Journal of Family Studies

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rjfs20

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To cite this article: Aliya Khalid & Nidhi Singal (2023) Parents as partners in education during COVID-19-related school closures in England: challenges and opportunities identified by parents with Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage, Journal of Family Studies, 29:4, 1822-1846, DOI: 10.1080/13229400.2022.2098804

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2022.2098804

Published online: 15 Jul 2022.

JOURNAL OF FAMILY STUDIES
2023, VOL. 29, NO. 4, 1822–1846
https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2022.2098804

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Parents as partners in education during COVID-19-related school closures in England: challenges and opportunities identified by parents with Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage

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ABSTRACT

Educational disruptions during COVID-19 in periods of lockdown have redirected attention to homes and parents as key partners in schooling. Educational literature explores multidimensional disadvantages faced by communities in England. COVID-associated school closures changed the relationship between school and home. Parents and family played an important role to provide support for their children's education. There is little reflection on the experiences of parenting during this time of uncertainty. The paper focuses on the parenting experiences of Bangladeshi and Pakistani families with GCSE years children (years 7-11) in supporting their children's education during periods of abrupt school closures. Qualitative data were collected during the third national lockdown from 19-families in England using semi-structured narrative interviews. We find that most of the parents were largely satisfied with the support provided through schools. However, resources were unevenly distributed, and the learning experience was non-interactive for many children. Parental anxiety for their children's futures and education was high. Nevertheless, families adopted diverse strategies to support their children by taking a more active role in providing educational as well as socio-emotional support. Notable in these accounts were significant reflections from parents, who regardless of the adversities, experienced a strengthening of the family as a unit.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 29 November 2021
Accepted 1 July 2022

KEYWORDS
COVID-19 and education; ethnic minorities in England; parents and education; underserved communities; culturally diverse minority groups; schools and COVID-19

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only a health crisis but also a significant economic crisis globally (McKee & Stuckler, 2020; Ozili & Arun, 2020) as well as in the UK where it has cost an estimated amount of £39.6 bn to the economy (Keogh-Brown et al., 2020). Rising infection rates and concerns around the spread of the pandemic resulted in the closures of schools for prolonged periods in England. Between March 2020 and February 2021,

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UK went through three national lockdowns. This had considerable implications for students who only attended school intermittently over a period of more than a year. These disruptions greatly impacted children from socially diverse and low-income families (Andrew et al., 2020). However, in these discussions the educational impact on children from ethnic minority families is not determined even though compared with the majority, these families absorbed substantial economic (Crossley et al., 2021), health (Aldridge et al., 2020) and educational (Bayrakdar & Guveli, 2020) shocks during this period which is the focus of this article. The current literature on COVID-19 and ethnic minority families can be broadly grouped under the following three themes: (i) a highly medicalized narrative of ethnic minority communities, especially during COVID-19; (ii) educational literature which discusses the impact of COVID-19 from the perspective of teachers, schools and parents during COVID-19 but does not specifically reflect on the experiences of ethnic minority communities; and (iii) the changing dynamics of home support, families and the impact of home schooling.

1.1 Medicalized health-related impacts of COVID-19 on ethnic minorities in England

The literature on the so-called Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) experiences of COVID-19 is the strongest in the medicalized literature. We use 'BAME' (enclosed in quotation marks) as a term here to show how racial disadvantage has been seen in a reductionist light. The terminology of BAME including us has been rejected by culturally diverse groups based on its inability to acknowledge and distinguish between the unique experiences of racism faced by individuals (Fakim & Macaulay, 2020). The framing of the impact of COVID in medicalized literature acknowledges that the COVID-19-related mortality rates in England were much higher amongst these groups (Platt & Warwick, 2020a). Most of the research associates the inflated mortality rates with socio-economic factors that are often a consequence of structural inequalities. For example, 'BAME' populations are mostly engaged in manual work. This suggests that they would often be the frontline workers even during the peak of the pandemic. This puts them at a greater risk of exposure, increasing their chances of getting infected (Campbell, 2020). Other associations are based on the residence and composition of these families. For example, these families are noted to live in densely populated neighbourhoods, increasing the likelihood of spreading infection (Platt & Warwick, 2020b).

Additionally, an emerging body of literature acknowledges the significant structural disadvantages these groups face (Bhala et al., 2020). Unlike health-related literature emerging in the earlier phases of the pandemic, this literature acknowledges structural disadvantage as a source for exacerbating social inequalities.

However, in COVID-19- and BAME-related literature, the emphasis is placed on mortality and incidence rates in these communities. Within the medicalized literature, studies frequently come across the finding that Bangladeshi and Pakistani families are the worst affected minority groups based on overcrowding (Ahmed, 2020) and increased mortality (Aldridge et al., 2020) rates. It may be inferred that during the pandemic the socio-economic disadvantages are greater for families of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage, living in England (and the UK). This literature on the impacts of COVID-19 only focuses on the health and economic costs of the pandemic to ethnic minority families

especially those of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage. The emerging literature on COVID-19 and education further sheds light on how minoritized communities rarely emerge positively in these discussions.

1.2. COVID-19 and education

A significant body of education and COVID-19-related literature is focused on schooling provision, for example, the impact of the pandemic on practices (Ellis et al., 2020; Kidd & Murray, 2020; Velle et al., 2020), and the adverse impact on the teaching of creative subjects(Daubney & Fautley, 2021). Studies focused on students highlight the devastating effects of the pandemic on the mental health of young adults (McClusky et al., 2021; Newlove-Delgado et al., 2021). However, these studies remain silent on differences in experiences of minority ethnic groups.

Explorations on student characteristics tend to focus on socio-economic dissimilarities, learning gaps and learning loss (Eivers et al., 2020). Parental role tends to be highlighted in terms of the increased responsibilities placed on women/mothers leading to economic and health deterioration (e.g. sleep deprivation) (Falkingham et al., 2020). Note that home schooling for primary and secondary school-age children was generally well received by parents and creative learning emerged. (Bubb & Jones, 2020). However, these studies because of the nature of data either do not explore the experiences of underserved groups or only mention these families in passing. Parental experience is hardly addressed with a few studies (mostly in the area of disability) referring to parental perspectives on the difficulties faced by children with disabilities (Greenway & Eaton-Thomas, 2020), and the disappointments that parents of children with disabilities feel in the government (Pavlopoulou et al., 2020). Amongst the underrepresented groups, Pakistani and Bangladeshi families and their experiences of educating their children during COVID-19 are rarely explored. The ones that do, mostly focus on learning inequalities caused by structural issues such as schools' capacity to provide material and technological support (Bayrakdar & Guveli, 2020).

