable children from gestation to 5 years old and their families. Our sample was composed by two pregnancy and postpartum mothers with complex psychosocial risk factors who lived in a disadvantaged community, had poor engagement with antenatal care services and lacked social support networks. Qualitative data was collected through an intensive follow-up done by the researcher between July 2018 and January 2021 using direct observation of services activities, exchange of text and voice messages through a mobile messaging app (WhatsApp), and follow-up telephonic interviews. The data were analyzed according to a processual analysis to discern similarities, differences, and patterns within and across cases over time. The results show that mothers receive support from four different sources: husbands/partners, extended family, community, and social services. Our findings also reveal that mothers are dissatisfied with support they receive from their husbands/partners, grandmothers are the most important providers of economic and emotional social support to them, neighbors and community organizations do not represent an important supportive relationship to participants, and social services allow them to survive but do not ameliorate their living conditions. Finally, participants report feeling frequently overwhelmed, stressed, exhausted and taking full responsibility for their children due to insufficient social support. Policy implications include empowering the most vulnerable and disadvantaged mothers to voice their needs directly, identifying training needs to help them build local social support networks and be able to navigate social and health services, and developing innovative community-focused interventions that are better suited to maternal social support needs during the pandemic. Future research should investigate whether these results can be generalized to other settings of interest

using a longitudinal research design that tracks changes on social support network's structure, and their influence on mothers' wellbeing and children's outcomes.