

COVID

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**Discuss the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on children,
young people and families living in poverty in the UK.**

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The COVID-19 pandemic has been a monumental challenge that has far-reaching repercussions for society. This illness is now present in every single country in the world. Children, teenagers, and families living in low-income homes are among the demographics who are hit the hardest by this issue (Holt and Murray, 2022). Those in the United Kingdom who were already struggling to make ends meet financially have a considerably harder time due to the pandemic's effects, which have made the preexisting socioeconomic inequities in the country even more obvious. This has made life significantly more difficult for those individuals. The current COVID-19 outbreak in the United Kingdom has significantly impacted younger generations, families with lower incomes, and adolescents (Cowie and Myers, 2021). Some of the domains in which the impacts have been observed include but are not limited to, education, mental health, economic security, and social well-being. It is necessary to be aware of these effects if one is to have any hope of understanding the challenges faced by this vulnerable population and coming up with viable solutions for their support and rehabilitation. This essay examines how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected families and children in the United Kingdom who are surviving on low incomes. These families and children live in areas hit particularly hard by the epidemic.

Poverty was already a major issue in the UK before the COVID-19 outbreak. In 2019/2020, the poverty rate in the UK was 21.0%, with an estimated 14.5 million people living below the poverty line, as the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported. Everyone, from young to old, is included in this. Not surprisingly, poverty rates in the United Kingdom have increased due to the pandemic's severe effects on the economy (UK Parliament, 2023). The epidemic caused widespread economic turmoil, company failures, and the loss of thousands of jobs. It is possible that many people, especially those with low-paying employment, have lost their income and fallen into poverty. According to the government's annual 'households below average income' report, around 14.4 million individuals lived in poverty in 2021/2022. Almost a third (29%) are youngsters, among whom are 4.2 million. Poverty affects 8.1 million individuals of working age and 2.1 million seniors. Lowered working hours, furlough plans, and pay cutbacks have lowered income for everyone, not just those who have lost their jobs due to the epidemic. The poverty rate may rise as a result of this decline in income.

It is becoming increasingly difficult for low-income individuals and families to satisfy their necessities as the cost of living, which includes housing, food, and utilities, continues to climb. When people already have a low standard of living and their income drops, they may fall even further behind (Waite et al., 2021). A burden has been placed on the social welfare system because of the increasing need for support during the epidemic. Those struggling financially may find that delays or barriers to receiving aid make their situation even direr. If you want accurate data about poverty in the United Kingdom, you must look at recent papers and research. The present state of poverty and inequality in the UK can be better understood through reports and statistics published by organisations like ²⁷ the ONS, the Department for Work and Pensions, and related NGOs (Whitehead ²⁵ et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 epidemic has devastated the UK's poorest children and youth due to the interruptions it has made in their education. The elimination of classrooms and the rise of online education have exacerbated existing educational gaps and presented new difficulties. The digital gap is one of the most significant results of educational disruptions. Unfortunately, many students from low-income backgrounds lack the computer and internet access they need to participate in online education fully (Pierce et al., 2020). The inability to fully participate in online classrooms and access educational tools has further marginalised youngsters living in poverty. The digital gap has worsened things for poor kids falling behind their more privileged classmates. Students from low-income households have also had to deal with the loss of essential services due to the closure of schools. Many students' nutritional needs are partly met by the school's food program, which often includes free school lunches (Adegboye et al., 2021). Due to the school shut down, these disadvantaged youngsters may experience increasing food insecurity. Lack of access to adequate nutrition can negatively affect their health, well-being, and academic performance. Potentially lasting effects of the pandemic on schooling are being investigated. It may be difficult for students from underprivileged families to make up for lost academic ground once school resumes.

They may have a harder time getting ahead and staying out of poverty because of the widening educational gaps over this time. Policymakers, schools, and communities must prioritise and assist pupils from low-income households if these disruptions are to be mitigated (Shakespeare et al., 2022). Those kids who don't have access to computers and the internet should have that gap closed as much as possible. Families that cannot afford the required equipment for remote learning should be eligible for financial assistance.