To summarise, the medicalized literature on COVID-19 identifies the disadvantages that ethnically diverse minority populations are facing during the pandemic. This literature also filters families of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage as the worst affected. Other literature on education either takes the perspective of the school and teachers or highlights how parents have engaged positively with home–school learning and the issues that parents of children with disabilities have faced during the pandemic. Overall, while COVID-19-related literature focused on underrepresented groups is emerging, it does not fully engage in the experiential aspects of COVID-19, parenting and education. Pakistani and Bangladeshi families while acknowledged as adversely impacted by the pandemic, research has not explored the experience of living through, parenting and educating children during COVID-19.

1.3. The changing dynamics of home support, families and the impact of home schooling

The onset of COVID-19 impacted the mode of educational delivery and support. During this time, school closures and a shift to online schooling modalities meant that family

members, regardless of their education level and formal training, stepped in to provide help. This is understandable since the children were at home and in need of guidance in adapting to a new mode of learning. Multiple issues are highlighted through literature related with parenting during COVID. For example, Oppermann and colleagues' (2021) study in Germany investigating the abrupt closures of daycare during COVID found that parental stress was negatively associated with home learning activities. This helps understand the nature of the environment of the homes as families tried to grapple with the sudden increase in parental responsibilities. Shao and colleagues' study in China (2022) shows that parental involvement in school has a direct relationship with their satisfaction. During COVID, a source of rising stress for parents was cause by an inability to support children. In England, Andrew et al. (2020) shed some light on this and show that due to the differences in parental abilities to support children, inequalities in learning were exacerbated during this period. It was also noted that parents became responsible for delivering educational content. Schuck and colleagues' (2021) study of elementary educators working with parents in California demonstrates this point.

The studies related to home and parental responsibilities for supporting their children create multiple narratives which relate to parental engagement with their children's education; notable ones include an increase in parental stress during COVID (Oppermann et al., 2021), the relationalities between parental ability to support their children and their feelings of satisfaction (Shao et al., 2022) and deepening inequalities due to the differences in parental education (Bayrakdar & Guveli, 2020). The paper explores how Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage parents' experiences of either educational support through homeschooling or emotional support have been conceived in the literature.

Even prior to the pandemic, notions of 'hard to reach', perceptions of culture as fixed and debilitating and the stereotype of parents either having too high of aspirations for their children or not being interested at all, have been commonly associated with Asian parenting styles in the UK. During the pandemic, numerous reports trying to capture the scale of learning loss came up with comparisons that are implicated in sustaining these stereotypical notions. For example, Emilia and colleagues (2021) report:

> Children with more educated parents (in the case of secondary school students) or higher household income (in the case of primary school children) spent slightly more time on schoolwork than children from less educated or lower-income households and Pakistani or Bangladeshi backgrounds. By contrast, the time spent by parents was not associated with those indicators, or other parental characteristics such as work status. (p. 4)

There is an interesting binary in such reporting that assumes that Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents along with lower-income households are a contrast to 'educated parents' and high-income families. Many scholars have challenged such notions. For example, Crozier and colleagues (2007) show that school narratives about Pakistani and Bangladesh parents in the UK as 'hard to reach' are misplaced. The authors argue that it is not parents that are hard to reach but schools that misunderstand them and it is instead the schools that inhibit involvement for some parents. Others argue that teachers' expectations of young South Asian students are limited by a misconception that cultural identifiers as fixed and limiting (Crozier, 2009). Related work also shows that these communities draw on emotional support from a wider community of family and friends, therefore identifying these broad structures as a potential resource (Crozier & Davies,

2006). Surprisingly very few studies related to parental experiences during COVID from these communities in England have been conducted. However, considering the cultural relativity of parents in Pakistan Bhamani and colleagues' work (2020) in urban Pakistan is noteworthy that sheds light on parental experiences and strategies during COVID and shows that parents adapted by maintaining strict timetables, engaging children in creative activities and facing difficulties in keeping children productively busy. Through this work, we want to know more, not just about how parents kept active but how they approached and supported their children. This work also presents a critique of the assumption that parents are devoid of formal pedagogic potential and that they need to be taught certain things to enable them to help their children (Wang et al., 2020). While we acknowledge that formal training helps, we approach this study with the belief that in contrast to existing stereotypes about Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage parents in England; these parents, like others, were faced with unprecedented circumstances and hence acted also by instinct – the instinct of caring for and being responsible for their own children.

2. Research approach

This paper draws data from a larger project in which interviews were conducted with 19 secondary school students and their parents of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage in February (2021) living in England during the third national lockdown. In this paper, we draw on parental data which was captured using semi-structured interviews.

2.1. Method

Interviews were conducted using a narrative approach and the interview schedule covered themes such as social and interactive (family relationships), spatial (physical space) and temporal (recalling past pandemic experiences, present ones, and future aspirations) elements. These three elements are a signatory of a narrative approach (Clandinin et al., 2016). After incorporating reflections from an initial pilot interview, the final interview schedules were structured in three sections:

- The first one prompted the participants to recall their past experiences (school provision/support, and resource-related difficulties) of educating their children during the first lockdown and the key messages to take away.
- The second section asked the parents about the family and community dynamics and being conscious of changing gendered roles within families. In this section, parents were also asked to share their strategies to support (educational and socio-emotional) their children during the pandemic.
- The third section focused on the aspirations of the parents for their children's future careers, being attentive to the pandemic-related changes to parental aspirations.

Given the constraints of a national lockdown, all interviews were conducted using Zoom or Whatsapp video calls depending on the participants' preference. The disadvantage of online interviews is that the environment as well as meaningful subtle ques is often missed by the interviewer. However, video interviews are the closest to a physical interview

(Salmons, 2012). All the interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and audio transcribed later (taking Cohen et al., 2017 approach). To gain in-depth insights into the educational experiences during times of precarity, the online engagement was complemented with a narrative approach to data collection and analysis which allowed participants to share their physical, social and temporal experiences during lockdowns.

2.2. Sampling approach

A purposive snowball sampling approach was used for the research. Initially, a poster was created that had basic information about the project, a link to a google form seeking contact details and identifying prospective participants for their ethnicity and children's school age, links to the project webpage and researchers involved, and information about the compensation (£20 worth superstore vouchers) promised in gratitude of their participation. The issue of compensation is widely disputed in research because it can act as a barrier to voluntary participation (Nyangulu et al., 2019). However, some scholars agree that compensation intending to value time lost and/or as 'appreciation for participation' may be justified if the relationship with the participants is built on grounds of mutual respect and care (Saleh et al., 2020, p. 524). On reflection, we felt it was ethical to compensate the participants in appreciation, considering that many of the families had lost income as a result of the pandemic and we were engaging the families over extended time periods.

