VULNERABILITY AND RESILIENCE IN CHILDREN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Background: The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is having a profound impact on the health and development of children worldwide. There is limited evidence on the impact of COVID-19 and its related school closures and disease-containment measures on the psychosocial wellbeing of children; little research has been done on the characteristics of vulnerable groups and factors that promote resilience.

Methods: We conducted a large-scale cross-sectional population study of Hong Kong families with children aged 2 to 12 years. Parents completed an online survey on family demographics, child psychosocial wellbeing, functioning and lifestyle habits, parent-child interactions, and parental stress during school closures due to COVID-19. We used simple and multiple linear regression analyses to explore factors associated with child psychosocial problems and parental stress during the pandemic.

Results: The study included 29,202 individual families; of which 12,163 had children aged 2 to 5 years and 17,029 had children aged 6 to 12 years.

Conclusions: This study identifies vulnerable groups of children and highlights the importance of strengthening family coherence, adequate sleep and exercise, and responsible use of electronic devices in promoting psychosocial wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.