³¹ The COVID-19 epidemic ²⁹ has caused mental health issues for children, youth, and low-income households in the UK. ²⁹ The pandemic's mental health effects have been significant, especially for impoverished people. Pandemic uncertainty, anxiety, and social isolation can negatively affect mental health. The epidemic adds to the daily strains of poor children and youth. Financial instability, resource scarcity, and housing insecurity can exacerbate family stress and anxiety (Bailey et al., 2021). The disruption of daily routines and the loss of social relationships have also affected children's mental health. School, extracurricular, and community centre closures have reduced structure and social contact. Isolation can cause loneliness, despair, and a lack of support. The inability to participate in emotional-release hobbies and leisure activities exacerbate these issues. The epidemic has also affected mental health care. Poverty can make mental health care difficult for children, youth, and families (Banati et al., 2020). Due to healthcare system strain, mental health services may have been disrupted, making timely and effective help more difficult. ³⁰ Anxiety and sadness have increased because of the pandemic's length and constraints. Mental health can be affected by future uncertainties, health and safety worries, and losing loved ones. These problems might be daunting for children and youth already struggling. Mental health issues demand complex treatment (Blundell et al., 2022). ²⁴ Mental health services for children, youth, and low-income families must be expanded. Counselling, therapy, and support groups should be inexpensive and accessible. Schools, mental health specialists, and community organisations may work together to support vulnerable kids. ²⁰ The COVID-19 epidemic has had a major influence on the mental health of children, youth, and low-income households in the UK. Uncertainty, social isolation, and pressures have worsened mental health issues, necessitating tailored assistance and interventions (Brown and Albani, 2022).

Prioritising mental health resources and early care can lessen the pandemic's long-term effects on this vulnerable population's mental health.

The COVID-19 epidemic has harmed UK children, youth, and low-income households. Due to the economic slump and social upheaval, disadvantaged households have been hit hard. Many low-income parents lost employment and income because of the epidemic. Unemployment has increased due to lockdowns, company closures, and economic restrictions (Fisherr et al., 2020). Already impoverished families are struggling to satisfy their basic requirements. According to unofficial estimates, the drop in GDP in 2020 is projected to reach 9.7 percent, making it the biggest decline since accurate records were kept, which began in 1948. Compared to February of that year, the GDP of the UK fell by 25% in April 2020 as a direct result of the first lockdown. The lack of money has made it difficult for these families to afford food, shelter, and healthcare. Food insecurity is a major issue for many households. The shutdown of schools has had a major impact on low-income children who rely on school lunches for nourishment. Due to financial difficulty, families can't afford decent housing, resulting in overpopulation and poor living conditions (Garthwaite et al., 2022). Healthcare costs and restricted availability have left families struggling. Economic problems have also interrupted educational chances and resources for poor children and youth. Remote learning during school closures has exposed the digital divide since many low-income homes lack the gear and internet access for online classes. The parent's mental health has suffered due to financial stress (Hefferon et al., 2021). Anxiety, sadness, and other mental health issues can result from financial problems, employment uncertainty, and childcare stress. The COVID-19 epidemic has made poverty worse for UK children, youth, and families. Vulnerable households have been disproportionately affected by income loss, food and housing hardship, restricted healthcare access, and educational interruptions.

The COVID-19 epidemic has increased social isolation and the digital gap among UK children, youth, and low-income households. These implications have exacerbated disparities and hampered connectedness and social well-being. Pandemic isolation is common (Kyerematang et al., 2022).

Lockdowns, social isolation, and gathering restrictions have reduced community involvement. Poverty-stricken children, youth, and families may lack social networks, community resources, and support systems, making them more susceptible to social isolation. Lack of social contact and activity can cause loneliness, mental illness, and social growth. The pandemic has widened the digital gap (O’Conner et al., 2020). Digital technologies and dependable internet connections are essential for distant employment, education, and communication. Low-income children and youth typically lack electronics and internet access. This digital gap marginalises these people, making it harder for them to study remotely, use internet resources, and socialise. This discrepancy worsens educational inequality and restricts human progress (Onwumere et al., 2021). Social isolation and the digital divide have far-reaching effects. Social isolation can promote anxiety, despair, and loneliness in children and youth. Social contacts, which shape emotional and cognitive development, may also be missed. The digital divide also hinders remote learning for individuals without technology and the internet. Learning loss, academic underachievement, and long-term educational effects can result (Patel and Kariel, 2021). Social isolation and the technology gap must be addressed holistically. Provide gadgets and internet access to low-income households to bridge the digital divide. Public-private partnerships and government actions can promote technological equity. Digital literacy program may help kids and teens use internet platforms and resources. Social isolation needs community-based initiatives and assistance. Community organisations, schools, and local authorities can collaborate to provide safe social contacts, mentorship, and extracurricular activities (Porter et al., 2021). Social isolation can be mitigated by encouraging virtual social groups and mental health support program. In conclusion, the COVID-19 epidemic has increased social isolation and the digital gap among poor UK children, youth, and families. Lack of social connections and digital resources hinders social well-being, educational possibilities, and overall growth.

¹⁹ The COVID-19 epidemic has had a major effect on food insecurity among low-income households in the United Kingdom. The interruption of free school lunch programs due to school closures is a major contributor to this rise.