For snowball sampling purposes, the poster was shared widely through online forums such as Faceboook and Whatsapp groups. More than 40 contacts were made but due to time commitment, only 12 agreed to participate. This number only had two Bangladeshi families because of cultural and language barriers. To increase the participation of Bangladeshi families, the researcher distributed the project posters amongst owners of Asian stores in Cambridge and London and resulted in gaining access to one contact of Bangladeshi heritage. Our contact Ms Rokeya Kabir, a teacher by profession, an active member of the Bangladeshi community and involved in social work, was an invaluable asset to the study. She acted as the key informant, facilitator, and interpreter for four of the participant families who could only communicate in Bangla. With her help, we were able to recruit 10 families of Bangladeshi heritage. To build rapport, the participants were contacted once (voice call) before the interview to answer their questions about the project. We thought it to be helpful to have a conversation before the interview. To ensure that there was clarity in communication, we hosted a project web page hosted on the institutional website which was also shared with the participants. We adopted the approach of icebreaking by making an initial phone call to answer any questions and concerns raised by the participants; the subsequent calls focused on gathering data and were always concluded with a note encouraging participants to share their reflections on our research and add anything that they felt was not asked or covered in the conversation. This was followed by a sincere appreciation and gratitude for the time and energy that they so generously offered to us.

2.3. Data analysis

The analysis adopted a narrative approach to the data (Clandinin et al., 2016). The onset of the pandemic, the period of setting up homes for home learning, the instances of three

national lockdowns and the differences of experiences between the three served as 'narrative moments' to analyse experiences with respect to context, temporality and relationships which are distinctive of narrative analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The data were analysed thematically by first producing a coding frame by going through three interview transcripts and the interview schedule. Based on this coding, interviews were coded and analysed for themes. The themes were grouped into temporal categories of past (beginning of the pandemic), present (life during third national lockdown) and future aspirations (changes in aspirational capability). The themes revealed patterns of resource constraints, parental anxieties about schooling, strategies and changing family dynamics within families.

2.4. Sample characteristics

In total, parents from 19 families were interviewed: ten with a Bangladeshi and nine with a Pakistani heritage. They varied in their economic situation and education status of their parents. There was one multigenerational household and four single parent (mother) families in the sample. The demographics of the families are illustrated in Table 1.

3. Findings

In presenting our findings, we focus on the four main areas: (i) school support, (ii) parental perspectives of children's school experience during lockdown, (iii) parental strategies, and (iv) the impact of school closures on families.

3.1. School support

Parents were largely satisfied with the support provided by their children's schools. They agreed that since the first lockdown the schools had improved their provision considerably and were communicating with the parents. During the pandemic, parents found it hard to adjust to the demands of home–school alongside other responsibilities. School guidance and support proved to be very valuable for some to make this transition of learning from school to home. Ruksar (mother, Hh-02) elaborated on this:

> I mean the first lockdown I would have said (wanted the) school to get more in touch with parents, do things – because I felt quite lost, I wasn't sure what was happening, education wise. To be honest I was quite clueless at the beginning but now they have changed a lot.

Communication was a strength for some schools. Sultana (mother, Hh-13) described how her son's school had created a sense of community:

> they email you and they do see if you have any concerns. Even their form tutor as well, they will email us and they will say if there's any concerns or anything always to email and ask them anything. So in that sense we do feel like we're part of it, can raise our concerns and we know it will be dealt with as well.

Marwa (mother, Hh-07) expressed positive sentiments about her son's school, 'The school have been fantastic. I've got to say they've been really good. They've rung as well to check how things are going'.

Table 1. Demographics of sample.

Participating Parents and family Demographics Total families = 19 from England	Parents interviewed
Gender	Fathers = 3 Mothers = 16
Average age	43
Education	• Primary = 3 • Secondary = 2 • Tertiary = 8 • Postgraduate and professional = 4 • PhD = 2
Employment status at the time of the interview	Employed = 14 Unemployed = 5
List of professions	• Researcher • Teaching assistant • Administrator • Hospital support staff • Teacher • Home -maker • Teacher • Merchandise controller at a supermarket • Research director
Family type	• Joined 1 • Single parent 4 • Nuclear 14
House ownership	• Owned 11 • Owned (council housing) 1 • Rented 4 • Rented (council housing) 4
Children interviewed	
School year (attending during closure)	Year 11 = 5 children Year 10 = 8 children Year 9 = 3 children Year 7 = 3 children
Gender	Daughters = 11 Sons = 8

Notably, these positive experiences were not experienced by all, and our analysis suggests was not the case for families with lower economic status. For example, Sarfaraz (father, Hh-06) explained:

> But, you know, all we ask them, "Ask your teacher." But my girl, last time, she'd given 100 messages to teacher, no response. I said, oh my god, what's happening here. But then again, as I said, it's a very difficult time for teachers, for everyone, yeah.

Similarly, Saira (mother, Hh-05) was finding it very hard to get support from her daughter's school, 'I don't know, obviously each school is different but with her school I'm not having good luck to be honest with you'. Regardless of these challenges, parents empathized that schools were also learning with time,

> I think, every day they're trying to make improvements to see how better they can do and if there is a learning curve for them' (Jasmin, mother, Hh-08) and 'it's been hard for teacher and the students because teachers never done it this way as well and for them to do this in this way and for students. (Faseeha, mother, Hh-18)

Nonetheless, a clear feeling of having been let down by the school emerged for some:

> School never asked then, "How are your children coping?" And I think, you know, they should call the families, and they should be openly – you know, maybe a video call or any phone call, how they're doing and stuff like that. I think it's really important for families, to encourage them to help your children, but it never happened. (Sarfaraz, father, Hh-06)

Interestingly what is noticeable here is how families' economic status, and residential area and the quality of school provision were coming together – a theme we discuss in more detail later.

3.2. Parental perspectives of children's school experience during lockdown

Analysis of our data suggests that parental concerns for their child's schooling experiences that shaped their own perspectives could be grouped into three categories: (i) resource-related issues, (ii) educational and socio-emotional concerns for children, and (iii) strategies for educational and emotional support.

3.2.1. Resource-related issues

Concerns arising from resource constrains were focused on, lack of access to devices and lack of physical space

3.2.2. Lack of access to devices

In some cases, schools supported parents by providing extra devices provided through the UK Department of Education Laptops for Disadvantaged Children Programme. Lubna's (mother, Hh-15) family is a prime example. Her daughter Laiba (Yr 10) constantly struggled due to a lack of devices. Even though the school had provided one functional device, the five siblings had to take turns to study. The Bangladeshi community member who facilitated the study and was a teacher herself acted as an interpreter for this family and explained their situation:

> they did have an iPad … from school, because [there were] not enough iPads … [for] everyone … So … we [the school] gave one, because she's [Laiba] in secondary and she needs to do her work … So, once Laiba done [does] her's, in the evening she does with the others [helps other siblings complete their work].

Having a similar experience of school support, Faseeha (mother, Hh-18) explains how the school provided her family with multiple devices when they were not enough for her family. She says,

> [being given one] laptop it was even worse because they used to keep moaning and telling tales about each other, he's not giving it to me, she's not doing any, you know, and now they've got their own device it's much better.

Eventually what mattered was what resources schools had available to support the children. In contrast to these experiences, parents living in underprivileged neighbourhoods had trouble accessing material support from schools. Sarfaraz (father, Hh-06) had been unable to convince the school that his children could not study because of this. He explains,

> I spoke to them so many times. I emailed them as well … I told them … she's doing it with iPhone 5, and they said, "At least you've got a device." I said, "I'm using it for myself sometimes, I have to communicate people and talk to them and, you know, my mum is not well." I explained to them, yeah? But they said, "No, no, you have to manage it." They're really forcing you to manage it. That's not helping you in no way.

It could be seen that these parents had greater difficulty accessing resources.

3.2.3. Lack of physical space

Physical space was another factor that parents felt had an impact on the way students engaged in online classes. Sarfaraz (father, Hh-06) whose son had been having a lot of difficulties during lockdown noted:

> it's not like the same involvement as you are in the class yourself. Plus, you know, I've got a young boy. My mum, she's got dementia, and sometimes she's shouting and it's very disturbing, very disturbing. What can I do? If someone listened to us – But, you know, no one is listening to us, no. And, you know, the children, they're really getting behind. As they go to school themselves and learn in school, it's not the same environment in the home.

Families like Sarfaraz's dealt with resource constraints. The house has multigenerational residence, and COVID had claimed the social interaction that helped these families to connect with others. Family structure was another notable aspect. Out of the sample, four families were headed by a solo parent, in this case, mothers. In the families where the parent was highly educated and able to earn a good income the situation was better. Others had serious concerns sometimes barely sustaining themselves. Regardless of the income status, these families bore a heavier social burden, by looking after their children, supporting them educationally and emotionally. Some of these families saw a silver lining in their challenging times. Shefali (mother, Hh-12) – a sole parent – noted some unintended positive consequences:

> I noticed with my younger one, that she was the type to study more in a classroom environment, with the teachers there, but she found it hard to motivate herself, whereas Sanya [the elder daughter], because by nature she was the studious kind and able to manage her own workload, she did well. So, since September, my youngest … [is] trying to be a bit like Sanya as well, so she has really changed herself.

In this case, closeness of proximity had meant that Sanya became a role model for her sister.

3.2.4. Educational and socio-emotional concerns for children

School closures and COVID-19-related educational disruptions had heightened parental concerns. Three themes emerged from the analysis: quality of online education, anxieties about children's examinations and performance and socio-emotional concerns for children.

3.2.5. The quality of online education

Parents were convinced that since the first lockdown there had been an overall improvement in the educational provision by the schools. However, online schooling was a new experience for parents and some made efforts to support their children in various ways:

> This experience has made me see home-schooling in a very different light. I am quite appreciative of the friends who do home-schooling with their children. You need to search for some educational support and organise teaching material. (Shehzad, father, Hh-11)

However, many parents raised concerns about the lack of interactiveness of online schooling and its inability to gauge the children's interests.

> it's a different thing for them; like just being in front of the screen and even mentally, socially. Because if they go to school, it's different, isn't it, they have that time with their friends as well and even going in and out and the way the teachers get to know them as well. (Sultana, mother, Hh-13)

> You know like they can learn visually, looking at the teacher explaining to them, re-explaining to them. But when they're at home looking a little screen, it's different because you've got a whole class listening. I've sat in his sessions quite a few times and I'm thinking, sometimes they need to repeat it but sometimes you might get other children who might frustrations and say to the teacher, can you move on. (Jasmin, mother, Hh-08)

Parents thought that online teaching limited the teachers' ability to support students.

> it's not the same as when you're at school because obviously the teachers are so limited in how they can explain something. Because it's like an online class so if Seema [daughter] gets stuck sometimes she can't always get hold of the teacher and that is one thing that obviously I'm not happy with. It's like when you're face to face, I don't know, I feel she learns more but with online I feel like she's lacking that extra help. (Saira, mother, Hh-05)

For a lot of children this made the learning process non-interactive. Farkhanda (mother, Hh-17) said that the school had 'been doing like a lot of live lessons and if they're not on the live, they'll put video recordings so children can watch and do their work'. However, the effectiveness of such methods depended on the neurodiverse learning needs of children.

> the important thing is Kiran's [daughter] personality as well. Because sometimes, for some children, it might be easier to translate from the kind of live sessions to online, but for Kiran it was very difficult, because she's a very, very social person. (Khalida, mother, Hh-04)

The inability of teachers to learn from children's physical expressions led to lessons where they were unable to gauge the interest of the students.

3.2.6. Anxieties about children's assessments and performance

The parents who had children in GCSE years (10 and 11) particularly expressed their anxiety about their children's assessments. Adila (Hh-03, daughter, year 10) said:

> I'm concerned about the grading system, how they're going to grade it … one of my friends was telling me the children are complaining they are being examined on things they haven't read yet. I don't want any such thing happening … I don't want her to be disappointed. But it has not just an academic but psychological effect on a child as well. You know, you have been working so hard and for what? I don't want that.

The unpredictability of the GCSE exam (national-level final school exams conducted in school year 11 for entry into college-level education) and the gaps in learning were causing a lot of anxiety to other parents, especially the ones that were unable to help their children with schoolwork.