Children from low-income households often rely only on these programs for their daily nutritional needs (Power et al., 2020). Due to the closure of schools, these kids have lost access to their usual lunch schedules, increasing their vulnerability to hunger. In addition, it has become more difficult for low-income families to buy nutritional food due to the closing of community services and the loss of income brought on by the epidemic. Many families struggle financially and have had to prioritise paying for necessities like housing, food, and healthcare above extras like vacations and entertainment (Rosenthal et al., 2020). Because of this, individuals may be less able to afford healthy food, which might make them more susceptible to food insecurity. The epidemic has caused a ²⁸ rise in the number of people using food banks as more people struggle to provide for their families. When people need immediate food help, food banks may be an invaluable resource. The increased demand, however, has put a strain on these organisations' resources, making it difficult to keep up with the rising demand. During the epidemic, food insecurity must be addressed on all fronts (Bailey et al., 2021). Government agencies, charities, and local communities have all taken initiatives to aid low-income families. Increases in food bank financing, broader access to welfare, and safeguards for free school lunches are all examples of efforts that fall under this broad rubric. Food insecurity among low-income households ²³ in the United Kingdom has worsened due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The UK's poor children, youth, and families have suffered from the COVID-19 pandemic's restricted healthcare access. Poverty-stricken families and individuals have delayed or neglected medical care due to limited healthcare availability (Banati et al., 2020). Due to overburdened healthcare systems and COVID-19 prioritisation, routine check-ups, preventative screenings, immunisations, and required treatments have been delayed or cancelled. This delay in medical attention can have long-term ³² effects on children's and young people's health. Poverty-related health hazards grow with limited healthcare access. Undiagnosed or untreated health issues can develop, causing more severe symptoms, complications, and a deterioration in health (Blundell et al., 2022). Chronic problems may deteriorate, and acute illnesses go untreated, putting people at risk of poor health outcomes. Children, youth, and low-income families' mental health issues have worsened during the epidemic.

The stress, fear, and uncertainty of the epidemic and restricted access to mental health experts and assistance have affected their mental health (Brown and Albani, 2022). Lack of mental health treatment can aggravate mental health issues and cause distress. The epidemic has worsened health disparities for poor people. Financial restrictions, a lack of transportation, and limited community healthcare services sometimes prevent them from accessing healthcare. The epidemic has compounded these inequities, leaving disadvantaged groups without crucial healthcare treatments. The pandemic's restricted healthcare access ³³ may have long-term effects on poor people's health. Untreated problems, disease progression, and irreparable harm can come from delayed or skipped medical attention. Unmet health demands might also increase the likelihood of future health issues. During the COVID-19 epidemic, coordinated actions are needed to improve healthcare access. It comprises improving healthcare systems to ensure basic services, boosting telehealth alternatives to increase access, and supporting vulnerable people with transportation and financial aid ³⁴ (Blundell et al., 2021). Addressing the social determinants of health, such as poverty and inequality, reduces obstacles to healthcare access and promotes health equity for all.

COVID-19 has hard-hit low-income families and children in the UK. Socioeconomic inequality and susceptibility worsened throughout the epidemic. Social, economic, emotional, and educational well-being are affected. Online learning has widened the digital divide and affected low-income students without internet access. School closures have denied many children school meals, which may have long-term health and academic consequences (Brown and Albani, 2022). Addressing these educational disruptions requires financial help for families who cannot afford the essential equipment and equal access to educational resources and support for all children. The pandemic has caused anxiety and social isolation. Financial instability and resource constraints have raised stress and anxiety in low-income households, aggravating mental health issues. Affordable mental health therapies prevent adolescent mental health concerns. Schools and community groups support vulnerable persons (Holmes, 2022). The pandemic has left many low-income parents jobless and unable to meet basic needs. Families struggle to afford food, shelter, and healthcare due to income loss and financial stress.

These families require immediate aid, economic recovery, and social welfare to avert long-term injury. Low-income families are more isolated and digitally disadvantaged due to the pandemic. Community-based, public-private, and government programs must bridge the digital gap, provide technology and internet access, and provide safe social environments for children, youth, and families (Patel and Kariel). The outbreak has aggravated food insecurity in low-income households by suspending free school lunch programs. Because healthy food is scarce, food banks are used increasingly. Increase food bank funding, welfare access, and free school lunches to ensure food security. Finally, the pandemic delayed or denied low-income families medical and mental health care. To offer equal healthcare access, improved healthcare infrastructure, telehealth choices, and socioeconomic considerations are needed. Policymakers, schools, communities, and stakeholders must collaborate to lessen the pandemic, help vulnerable populations, and better their futures.

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