> I think she was supposed to have her IT exam … in Year 10, so then they didn't have to worry about it in Year 11 … Now that's had an effect [with Yr 10 GCSE cancelled]. I'm worried about the gaps in her learning … What's going to happen when she's in Year 11 and those gaps haven't been filled?. (Faryal, mother, Hh-07, daughter, Yr 10)

When the interviews were conducted, year 11 children had already had their first mock exam and there was a lot of discontents regarding these assessments because they were conducted right after the first lockdown. The unpredictability of the GCSE examinations and frequently changing decisions not only caused anxiety but were also demotivating for families:

> there's no exams I'm scared that she's not going to get the grades which I thought she was going to get and then if she doesn't do well that's another year wasted … she learnt nothing last year, this year everything's cancelled again, yeah, and … some of the teachers don't know what they're doing … what's the certainty for next year now. This year, I feel like it's just been wasted. (Saira, mother, Hh-05, daughter, Yr 11)

There was heightened anxiety amongst the parents as they watched their children go through an emotional roller coaster with the GCSE news changing every day.

3.2.7. Socio-emotional concerns for children

During their interviews, all the parents were acutely aware of the impact that physical school closures were having on their children:

> She feels burnt out. There is a lot of learning that school offers. And I push her to do more in home environment. It was kind of nice when she went to school from 9 am till 3 pm. She would have a break from school. I think she is working from 9 to 3 but after that she is getting extra learning from 6 to 7 that burns her out. (Shahzad, father, Hh-11, daughter, year 7)

Parents were worried that their children's emotional well-being was suffering because of social isolation:

> I think … it's the physical aspect that they are missing … she was saying she's feeling lonely at times … I think that aspect is missing. Classes wise she's attending those. She hasn't complained much about them. I think she still misses school. (Adila, mother, Hh-03, daughter, year 10)

> It's not just the education side of it, he's Year 7, so the whole growing, becoming more independent, he's not had any of that … now in lockdown, he's missing out on the social interaction with the teachers, with friends, making new friends, falling out. It's all part of experiences that he's not able to have. (Marwa, mother, Hh-09, son, year 7)

Rather importantly, this awareness led parents to develop strategies to support their children educationally and emotionally.

3.3. Parental strategies for educational and emotional support during lockdown

Even though our parental sample was varied, across the board what emerged was their agency and commitment to actively supporting their children for which they adopted different strategies. The main strategies which emerged in the analysis were (i) educational support through online tuition, (ii) engaging actively in education and setting

boundaries between home and school, (iii) supporting children in creative pursuits, and (iv) adapting aspirations, practicality, and the loss of imagined futures.

3.3.1. Educational support through online tuition

Many parents had to think about extra support, even the ones that could hardly afford it because schooling disruptions had made it very difficult for children to cope with the GCSE-level course. Parents provided this in the form of online tutoring or the use of online forums even when they are found it financially burdensome:

> for them to reach the goal to go into sixth form they would need to work extra and, as we said, like if he needs extra tuition, anything extra, we're happy to support him in that way because we know they miss out a lot and it won't be really fair like just to say, "Oh get on with it, just do your work, do your own research". (Sultana, mother, Hh-13, son, year 11)

> in this pandemic, we started a lot of tutoring for her, which she was not taking before, right? Because I thought that, okay, this disruption – I mean, I can't afford to have that tutoring, but it's just like I'm spending beyond my financial kind of things. (Khalida, mother, Hh-04, daughter, year 11)

Some parents didn't have a choice because of their inability to help their children with schoolwork. Yarjan (mother, Hh-14, son, Yr 10) is a good example. Her son always received home tuition. Since the tutors could not visit home during the lockdown, he was unable to understand Math which he found very difficult. Although the dad had lost income during COVID-19, the family did not have a choice but to continue spending on tuition.

Overall families tried to compensate for lost education by providing tutoring even when it was difficult for them to afford it financially.

3.3.2. Engaging actively in education and setting boundaries between home and school

There was common awareness amongst parents that the children needed their support for education so many of them actively engaged with their children's education. In many families, parents started getting more involved in their children's education. A common strategy was to push them to achieve more. Asiya (mother, Hh-10) and Sulatana (mother, Hh-13) shared how their husbands encouraged their children to become high achievers. Some felt that the schools being unable to provide appropriate support often did not push students enough to reach their true potential.

> I think the biggest obstacle from school is telling children that it's good, when the children have the potential to achieve more. I think that puts parents in a very bad position … It took a lot of lectures to convince her, "Fatima, it's okay, if you have this much ability for example in certain subject, I will not push you. But if I know you have more ability then I will push you". (Adila, mother, Hh-03, daughter, Yr 10)

> Parents realised that doing well at school in these times depended on the child's level of motivation and they felt the need to keep children engaged so that they did not lose interest in education.

> they are like dependent on us to like kind of motivate them a lot, because that is the kind of support, I think they are always looking towards us … Like for my son (Yr 10), right, I mean, you have to be there, what you're thinking, that the teachers are not doing well. You should

> communicate to them what is not good, right? So, I think they are very dependent on us for all that moral support more than what we used to give before. So, I have to really kind of control this thing, that I will just appreciate them more. (Khalida, mother, Hh-04)

Additionally, parents' focus on setting boundaries between home and school was an important coping mechanism during the lockdown. They articulated how they needed to draw boundaries between schoolwork and downtime at home for their children to maintain a healthy life:

> I try and have a bit of a cut-off point so then in the evening we're not doing anything school-related; we're spending family time because our home is everything at the moment. It's school, it's an office, it's our dining room, living room, everything. You've got to have this cut-off and a boundary. (Marwa, mother, Hh-09)

> when I see her homework done really well. I know what she can go with. In school one does the best they can, but you also have off days and that's okay. In this current situation maybe she's not getting an opportunity to have an 'off' day because she is constantly being supervised. There are moments when she looks tired and I suppose that's when I should go easy with her. (Shehzad, father, Hh-11)

Some parents felt that the boundaries also blurred because the children had more screen time than they would be allowed normally.

> it's an online platform, right, so he cannot differentiate between like what is formal education and what is his other space of like gaming with his friends … So, that kind of differentiation is very difficult for him when he is on his PC, and distractions are easy. (Khalida, mother, Hh-04)

Through the analysis it was evident that parents were keenly aware of their children's needs during the lockdowns. They provided educational support in the shape of home tuition and to bring some structure to life established boundaries between school (study time) and home (down time). Additionally, parents realized that the pressures of school were causing anxiety so they made efforts to alter expectations and future aspirations in light of the unfolding situation.

3.3.3. Adapting aspirations, practicality, and the loss of imagined futures

Regardless of being in or near exam years, the parents were preparing their children for uncertain futures which sometimes came at the cost of 'imagining alternative futures' (DeJaeghere, 2018, p. 237). Parents of younger children (Years 7 and 8) had seen them trying to adjust to the new secondary school environment without the social element.

> The transition was hard because primary and secondary are completely different. It is difficult for the child to understand and adjust to a new system when you have to take more responsibility for your education … Unfortunately, for her the pandemic hit at this crucial time when she transitioned to secondary. She has not been able to make new friends which has affected her whole experience. (Shahzad, father, Hh-11, daughter, Yr 7)

Parents were generally concerned with their children's future prospects from a very early age. These aspirations are nurtured during the time children grow up, sometimes through childhood dreams, family professional background or teacher predictions. Given the importance of educational aspirations in these households, changing aspirations was harder for parents and students because what was possible earlier was no

longer 'practical' and many dreams had to be abandoned. Many GCSE year children who had nurtured their educational aspirations felt betrayed by the system when their mock exams did not reflect their potential. These children could not choose subjects (STEM) that required a higher level of engagement and competitive scores to gain admission to good colleges.

> I think, because some things are forced, you know, like exams are not going to happen, so we have to change our aspirations. There is not like my choice to change those. So, whatever she got, like her predicted grades or whatever, we are forced to like accept this reality now … so her career aspirations really kind of gone wrong or maybe something – I mean, she wants to take maths and physics, but I don't know. (Khalida, mother, Hh-04, daughter, Yr 11)

> She wants to become … chemical engineer she wants to become … But the way everything is going it's like she's going to be behind a year because she's not doing well right now. Because not got good … she's not got good input from the teachers at the moment. (Saira, mother, Hh-05, daughter, Yr 11)

The uncertainty of GCSE teaching and examinations were having a negative effect on students near the GCSE year (year 10). Some were changing their aspirations very rapidly because they struggled to imagine their futures. Ruksar (mother, Hh-02; son, year 10) explains, 'So all these years he wanted to be a vet but he's changed his mind. I don't know what he's going to be now, but I hope something comes good because he is a clever boy and he uses all that'.

In summary, the changing of aspirations was at the same time a coping strategy but also a disappointment for the children and parents alike. The parents were constantly involved in navigating these aspirational changes at the same time trying to provide support in appropriate places and motivate children morally, so this change was managed without harm.

3.3.4. Supporting children in creative pursuits

Parents recognized that arts and creative pursuits were helping children find meaning and value in a life with long and monotonous days. Most of the students (12/19 students) were engaged in some sort of creative and/or art-based activities. For example, Pratap's (father, Hh-19) daughter Manali (year 11) found a new love for dance during lockdown which kept her inspired. Similarly, Faryal's (mother, Hh-07) daughter Amina (year 10) converted her love for singing and dancing into a profession during the lockdown. She began teaching students online across the world and started earning during this period. According to Faryal, this kept Amina motivated to begin each day with a new found enthusiasm.

There were other students who used their artistic sensibilities to keep them hopeful for better times. For example, Jasmin's son Zain (Hh-08, year 10) used his interest in design technology to update the chicken coop with a jumping pad for his chicks. Yarjan's (mother, Hh-14) son Mohsin (year 10) used his interests in architecture by sketching building designs, whereas Adila (mother, Hh-03) and Khalida's (Hh-04) daughters used their artistic skills to sketch portraits in their spare time. Others tried their hand at translating their interest in cosmology to making marble constellations on the ground (Tabinda, mother, Hh-11). Parents saw value in all of these pursuits.

> Sahiba has a very different personality of doing craft and art, so she finds her therapy in her work, like she's always painting, doing something. She will find some like, you know, poster, and she will start painting them. So, it's just like kind of therapeutic for her. (Khalida, mother, Hh-04)

The parents recognized that creative interests were keeping their children motivated to continue with their otherwise monotonous days. However, when it came to career choices, this was not something they encouraged. This highlights the importance of equal opportunities in the job market and eventually influence families' decisions about future careers, in terms of not just ethnic but also disciplinary differences.

3.4. Impacts of school closure on parents

The analysis showed that there were two ways in which the pandemic was impacting parents and the approach to life: (i) the altering of gendered roles and responsibilities, and (ii) using 'positivity' to cope with the pandemic.

3.4.1. The altering of gendered roles and responsibilities

Roles and responsibilities inside the family altered during lockdowns. This was a direct result of income opportunities being reduced for some families while for others this meant that the males had to work from home. These changes provided opportunities for males to share the responsibility of providing educational support to children. However, in some cases the mothers were predominantly carrying the responsibility of looking after a house that was occupied by multiple members all the time. This increased caregiving activities manifold. There were three themes emerging from an analysis of gendered dimensionality of the family: males taking up household responsibilities, increased involvement in a pre-determined division of labour between the male and female, and increased caregiving for mothers and the family chipping in to support each other.

In most families, the mothers cared for the family and the father took responsibility for helping the children with education. Since the lockdown, many fathers were spending more time at home and so were more involved now (e.g. Asiya, Hh-10, Sultana (Hh-13, Faseeha', Hh18 husbands, and Pratap Hh-19)). Fathers engaged in manual work had lost income. Spending more time at home they actively supported their children and helped their wives with household responsibilities (Saira, Hh-05, Jasmin, Hh-08and Yarjan's, and Hh-14 husbands).

Another change in the family dynamic is related to the children helping their parents. There were six households where the mothers were solely responsible for household and care responsibilities. All of these mothers were doing part-time or full-time jobs that they were managing alongside their family responsibilities. They would often involve their family to support them.

> I think because they're home and because they're here when I'm here. That's really helped. We try and do things together. If I'm cooking or whatever, try and get them involved in things more. (Faryal, mother, Hh-07)

Shefali (mother, Hh-12), a single mother and an accountant by profession, shared how she had plenty of support handy, but she liked to do things by herself said,

> I don't like asking for help … But I know that, if I need it, my family would be there. So, if I needed a break with the kids, you know, there are places – like my mum will happily have them, my sister will happily have them.

There was evidence of altering responsibilities in the households, especially the role of older siblings in supporting their younger siblings with education. This is a common theme in multiple families (Households, 01, 02, 04, 05, 23, 41, 49, 50, 52 and 54). This support meant that the younger siblings had grown closer to the older ones emotionally who also provided in home educational support as well. In some cases, this had added to the responsibilities that older children often in GCSE years or higher education were already juggling during COVID-19.

3.4.2. Using 'positivity' to cope with the pandemic

Staying 'positive' was a strategy used by parents to guide the rest of the family so that they were protected from the immediate frustrations of COVID-19.

> we've accepted the fact that this is something that's going to be around for a while … the best thing is to get on, be nice, be humble, be patient, patience is a big thing in our house now. (Saira, mother, Hh-05)

In these times parents practiced and preached 'positivity' to their children to save them from disappointment.

> I say, you can always turn a negative into a positive, it all depends on yourself as well and how you cope. And I think a mother plays a big role as well in the family so it's how you maintain everything. So yeah, sometimes, you know, it's just that, it's how you get the family together, "Oh let's eat together, let's do this together, let's do that together … so maybe in a few years' time that could be something positive. Could've been a blessing in disguise that they got to know themselves, not education but as a person, what they're like". (Sultana, mother, Hh-13)

One key positive aspect reiterated throughout was the element of the families coming together and relationships being rekindled. All the family members were now spending more time together in their house. Members were discovering new ways of living together and appreciating each other.

> there is a negative but also a positive side to everything. So we should seek the positive perspective … Let's make the best out of it so when the lockdown is over, we have made good memories … The lockdown brought us together. That was quite powerful. I was not as communicative, with little time for anything but work. I would go to work, come home in the evening tired. Would eat dinner and then watch tele. Don't be such strangers in a room. It's a good time to renew relationships, to speak to one another. (Shahzad, father, Hh-11)

There was also a shared feeling of living in the 'now'. This active approach to take it as it comes is demonstrated in Faryal's (mother, Hh-07) statement 'One day at a time, that is motto. Let's get through today before we start looking at a good few week ahead'. Similar feelings were shared by Saira:

> One step at a time because the problem with me is when I used to be young, I used to have that many things in my head that I want to do, none of them I did. So, I say to the girls, a step at a time, that's how we work in this house, cause you don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. (mother, Hh-05)

The experiences of the pandemic shaped the roles and responsibilities within families and strengthened family relationships. The families came together as stronger units helping each other out when needed. Parents often used positive thinking to help themselves and their families cope with the frustrations of the pandemic.

4. Discussion and reflections

The findings from this study provide important insights into the role of Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents in supporting their children's education during COVID-19. In this regard, the study departs from the reductionist 'BAME communities' framing of research, especially within the UK, which creates false homogenisation of ethnicity and simplification of complex racial disadvantages and leads to the formation of deficit discourses representing diverse cultural communities in a non-agentive light.[1] Informed by our data and through our conversations with parents in this paper we highlight the 'agentive' role that parents played to lessen the shocks imposed on their children by the COVID-19 related educational disruptions. Parents remained physically and emotionally available to their children in times of grave economic, emotional, social, and spatial challenges. There were significant economic challenges that stemmed from systemic inequalities within the system that made the COVID-19 experience an exceptionally difficult one for many communities. However, as educational provision changed parents devised ways of helping their children cope with the changing times regardless of the inequalities within which they were situated.

To discuss the pertinent insights from this study, we fall back on our narrative inclinations and draw on narratives 'as a way of characterising human experience' (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 3). Therefore, we discuss three narrative events depicting parental experiences: (i) the change: schools being zoomed into houses, (ii) coping mechanisms: the active and strategic role of the parents, and (iii) the structures: Inequalities, income, and educational experiences during COVID-19.

4.1. The change: schools being zoomed into houses

When schools shut parents became frontline managers for education on a household level. At this point, many changes needed to be made amongst which dealing with the blurring boundaries between school and home was the most crucial. For example, some practices were adopted to help distinguish between home and school so that the children had a healthy structure in their lives. Parents established strict boundaries that would allow the children to have some 'down time' (Shehzad, Hh-11) so they could replenish to begin a new day was a difficult task to accomplish. However, parents adapted their lives to transform home spaces into learning and back home, for example, using strategies such as designating certain spaces such as the 'dining table' for schoolwork. Marwa (Hh-07) discussed how she designated her dining table as a 'physical space' for school. When school ended the children would leave the table and enter their home/private space. This resulted in a psychological distinction between school and home by the act of entering (sitting at the dining table) and leaving school. It is important to note that the blurring followed by ideological distinctions between dichotomous boundaries such as public/private, home/school, and work/home have

often used the metaphor of the 'kitchen table' to strengthen the importance of the merger and subsequent separation in critical race and feminist literature (Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2020; Fletcher, 1995). Sometimes parents would invoke physical boundaries to remind their children of the need to take time off. A good example is Shefali's (Hh-12) advice to her daughter who fell ill and found it hard to disconnect from schoolwork. Shefali reminded her daughter that just like in normal circumstances when she would take a day off from school if she was unwell, she had to do the same during lockdowns.

However, the blurring of boundaries does not prove to be advantageous for everyone. For example, Canning and Robinson (2021) argue that families were maintaining their homes as safe spaces for children with special needs, but these boundaries were compromised by the intervention of outside elements such as school and other agencies during COVID. Contrary to such findings our study reveals that inside the house, parents were instrumental in their efforts to maintain a school-life balance for their children. In line with this, spatial constraints are the most disruptive for the families that live in small or multi-member households. Some of these reflections are shared in the literature; for example, Fontichiaro and Stephens (2021) argue that video-conferencing during COVID has meant that parents 'hover' over their children's shoulders to monitor learning; similarly, educators claim more of the children's family time. In contrast to these discussions, our study reveals the difficulties and activism of parents to maintain a school-home balance for the well-being of the children. This supportive role ensured that children sustained themselves during one of the most challenging times of their lives.

4.2. Coping mechanisms: the active and strategic role of parents

Parents took an active role in providing educational as well as emotional support. Socio-economic inequalities meant that the children missed out on learning opportunities. There were multiple reasons behind this, some could not adapt to the digital educational provision and others had reduced access to educational resources and were not appropriately supported by the schools. However, parents recognized the problems that their children were facing and provided extra support by getting directly involved in teaching. Others arranged for online tutoring to compensate for personal teaching. The reliance on tutoring was seen in most of the families rehardless of their socio-economic circumstances. Data show us that during the school closures middle income and working-class families spent considerably on their children's tuition (Cullinane & Montacute, 2020).

Parental emotional support during this period is most notable. The multitude of ways in which parents were looking after the emotional well-being of their children was particularly noteworthy for the children in their GCSE examination years (years 9–11) who were suffereing from extreme anxiety due to the inability to do well in their career setting GCSE exams. This had strong negative consequences for the future choices that were no longer available to them. We often noted that children who wanted to pursue careers in STEM had to change their aspirations because extreme inequalities emerged when students were marked based on their school performance. In this situation, the parental strategy was to adapt their own as well as their children's aspirations. Joan DeJaghere (2018) in her work with young girls in Tanzania argues that 'aspirations and agency are dialectically related and socially situated' (p. 237); this was indeed reflected in the case of parents in our sample families. On a cursory view, the acceptance of unmet

dreams shows a lack of power but in this case, parents strategized to protect their children from despair. There was agency in their actions for imagining alternative futures … and thinking through constraints and alternatives' (p. 252). Our findings go contrary to the deficit discourse that is constructed for culturally diverse and minoritized communities in the UK. Such deficit discourses circulated at the beginning of the pandemic when discussions focused on infection and mortality showed that these groups were adversely affected.

With the onset of the pandemic as children were suddenly thwarted into present and future instability, parental agency was visible as they attempted to protect their child's psychological well-being. One of the ways that parents did this was by preserving their children's creativities by encouraging them to pursue artistic and creative activities. Alongside, such efforts they also encouraged children to practice 'acceptance' of the present with positivity, no matter how disheartening the circumstances were. Acknowledging the struggles of their children parents made efforts to maintain some semblance of a normal and happy life.

4.3. The structures: inequalities and educational experiences during covid-19

Social inequalities served as a backdrop despite parental attempts to stabilize and improve the educational experience of their children by focusing on their social, emotional, and psychological well-being. During interviews, we decided not to collect explicit data on family income as we felt that collecting such sensitive information during an online interview and in a time of extreme economic hardship would not be ethically appropriate. Additionally, the focus of the study was on the lived experiences of parenting during COVID regardless fo their socio-economic circumstances. However, there were elements that emerged in the data which show how experiential inequalities were linked to socio-economic markers.

The pernicious impacts of social inequalities were particularly visible in single parent households where there were considerable social and/or economic challenges. Although this was not the case for the family whose sole parent was highly qualified and could earn more income, however, in terms of caring responsibilities the social difference compared with nuclear households put the families under greater duress. This was one of the aspects of COVID-19 that acted silently to exacerbate inequalities. Some literature engages in the changing dynamics of gender roles during COVID-19 (Carli, 2020; Power, 2020) but does not address the silent and deep-rooted inequalities that emerge when there is little understanding of families that are culturally structurally diverse.

Social and economic inequalities are hard to separate. Literature suggests that there is intersectionality between the different dimensions of inequality (O'Connor, Bright & Bruner, 2019), and therefore, judgements about whether income inequalities lead to social disadvantage or vice versa are not discernible. This was the realization from the analysis conducted for this study. For example, economic, social and class inequalities worked in concert with each other to create varied experiences for the families. An added dimension was regionality which we analysed drawing from the idea of physical space from the narrative inquiry.

Wacquant (2018) provides a useful idea to evaluate the intersections between economic and social inequalities for the participating families in the study. He describes

the ethnic segregation of populations in European cities with these groups becoming urban outcasts. These urban wards are where ethnic minorities are clustered together to form homogenized groups with limited access to quality facilities (for UK; see also Slater, 2010). He calls these pockets of residence 'ghettos', which he describes as 'part of a city, … occupied by a minority group or groups' (p. vii). Ghettos are usually associated with deprivation and are marked by resource scarcity for livelihood and schools.

Conversations with the parents in our study showed the incidence of ghettoized communities. This was evident in the discrepancy in the level of support that schools were able to provide to the children. While parents living in privileged neighbourhoods availed the material support provided by the government through schools (such as other electronic devices) children of those residing in 'ghettoized wards' lost learning because of material constraints. The parents having difficulty communicating with schools belonged to densely populated 'urban wards' with little support from the government and schools. Schools in these 'ghettoised wards' tended to be weaker in coping with the pandemic and making education inaccessible. As schools closed, parents had to transform their houses into spaces of learning, and this further disadvantaged underserved groups.

Our research shows that while the pandemic tested the education system, it also posed high demands on parents where they became the most crucial element in the formal learning of their children, and how they acted as diffusers in times of disruptions. Parents, from Bangladeshi and Pakistani families, despite structural barriers and other hardships were rescripting relationships between 'home' and 'school'. The evidence we present provides an opportunity to reimagine the role that parents from these communities, who are largely viewed in the literature as disengaged, created spaces for their children to function and continue with their learning. Such insights provide a very agency-driven discourse of parents and families in general. One of the consequences of COVID is that it has brought to light how parental support from largely little-understood (and commonly misunderstood) culturally diverse minority communities (see Canovan & Fallon, 2021 on lack of parental involvement in school) proved as the most valuable asset to improve the educational as well as socio-emotional well-being of their children during lockdowns. Going forward it is essential that these experiences are utilized to improve the learning experiences of children from culturally diverse minority groups.

5. Key implications for educational providers, policy-makers and practitioners

Based on the insights from this research, a few key implications can be drawn out:

The lived experiences parents from communities that are seen as 'hard to reach' should be included as contextual information to improve the provision of education for children, especially when thinking of education during times of crises. Setting up and working with parental advocacy groups especially comprising of parents from ethnic minority communities can shape the development of an inclusive policy.

- To alleviate educational inequalities it would be important to allocate resources to schools based in the most disadvantaged physical and community locations. These communities which are historically underserved often have schools that are also

reflective of this legacy. When redressing educational inequities these 'most marginalized' and 'hard to reacxh' communities and schools need to become the starting point of such efforts.

- COVID19 has emphasized and made it possible to reimagine the role of families in the schooling of their children. Parents and extended families/guardians proved to be key stakeholders and partners during the pandemic as schools tried to engage with children through online provision. As we look into the future there is a significant need to strengthen these partnerships between home and schooling to deliver quality education. Working through establishing more formal structures which enable this connection to be maintained and nurtured can be valuable for schools as they re-engage and reconnect with their students.

To work towards a post COVID-19 education system, schools should take advantage of strategies adopted by families- their experiences, challenges and enablers narrated by them to develop a more collaborative way of supporting the holistic learning of children from these culturally diverse groups. For fruitful collaborations to take the agenda of equitable education in England forward, knowledge needs to come from the knowledge bearers within diverse ethnic communities.

Note

1. A good example is the medicalised literature on BAME, which even though well intentioned often leads to the different communities being depicted in deficit ways. This ties in with the critique on the terminology of 'BAME' which fails to acknowledge the diverse ways in which people and communities face cultural, historical, social and institutional racism.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by Cambridge Humanities Research Grants Scheme 2020/21.

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